Writing Women Dance

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Romance Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University

2021
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This project examines dance scenes in nineteenth-century French novels written by women to consider how grace—beauty in motion—defines women as social, moral, and artistic actors. Creating a constellation of dance scenes, I develop a concept called graceful inclinations, meaning experiences that move observers to contemplate space, time, or bodies differently. I use this concept to study representations of women’s sexuality and subjectivity in dances scenes written by Sophie Cottin, Germaine de Staël, Barbara von Krüdener, Claire de Duras, George Sand, and Marie d’Agoult. Because previous studies of dance in nineteenth-century French literature focus predominately on texts by canonical male authors, scholarship on literary descriptions of dance is limited to a masculine perspective. Moreover, studies of the philosophical and esthetic meanings of grace rarely cite primary sources written by women, although, since the eighteenth century, grace has been closely associated with Western understandings of femininity.

This project focuses on four genres of dance: contradances, the waltz, presentational dances (the shawl dance, quadrille, and bolero), and the tarantella. Whereas descriptions of contradances propose ideal social relations or contest the idealization of disembodied femininity, waltz scenes create dystopian depictions of upper-class debauchery and masculine authority. Characters performing presentational dances become archetypal representations of their gender or race. The tarantella in Staël’s novel Corinne, ou l’Italie presents the ultimate dancer who is graceful and sensual. Analyzing representations of exoticism throughout this corpus, I use Srinivas
Aravamudan’s theory of Enlightenment Orientalism to consider how exoticized bodies became a testing ground for thinking about female sexuality. I draw upon the theories of Adriana Cavarero, Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Genviève Fraisse, and Judith Lynne Hanna to study the sexual politics of dance scenes. In my study of the aesthetic and philosophical concept of grace, dance emerges as an art capable of moving its viewers but not yet capable of instigating social change. Creating both utopian or dystopian moments, dance scenes offer insight into the different worlds that writers wished to create or to avoid.
I dedicate this project to the memory of my mother Polly Nunn (1958-2013).
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List of Abbreviations

Sophie Cottin. *Malvina*.  
Germaine de Staël. *Delphine*.  
Julianne Barbara von Krüdener. *Autour de Valérie*.  
Germaine de Staël. *Corinne, ou l’Italie*.  
Claire de Duras. *Mémoires de Sophie*.  
George Sand. *Indiana*.  
George Sand. *La Filleule*.  
George Sand. *La Daniella*.  
George Sand. *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*.  
George Sand. *Lavinia*.  
Marie d’Agoult (Daniel Stern). *Nélida*.  

* M  
* D  
* AV  
* C  
* OEO  
* MS  
* I  
* F  
* LD  
* LC  
* L  
* N  

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Introduction

Grace danceth. I would pipe; dance ye all.

“The Hymn of Jesus,” Acts of John.¹

La vie n’est que mouvement.

Montaigne, Essais.

Grace is a means, expression, and impression of moral beauty.² Visible in human movement, it is a bodily expression of the spirit.³ In Western philosophy, dance is the best-known symbol of human grace.⁴ Dance scenes in nineteenth-century French novels written by women writers demonstrate how grace, beauty in motion, defines women as social, moral, and artistic actors. These novelists’ portrayals of graceful and graceless dancing demonstrate their concepts of active female bodies in dialogue with other bodies.

In the works of Sophie Cottin, Germaine de Staël, Barbara von Krüdener, Claire de

¹ This Hymn, belonging to the apocryphal Acts of John, was denounced at the Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE) as blasphemous.
² Paul Souriau defines expressions as the emotions of the mover and impressions as the spectator’s emotions.
³ As Raymond Bayer explains, grace is “le corporel élevé au plan de l’esprit” (13).
⁴ “Les autres arts peuvent se manifester sous des espèces gracieuses: seule, elle [la danse] est l’art gracieux en soi. Elle demeure la générale transposition de nos humaines modalités: la grâce de la vie demandée à un art. Tel est le prestige de la Danse” (Bayer 214).
Duras, George Sand, and Marie d’Agoult, descriptions of dance offer examples of women’s participation in the sexual marketplace, in evolving sociopolitical communities, and in esthetic debates. These textual dances negotiate the relationships between Christian morality, esthetic beauty, and social decorum. By creating a constellation of dance scenes, I develop a concept of grace symptomatic of communicative movements acknowledging the dancer’s sensual, subjective body. Drawing on Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero’s critique of the Western understanding of rectitude as a sign of reason, moral goodness, and masculinity, I designate these descriptions of dancing bodies graceful inclinations.

By inclinations, I refer to movements toward life, toward the future, toward others. In some cases, inclinations are movements away from situations that suppress the dancer’s freedom. According to Cavarero, Western thought, from antiquity to today, tends to represent women as inclined either toward maternity and chastity, emblematized by representations of the Virgin Mary leaning over her child; or toward eroticism and sin, symbolized by Eve reaching toward the apple. This dichotomy prevents women from asserting their subjective positions. Images of verticality, Cavarero explains, represent dominance in Western cultures by reducing inclined figures to inessential entities. Cavarero demonstrates how centuries of representations opposing erect and inclined bodies take part in establishing binaries of the strong sex and the weak sex, the superior sex and the inferior sex, the autonomous sex and the dependent sex, human subjects (homo erectus) and women. Ineffable, capricious, and never static, graceful inclinations, a sort of esthetic play, redefine perceptions of reality and sketch future possibilities.
Graceful inclinations are processes of creating experiences that move observers to contemplate space, time, or bodies differently. As Eduardo Saccone explains in his reading of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Libro del cortegiano*, grace is not a quality in itself but rather a “habitual state” or an “ability” to use various qualities in a manner that other people recognize as graceful (51-52). Graceful being is an ability to acknowledge other individuals and freely offer them an agreeable experience that they choose to accept or reject. Inspired by Ita Mac Carthy’s study of grace in Italian Renaissance art and literature, I value the multiple understandings of grace as experiences that affect their viewers spiritually, emotionally, or intellectually.

In the fields of philosophy, literature, and art history, research on grace predominately focuses on texts written during antiquity, the Renaissance, and the eighteenth century.1 Claude Jamain concludes that the sweetness of grace disappeared at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Though impressively detailed, Jamain’s study of an eighteenth-century esthetic of grace ignores questions of gender and fails to cite primary sources written by women, thereby offering an exclusively masculine concept of grace. Throughout the nineteenth century, French writers equated women to lifeless objects, antipodal to eighteenth-century concepts of grace, such as machines, dolls, fabric, and marionettes.2 During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the Baudelairian idea of artificial and eternal beauty replaced grace in descriptions of dance by Auguste de

1 See publications by Claude Jamain, Ita Mac Carthy, Raffaele Milani, Sarah Kaufman, Joshua Hall, Raymond Bayer, Paul Souriau, and Bonnie MacLachlan.
2 See Dorothy Kelly’s *Reconstructing Woman: From Fiction to Reality in the Nineteenth-Century French Novel*. 
Villiers de L’Isle-Adam and Stéphane Mallarmé. By studying the multifaceted concept of grace and its possibilities in novels by Cottin, Staël, Krüdener, Duras, Sand, and d’Agoult, I explore how these authors criticized ideologies oppressing women’s bodily freedom and proposed alternative forms of graceful existence.

Because twentieth-century scholars often scoffed at nineteenth-century novels born out of the eighteenth-century tradition of sentimental novels and ignored the political valence of their idealism, many of these works—ranging from bestsellers at the time of their publication to unfinished texts published posthumously—have received little scholarly attention. Previous studies of dance in nineteenth-century French literature prioritize novels by canonical male authors. However, to ignore Cottin, Staël, Krüdener, Duras, and Sand is to ignore key novelists in French Romanticism whose dance scenes influenced a generation of readers in France and abroad.1 If the sentimental novel constituted a frame in which a “forme d’expression féminine” developed, dance scenes in sentimental novels reveal a concept of grace defined by women thinkers (Louichon 25). As Michèle Le Dœuff notes in L’Étude et le Rouet, categorizing books authored by women as for and about women prevents readers from fully comprehending the works. The authors that I study represent an important force in nineteenth-century French literature, and I do not wish to reduce them to their gender or sex.2 Since the beginning of

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1 With a desire to privilege women writers whom literary history has muted, I developed my corpus by reading writers that Staël, Krüdener, Sand, and Duras cited. Laura Colombo’s 2005 dissertation, La révolution souterraine, likewise guided me to authors whose texts are out of print, hard to find, and incredibly exciting.

2 Joining “une protestation collective contre l’exclusion des femmes,” my research aims to take part in a larger feminist project in literary and cultural studies (Fraisse, Muse 282).
the eighteenth century, grace has been associated with European notions of femininity. In the nineteenth century, dancing entered the purview of notably feminine activities. By studying women writers’ various perspectives on grace and dance, I hope to enrich philosophical, moral, and esthetic understandings of the possibilities of grace and dance.

Blending realism and imaginative idealism, the novels studied in the following chapters portray different kinds of graceful existence, graceful perception of others, and graceful action. Their dance scenes create utopian or dystopian moments for considering human relationships and the situation of the female body. By studying the philosophical, esthetic, and moral aspects of grace in descriptions of dance, I show how these novelists conceived of dance as an art capable of penetrating, and sometimes altering, its viewers. Though my research focuses on social dances, many of the dance scenes studied are described as if they were dance performances. Therefore, I qualify these social dances as art. A dance is art insofar as it takes part in what Jacques Rancière calls “le partage du sensible,” the cutting up and redistributing of the sensible world to confuse fact and fiction, realities and possibilities. By rearranging visual and kinesthetic representations of a shared social existence regulated by power relations, dance is inherently political, in the sense that politics determine our ability to change what we see and experience. As a political act, dancing reveals potentiality, what could be possible.\(^1\) Overturning hegemonic systems of representation or recognizing collective and individual

\(^1\) “La politique porte sur ce qu’on voit et ce qu’on peut en dire, sur qui a la compétence pour voir et la qualité pour dire, sur les propriétés des espaces et les possibles du temps” (Rancière, *Du partage* 13-14).
subjectivities, dance reconfigures the relationships between gendered and racialized bodies to propose future possibilities.

Grace can transform its observers by inciting them to improve themselves and humanity. In On Beauty and Being Just, Elaine Scarry examines how beauty inspires its admirers to turn their attention toward others and act ethically. Though Scarry never mentions grace, her idea of beautiful things having a constant “forward motion” and making life more vivid coincides with theories of grace from antiquity onward (46). I argue that graceful dancing animates its admirers to “search for something beyond” the enchanting sight (Scarry 29). The sensation of watching graceful movements, according to Henri Bergson (1859-1941), produces a physical sympathy, “une espèce de sympathie physique,” that subtly suggests moral sympathy (10).¹ Unlike beauty, which David Hume (1711-1776) claimed to exist only in the mind of the perceiver, grace is understood by its effects on its beholders, not just their evaluation of a graceful person.² Perceivers of grace are emancipated spectators, meaning individuals able to observe moving bodies as bodies moved to act. Emancipated spectatorship, as Rancière explains, eliminates the opposition between watching and acting. Emancipated spectators observe, gather ideas, compare knowledge, and develop plans to act. Instead of being seduced by images, observers of

¹ Bergson wrote a single paragraph on grace in his 1889 Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience. For him, grace, the simplest of esthetic sentiments, is the perception of an ease of motor movements hinting at the movements and positions to be performed: “La perception d’une facilité à se mouvoir vient donc se fonder ici dans le plaisir d’arrêter en quelque sorte la marche du temps; et de tenir l’avenir dans le présent” (9). Here, grace corresponds to a continuous duration in the material world, like a curved line in contrast to the unpredictable harsh turns of a zigzag. For Bergson, grace born out of movement represents an esthetic vision of continuous duration.

² Hume wrote in “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757): “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty” (6).
grace learn and become active participants in turning ideas into actions.\(^1\) The spectacle of graceful movements inspires them to act with grace or to encourage graceful being.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Auguste Comte (1798-1857) bestowed the task of upholding morality upon women, all while denying their capacity to have political efficacy. Women’s political and social situation worsened after Napoleon Bonaparte promulgated the *Code Civil des Français* in 1804. However, women began to develop a collective conscious and gain recognition for their moral “superiority” circa 1830 (Landes 170). By presenting graceful dancing as a political or pedagogical tool and by showing how patriarchal practices hinder graceful inclinations, novelists assigned a political valence to dance scenes.

I understand dance as expression articulating a sensing body “not foreclosed by meaning” (Manning, *Politics* 111). Dance is “a transient mode of expression performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space” (Kealiinohomoku 28). Through dance, communities express collective joy, confirm cultural identities, enforce desired manners of bodily conduct and human relationships, or transgress normalized behaviors. What a group of people dances informs who they are and who they wish to become. Through repetition, dances normalize, reinforce, and stylize cultural gestures.\(^2\)

\(^1\) I develop this concept of viewers of grace from Rancière’s notion of a theater without spectators, “où les assistants apprennent au lieu d’être séduits par des images, où ils deviennent des participants actifs au lieu d’être des voyeurs passifs” (*Le spectateur* 10).

\(^2\) As dancer and choreographer Marie-Auguste Vestris purportedly said, “dites-moi quels sont les pas de la majorité des danseurs et je vous ferai connaître de suite à quel monde vous avez affaire” (qtd. in Champeaux 185). Dancer and dance historian Serge Lifar likewise emphasized this idea in his *Histoire du
Dance constitutes culture by taking part in the “theater where various political and ideological causes engage one another” and by acting as a “source of identity” (Said, Culture xiii).

Manipulating time and space, dances propose alternatives ways of living. As Paul Valéry (1871-1945) wrote in his essay Philosoplie de la danse, “la Danse est un art déduit de la vie même, puisqu’elle n’est que l’action de l’ensemble du corps humain; mais action transposée dans un monde, dans une sorte d’espace-temps, qui n’est plus tout à fait celui de la vie pratique” (83). Reconfiguring the body in space and time, dance scenes offer insight into the different worlds that novelists wished to create or to avoid.

French Romanticism developed with and through dance as it negotiated idealized femininities. The evolution of dance, on stage, in salons, and at balls, shaped and reflected Romantic notions of gender, imagination, and sensibility. Real and literary dances bolstered Romantic beliefs in the individual’s freedom to experience the world and in the mystic uncertainty of the future. I examine how the novels of my corpus retextualize Romantic images and narratives of dancing women.1 By looking at written accounts of dance in relation to the unwritten practice of dancing, I analyze the meanings and social implications of dance both inside and outside of texts. Dance can be a site of disobeying hegemonic understandings of masculinity and femininity.2 Through a

---

1 ballet (1966): “Les exécutants de ces danses n’inventent rien au sens propre du mot: ils se bornent à transposer, à styliser les gestes de la vie courante” (6-7).
2 Here, I borrow the language that Teresa de Lauretis uses to define feminist films.
3 Feminists have often “claimed dance as essential to their liberation” because dancing bodies “embrace the fragility of being thrown,” in the sense that, by dancing, an individual projects herself into a lived experience and exposes herself to risk (Ahmed 247-48).
repetition of actions, gestures, and discourses about how bodies should move, social dances have reinforced and defined gender roles in European societies.¹ If research on how dance solidifies and modifies concepts about gender ignores women writers, our knowledge of the histories and possibilities of dance will remain limited.

**Between Sin and Grace**

As cultural rituals, dances validate or protest dominant systems of belief. In nineteenth-century France, the dancing woman was a symbol of sin and a symbol of grace. In certain villages, theologians and lawmakers banned dance. At the same time, journalists glorified the beauty of graceful ballerinas, and education manuals recommended dance lessons. Dance and Christianity became increasingly feminized as masculine court dances from the age of Louis XIV disappeared, the cult of the ballerina emerged in the 1830s, and women dominated post-Revolutionary churchgoing crowds.

Dance and religion have a complicated history in which dance oscillates between a form of worship and a sinful practice.² In the Bible, David dances before the ark to express joy, and Herodias’s daughter dances in exchange for John the Baptist’s head on a platter.³ Dancing was a common form of worship throughout the first five centuries of the Early Christian Church. Yet, from the Middle Ages onward, numerous European

¹ Here, I draw upon Judith Butler’s theory of the social construction of gender in addition to dance anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna’s conclusion that the “inherent sexuality” of dance makes gender an undeniable aspect of any dance (46).
² Marie Glon and Juan Ignacio Vallejos propose understanding the history of Western dance as the history of a morally ambiguous practice.
³ References to David dancing often served as proof that dancing is an acceptable form of Christian worship. For example, in a letter to the Bishop of Vence about a religious procession, the Countess Marguerite de Villeneuve wrote in 1737: “David ayant dansé autrefois, on pouvait bien danser aujourd’hui sans offenser Dieu” (qtd. in Ruel 38).
moralists, theologians, and lawmakers denounced dancing as antithetical to Christian behavior.\(^1\) Prohibiting dance, French churches attempted to control bodies, forbid non-religious festivities (associated with paganism), and repress popular religiosity.

Nonetheless, dance has often been reintegrated into French Christian practices. In the seventeenth century, young men performed in Jesuit college ballets imbued with Christian humanism.\(^2\) Jesuit dance theorists such as Claude-François Ménessier (1631–1705) and Thoinot Arbeau (pseudonym of Jehan Taboure, 1520–1595) as well as humanist thinkers such as Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) advocated for dance as a practice in moving with grace.\(^3\) In the preface to *Des ballets anciens et modernes*, Ménessier distinguished dances meant to train the body in “actions nobles” from “les danses comme ont fait les Juifs, et les Infidèles” (np). Jesuits, supporting the Catholic Reformation and promoting an active embodiment of grace, saw dance as an educational tool whereas Jansenists, valuing the suffering body as one inhabited by divine grace,

\(^1\) The French Calvinist Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) wrote, “On ne saurait donner trop d'éloges à la Discipline des Églises Réformées qui condamnèrent la danse […] la manière dont elle se pratiquait, donnait lieu à mille désordres, dans la chambre même du bal elle ne pouvait servir qu’à gâter le cœur, à livrer une guerre dangereuse à la chasteté” (2523). For more examples, see John Northbrooke’s *Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays and Interludes with other Idle Pastimes* (1577), Saint François de Sales’s *Introduction à la vie de dévote* (1609), Carlo Bascapé’s *Traité contre les danses et les comédies* (1664), *Lettre pastorale de S. Em. Mgr le Cardinal de Bona†**, *Archevêque de Lyon et de Vienne, à l’occasion du Carême de 1848*, sur le zèle qui convient aux chrétiens de notre époque (1848), Henri Louis Hulot’s *Balls and dancing parties condemned by the Scriptures, Holy Fathers, Holy Councils, and renowned theologians of the church: advice to young person regarding them* (1857), and Jean-Joseph Nyssen’s *Un mot sur la danse adressé aux pères et mères de famille et à leurs enfants* (1876). I share Kimerer LaMothe’s hypothesis that, with the invention of the printing press, dance gradually disappeared from Christian worship and became unchristian because it distracted believers from sedentary biblical study. Although Christian attacks on dancing flourished during the Middle Ages, some anti-dance rhetoric dates back to the first millennium of the Christian calendar, namely in the writings of Arnobius, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Ambrose of Milan.

\(^2\) Dance education also played a role in eighteenth-century Lutheran schools.

\(^3\) Similar arguments appear in Bérenger de La Tour d’Albenas’s *Choréïde* (1556), François de Lauze’s *Apologie de la danse* (1623), and Pierre Coustel’s *Traité d’éducation chrétienne* (1749).
considered dance and the seventeenth-century concept of “honnêteté” to be “an artifice” void of Christian virtue (Robins 127). As new forms of Christian and pantheist thought developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, dance maintained an ambiguous, but evolving, position in spiritual life.¹

Inscribed in a religious rhetoric condemning dance as sinful, dance scenes in many nineteenth-century novels emphasize dancing women’s coquetry, vanity, or wantonness.² These texts create images of women “intended to reinforce patriarchy by keeping women categorized as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but never a combination of both, and never ‘human’” (Menon 11). Allusions to danse macabre, demonic dances, and pagan festivities weave through works such as Charles Nodier’s Smarra ou les démons de la nuit (1821) and Inès de las Sierras (1837), Victor Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris (1831), and Gustave Flaubert’s Salammbo (1862).³ These texts give particular attention to dancers from the Mediterranean creating a link between alterity and unchristian dancing.

¹ The 1795 Constitution declared the freedom of religious choice. With the Concordat of 1801, Napoleon Bonaparte restored Catholicism as France’s official religion. The Charter of 1814 promised freedom of religion but named France a Catholic state. Throughout the nineteenth century, deism, often associated with Enlightenment thinkers, spread as spirituality came into conflict with institutionalized and ritualized religions. The separation of Church and State in France did not become official until 1905.

² Nineteenth-century writers repeatedly created unflattering stories about the conduct of ballerinas. In La Théorie de la démarche (1833), Honoré de Balzac equated the grace of ballet dancers to a lack of virtue because, in his view, virtue is intimately connected to right angles and grace appears in rounded shapes.

³ As Anne Wéry and Michael Freeman demonstrate, the term danse macabre, first seen in texts written in 1376, probably only existed in images and was not an actual dance or procession. In Nodier’s Smarra ou les démons de la nuit, the narrator’s friend scolds him for having danced too much at a ball. The narrator then enters a terrifying dream in which young women dance in a Dionysian frenzy. In Inès de las Sierras, the Spanish dancer La Pedrina moves diabolically: “La Pedrina, possédée d’une frénésie sublime que l’enfer seul peut inspirer et entretenir, continuait à dévorer le parquet de ses pas” (21). Esmeralda, in Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris, appears as an enchantress or supernatural creature dancing as if possessed by folly. Baleful dancing likewise appears in Charles Baudelaire’s poem “Danse macabre” (1857) and Balzac’s Sarrasine (1830).
Staël’s *Corinne*, Duras’s *Ourika*, and Sand’s *La Filleule, Lavinia*, and *La Daniella*, in contrast, present exoticized dances as graceful and expressive performances instead of as sexual excess or diabolic behavior. Ball scenes emphasize women’s vanity in Honoré de Balzac’s *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1834) and *La Paix du ménage* (1830), Alexandre Dumas’s *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), and Guy de Maupassant’s “La Parure” (1884).¹ These motifs certainly arise in dance scenes written by women, especially with regards to the lascivious waltz. Yet, novels by Cottin, Krüdener, Sand, and d’Agoult shine light on domineering cavaliers who efface women’s subjectivity or lead them into heady experiences detrimental to their physical or moral health. The novels of my corpus demonstrate that, when female characters are not forced to dance as exchange objects within the sexual market, dance can express joy, imagination, or a love for humanity.

When they merely respond to social expectations, dances are boring. When they reinforce male domination, dances take part in oppressive cultural practices defining gender roles. But when they outline possibilities of a more just society, dances become what I call graceful inclinations.

In several novels of my corpus, dance and women, both ridiculed for being frivolous, come together either to contest this deprecation or to elucidate on what grounds it is founded. Western thinking has historically relegated dance to the low arts, in

¹ Balzac, in his description of contradances and quadrilles, accused women of falling prey to “cette espèce d’enivrement dans lequel une femme est toujours plongée par la danse et par le mouvement d’un bal,” meaning an excessive desire to seduce men (*La Paix du ménage* 327).
comparison to tragedy, poetry, and painting. Perhaps because dance emblematizes grace, given less attention than beauty and the sublime, philosophers have traditionally classified dance as a divertissement and not art. Introducing her volume on the history and practice of dance for the *Encyclopédie des dames* (1823), Élise Voïart, a prolific translator and novelist under the Restoration, belittled her text as “un livre sur un sujet léger, frivole même, et dont l’utilité réelle est plus que douteuse” (2). She then claimed that, lacking adequate knowledge, she must rely on the assertions of male scholars to educate her female readers. My project shows that Voïart’s female contemporaries were knowledgeable about dance and understood it as capable of being much more than an inane activity.

**The Multiple Meanings of Grace**

In the eighteenth-century, movement became a key element in various attempts to define grace.¹ Since grace is inextricably linked to the active body creating space and time through movement, dance provides the example par excellence for thinking about grace. If the “body does not move into space and time” but rather “creates space and time,” then grace is a process of creating space and time (Manning, *Politics* xiii). Graceful inclinations propose different experiences or ways of perceiving the spatio-temporal world. I look for descriptions of the various forms of grace in dance scenes, which do not necessarily use the word *grace*. Several of the dance scenes that I discuss

¹ Claude Jamain argues that the eighteenth century included the apogee of grace, whereas Samuel Holt Monk associates this century with the decline of philosophical and aesthetic interest in grace as the debate on the dichotomy between beauty and sublimity replaced that on the difference between beauty and grace.
are devoid of grace. This gracelessness however helps us understand the various ways in which the novelists construed grace.

Graceful inclinations describe movements of grace and dignity. Reason blends with instinct, strength exerts its force with lightness, and grace appears as a life-affirming action instead of self-sacrifice. The beauty of the human body, according to Johann Gottfried Herder’s 1778 treaty on sculpture, reveals itself through action as inner perfection shines through the human form. For Herder, grace is beauty freely moving toward perfection without striving to satisfy a need or obligation. Montesquieu, in *Essai sur le goût* (1757), identified a person’s spirit and manners as the medium through which her grace becomes evident. Contrasting a beautiful face and the revelation of grace, he argued that the beautiful face appears right away whereas grace appears as the spirit unveils itself little by little and manners emerge spontaneously. Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Henry Home (1696–1782) defined grace as an “object of sight” that people of taste can perceive. According to Home, grace originates in motion because “when the most graceful person is at rest, neither moving nor speaking, we lose sight of that quality as much as of colour in the dark” (363). Consequently, “dancing affords great opportunity for displaying grace” given that it combines elegant motion and expressions of exalted qualities, namely dignity which Home understood as self-respect (365). If grace and dignity, meaning movements simultaneously motivated by a love for others and self-love, coexist, then graceful dancing attests to the dancer’s acknowledgement of her subjective position as a social agent.
Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of grace coincide with perfectibility, an Enlightenment belief in the possibility of human improvement. Rejecting a cyclical view of history alternating between periods of progress and periods of decadence, the theory of perfectibility, outlined in Condorcet’s *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (1794) and Staël’s *De la littérature* (1800), proposes a history of human intellect as a process of knowledge gradually and irreversibly growing. Staël’s articulation of perfectibility offers a hope for a future better than the past. Rousseau, in *Discours sur l’inégalité* (1755), defined perfectibility as a potential, not an activated faculty, as well as the origin of unhappiness making individuals act like tyrants toward themselves. Perfectibility is not the belief that humans can be brought to a perfected state but rather the belief that the process of constantly improving is necessary for human freedom.¹ In a similar vein, graceful inclinations are processes of moving toward possibilities; however, graceful inclinations are not simply the potential to act. Realized movements toward others and toward the future constitute graceful inclinations.

Friedrich Schiller, who developed a theory of esthetic idealism based on a vision of human perfectibility achievable through art, wrote one of the most extensive eighteenth-century studies on grace. Schiller understood beauty as the appearance of freedom, not civic freedom, but rather contemplative freedom that emerges when a subject overcomes human drives, desires, and necessities. This notion of freedom prizes spiritual being yet depreciates corporeal being. Beauty, in this sense, depends on the

¹ “Chez Sand, la perfectibilité engage l’homme vers l’accomplissement de son humanité, distincte de la seule possibilité du vice et de la vertu” (Bara 44).
impression of regularity and the impression that the beautiful form is a free consequence of itself. Beautiful things are beautiful because they display the traits of freedom suggesting that the object became what it is through its own inner forces.¹ For Schiller, art provides a vision of human progress inciting observers to overcome the division between nature and freedom. His major treaties on esthetics, The Aesthetic Education of Man (1794) and Kallias Letters (1793), take up the Kantian notion that beautiful things prove that man (but not woman), as an intrinsically spiritual and rational being, is an integral part of the natural world.² For this reason, Schiller advocated for art that presents the Ideal and not reality. Beautiful women, according to Schiller, complicate men’s attempts at appreciating the world esthetically because men must learn to appreciate women’s pure beauty without desiring their sexual bodies.³ This opposition between beauty and sexuality dehumanizes women as their freedom-seeking observers reduce their living bodies to beautiful or graceful things.

Schiller’s 1797 essay On Grace and Dignity (Über Anmut und Würde) defines grace as the ephemeral beauty born out of an individual’s free will, visible in her morally expressive movements. Unlike architectonic beauty, that is to say the beautiful structure of the human body which, for Schiller, is a mere product of nature, “ein Bloßes Naturerzeugnis,” graceful movement changes the subject without altering her identity

¹ Schiller’s definition of beauty refers to the living form, in which “form and content seem freely to determine one another, so that freedom and necessity are one and the same and the object seems to spring naturally from its own inner rationale” (Sychrava 27).
² See Wolfgang Welsch’s “L’Esthétique de Schiller reconsidérée.”
³ In a similar manner, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) declared that women’s beauty and grace should be contemplated as art objects, but never as reality.
because movement is accidental (Über Anmut, 25). According to Voltaire, though beauty always pleases, it can lose the charm that attracts others and fills them with “un sentiment doux” (Dictionnaire 298). Architectonic beauty honors the creator of the human form and therefore attracts worshippers. By exteriorizing personal merits, grace “honors those who possess it,” and thus attracts lovers (Schiller, On Grace 134). Grace is associated with godly women, who kindle love, while architectonic beauty refers to womanly gods, who demand veneration. As such, graceful dancers excite love and not just admiration for the beautiful sight revealing their probity.

Unlike dignity, which, for Schiller, is a matter of controlling involuntary movements, grace is the freedom of voluntary movements. In this sense, a graceful person remains true to her nature. Produced through arbitrary movements expressing moral sentiments, expressions of grace never collide with calculated acts. Graceful actions cannot be reduced to a category of motor movements because graceful dancing emanates from the mover, not the movement itself.

Dishonesty and spite are incompatible with grace, for at its core grace consists in simplicity and lack of artifice. Nonetheless, graceful inclinations are “artful” insofar as they necessitate creativity and reflection (Souriau 95). In On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung, 1795), Schiller differentiates a naïve

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1 This notion of architectonic beauty coincides with Kant’s concept of beauty as the harmonious form of an object that gives pleasure to its beholders of taste, that is to say observers possessing the faculty to judge such pleasure. Robert d’Harcourt notices that, in Schiller’s esthetic theory, beauty (Schöne) gradually replaces grace (Anmut), and the sublime (Erhabene) replaces dignity (Würde).

2 “Indem der weibliche Gott unsre Anbetung heischt, entzündet das gottgleiche Weib unsre Liebe” (Schiller, Über die ästhetische Erziehung 58). “While the womanly god demands our veneration, the godlike woman kindles our love” (The Aesthetic Education 81).
esthetic, based on sensuous reactions to the world instead of the poet’s own emotions, and a sentimental esthetic, giving priority to ideals and rationalism, to claim that these esthetics should unite to create a higher form of poetry.¹ In this text, Schiller reworks the shortcomings of the Critique of Judgement, in which Immanuel Kant qualified the concept of naïve art, meaning art without artifice, as a contradiction. Schiller’s critique of Kant proposes an esthetic experience that becomes “the lived union of sense and reason” and a form of esthetic judgement that encourages a “moving and personal experience” of apprehending art (Syhrava 10). An ardent admirer of the simplicity and naturalness of Greek art, Schiller believed that naïve sights, characterized as natural, spontaneous, immediate, unreflecting, and uninhibited, lead to morally salutary experiences. Reflecting on the dual nature of sensuous (meaning passive and unreflecting) and rational (meaning active and reflecting) human subjects, Schiller advocated joining the naïve with the sentimental, echoing his call for the union of grace and dignity to perfect humanity. The interconnectedness of these four esthetic qualities becomes evident when compared to their opposites and potent when combined.²

¹ Schiller viewed his own poetry as sentimental, that is to say poetry that actively seeks the perfection found in nature. He qualified Goethe (whom he simultaneously despised and admired), Homer, and Shakespeare as naïve poets possessing a purely natural mode of perception. Schiller defined naïve art as art taken to be nature that puts sentimental art, taken to be art, to “shame” (beschäme) (Naive 84). Naïve poets harbor the harmony that sentimental poets try to find. For Schiller, sentimental poetry employs figurative and expressive language to transform “the natural through the genius of the creative subject” (Syhrava 196).
² “[…] the naive character would be united with the sentimental so that each would preserve the other from its own extreme, and while the first would save the mind from exaggerations the second would secure it against inertia. For, in the final analysis, we must nonetheless concede that neither the naïve nor the sentimental character, each considered alone, quite exhausts that ideal of beautiful humanity that can only arise out of the intimate union of both” (Naive 175).
I interpret graceful inclinations as thoughtful critiques of rigid social codes and the artifice born out of individualist desires to obtain advantages.¹ The simplicity of graceful movements by no means reveals ignorance, passivity, or a lack of subjectivity.² Simplicity attests to disinterested generosity. It is a sign of moving toward collective improvement. Grace describes experiences of relational movements toward the future.³ Graceful inclinations reach their pinnacle when they incorporate honesty (naivety), reasoning (sentimentalism), grace, and dignity.

The term grâce can be tricky because les grâces, social graces, describe the actions carried out to please others in order to fit into a given social group. According to Voltaire’s definition of gracieux in the Encyclopédie, a graceful action is not only agreeable but also seeks to please.⁴ In the novels studied, a graceful impulse to please seeks to impart love, joy, or the experience of awe whereas a vain or obsequious desire to please originates in a selfish quest for power or vengeance.

Traditional concepts of grace as synonymous with ideal femininity reduce grace to a sign of weakness in contrast to masculine dignity. Cicero made this distinction in De Officiis (44 BCE): “we ought to regard grace as the attribute of woman, and dignity as the

¹ The laws of propriety, according to Schiller, were born out of the “experience of corruption” in an “artificial world” (Naïve 141).
² Schiller qualified geniuses like Cervantes and Raphael as naïve, because a genius passively receives and transmits ideas by necessity without understanding them or employing his freedom. Genius is therefore an accomplishment of nature but not reason.
³ In Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy, Erin Manning defines grace as an “experience-with” as collectives reinvent relations and leap toward an unknowable future (97).
⁴ Later, in his Dictionnaire philosophique, Voltaire defined grace as “ce qui plait avec attrait” (298).
attribute of man.”¹ For Schiller, women are more inclined to demonstrate grace, observable in conduct (ethos), and men more often display dignity, visible in moments of suffering (pathos).² According to Schiller, grace manifests itself among women more often than among men because their “more delicate feminine physique” receives impressions more easily than men’s “strong constitutions” (On Grace 153).³ For Herder, men’s bearing approaches a sublime stability that resembles a noble column, and women, “adorned with the floating beauty of grace,” appear graceful through their lightness and ethereality, qualities frequently evoked to describe dancing women (85).⁴ This divergence

¹ “Venustatem muliebrem ducere debemus, dignitatem virilem” (132, my translation).
² “The more delicate feminine physique receives each impression more quickly and makes it disappear more quickly. Strong constitutions come in motion only by a storm, and when strong muscles are tensed, they cannot manifest the ease which grace requires. That which is still beautiful sensitivity in a woman’s face would already express suffering in that of a man. The most tender fiber of a woman bends like a thin reed under the softest breath of emotion. In light and lovely waves, the soul glides over the speaking countenance, soon then smoothing into a calm mirror once again. Also what the soul must contribute to grace, can be more easily fulfilled by woman than by man. Seldom will the female character elevate itself to the highest idea of moral purity, and seldom, furthermore, will it achieve more than an affected deed. The female character will often resist sensuousness with heroic strength, but through sensuousness. Since the morality of woman is usually on the side of inclination [Neigung], it will appear as if inclination [Neigung] were on the side of morality. Grace will therefore be the expression of female virtue, of which the male may often be wanting” (On Grace, 153, my emphasis).
³ This assertion echoes Hegel’s comparison between women as passive beings and plants. In Elements of the Philosophy of Right, Hegel declared that “the animal is closer in character to man, the plant to woman, for the latter is a more peaceful process of unfolding whose principle is the more indeterminate unity of feeling. When women are in charge of government, the state is in danger, for their actions are based not on the demands of universality but on contingent inclination and opinion” (207, my emphasis). In the original German, he wrote: “das Tier entspricht mehr dem Charakter des Mannes, die Pflanze mehr dem der Frau, denn sie ist mehr ruhiges Entfalten, das di unbestimmtere Einigkeit der Empfindung zu seinem Prinzip erhält. Stehen Frauen an der Spitze der Regierung, so ist der Staat in Gefahr, denn sie handeln nicht nach den Anforderungen der Allgemeinheit, sondern nach zufälliger Neigung und Meinung” (Grundlinien 319-20, my emphasis).
⁴ The Encyclopédie méthodique (1756) distinguishes the two sexes by opposing masculine dignity and reason to feminine grace and beauty: “La Nature a mis d’un côté la force et la majesté, le courage et la raison; de l’autre, les grâces et la beauté, la finesse et le sentiment […]. Ce qui est agrément ou vertu dans un sexe, est défaut ou difformité dans l’autre” (Desmahis 472).
between delicacy and strength leads Schiller and Herder to pinpoint lightness, which I interpret as an obscuring of corporeality, as a necessary quality to display grace.¹

In the realm of dance, grace and lightness were once the glorified qualities of male dancers. Such terms came to designate female dancers or effeminate male dancers in the nineteenth century.² Dance critic Théophile Gautier deemed graceful male dancers as repugnant because strength is “la seule grâce permise à l’homme” (Histoire 139). Raymond Bayer, in his 1935 dissertation on grace, explains dancing women’s aptness for grace as purely anatomical given their smaller frame. Thinking of this ilk effaces women’s sexuality and bolsters age-old beliefs in women’s physical weakness as a justification for their oppression.

Sexist theories of femininity have distorted the concept of grace. According to Schiller, women naturally possess a perfectly naïve character, allowing for a naïve mode of expression perceived as grace. Understanding grace and naivety as pure products of nature, Schiller relied on arguments, such as that made by Denis Diderot in Sur les femmes (1772), that women possess fewer intellectual capacities than men because they have remained closer to nature, “de vraies sauvages en dedans” (Diderot 25). In Schiller’s view, naïve movements reflect nature acting through the individual and not the individual’s “rational volition” (Elias 5). This “ naïve grace” (naiven Anmut) allows genius to express “its most sublime and profound thought; the utterances of a god in the

¹ The dichotomy between lightness and weight remains an issue for contemporary feminists: “La dichotomie (finalement esthétique) entre ce qui a de la substance (alourdissante) et la négativité philosophique (seule belle et légère) se retrouve un peu partout” (Le Dœuff 29).
² See Hélène Marquié’s Non, la danse n’est pas un truc de filles! Essai sur le genre en danse.
mouth of a child” (Schiller, Naïve 98). Associations between idealized women and grace, understood as naïve and light, suggest that ideal femininity is incompatible with the terrestrial, thinking body.¹ Because being and possessing a body constitutes being a person, such descriptions of feminine grace dehumanize women.²

An understanding of grace as ethical actions, movements toward perfection, and a lack of artifice does not efface a graceful individual’s reasoning capacities. In La manière de bien penser (1687), four dialogues on rhetoric and literature written by the Jesuit priest Dominique Bouhours, Philanthe, trumpeting the merits of modern writers, describes grace as a consequence of naivety, understood as intelligent simplicity: “Elle consiste, cette naïveté, dans je ne sais quel air simple et ingénou, mais spirituel et raisonnable, tel qu’est celui d’un villageois de bon sens, ou d’un enfant qui a de l’esprit” (156). In a later dialogue, Eudoxe, heralding the superiority of the writers of Antiquity, declares that the sublimity, marvel, and elegance of a work means nothing if the thoughts represented are not “nettes, claires et intelligibles” (362). In a similar vein, graceful inclinations demonstrate intelligent reflection and, at times, unpretentious genius accessible to all observers.

Obsequious asexual grace maintains systems of oppression, but “grace with grit, grace that’s fleshy and a little flawed and stems from an open embrace of life” proposes better ways of existing (Kaufman xxv). Instead of studying female sexuality in

¹ As Toril Moi shows, for Schiller and Kant, because women were thought to embody human sexuality, a sign of their animality, art must idealize them in order for them to fit into a scheme of human perfectibility.
² Paul Ricoeur declares in Soi-même comme un autre: “Posséder un corps, c’est ce que font ou plutôt ce que sont les personnes” (46).
nineteenth-century writing as understandable only through “masculine desire and self-representation,” I envision sexuality within feminine grace (Counter 11). Representations of the Roman goddess Venus, often accompanied by the three Graces, have influenced European notions of feminine beauty as either chaste or lascivious. In *Delle Bellezze delle donne*, the Tuscan writer Agnolo Firenzuola differentiated the libidinous Venus, “figliuola della Terra” (daughter of the Earth), from the chaste Venus, “figliuola del Cielo” (daughter of the Heavens), from whose name the term *venustà* derives (a synonym for *grazia*). For Firenzuola, a woman’s sexual chastity and modesty determine her gracefulness:

> the dignity of Man is nothing other than an appearance full of true nobility, full of reverence and esteem; the grace [venustà] of Woman will therefore be an appearance that is noble, chaste, virtuous, revering, admiring, and in each of its movements full of modest grandeur.¹

Graceful inclinations seek to identify the celestial Aphrodite Ourania and the terrestrial Aphrodite Pandemos as one goddess of sensual and heavenly beauty.

Writings on and representations of the Charites—the Greek divinities, also known as the Graces, Aglaea (abundance), Euphrosyne (mirth), and Thalia (celebration)—shape theological, moral, and esthetic notions of grace. The Charites presided over games,

¹ Firenzuola wrote, “la dignità nell’uomo non è altro che uno aspetto pieno di vera nobilità, pieno di reverenza e di ammirazione; la venustà adunque nella donna sarà uno aspetto nobile, chasto, virtuoso, riverendo, ammirando, e in ogni suo movimento pieno d’una modesta grandezza” (251-52, my translation).

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festivals, dance, and music. As followers of Aphrodite, they also represented sexuality. Given that the Greek verb *chairō* means *to rejoice*, the Charites were festive goddesses. Although social pleasure was an essential element of *charis* (grace), it is not to be confused with bacchante carousals, because drunkenness leading to vulgarity opposed *charis*. The Charites represented a lifestyle of beauty, pleasure, and generosity defined by their relationships with others.

Since the Hellenistic period, the Graces are typically represented holding hands or placing their hands on each other’s shoulders. Highlighting the capacity of dance to model ethical relationships, Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE) interpreted depictions of the Graces dancing hand-in-hand as a demonstration of reciprocal giving:

As to why the Graces are three in number, why they are sisters, why hand in hand, and why they are smiling and young, with a loose and transparent dress. Some writers think that there is one who bestows a benefit, one who receives it, and a third who returns it; others say that they represent the three sorts of benefactors, those who bestow, those who repay, and those who both receive and repay them.

[...] What is the meaning of this dance of sisters in a circle, hand in hand? [Quid

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1 Voltaire, in his 1732 madrigal “Sur la Camargo et la Sallé” distinguishing the two eighteenth-century ballerinas, differentiated the dancer’s qualities by comparing nymphs to the Graces:

*Ah! Camargo, que vous êtes brillantes!*
*Mais que Sallé, grands dieux, est ravissante!*
*Que vos pas sont légers, et que les siens sont doux!*
*Elle est inimitable, et vous êtes nouvelle:*
*Les Nymphes sautent comme vous,*
*Mais les Grâces dansent comme elle.*

2 Voltaire referred to the Charites as “l’emblème sensible de tout ce qui peut rendre la vie agréable” (*Dictionnaire* 300).
ille consertis manibus in se redeuntium chorus?] It means that the course of a benefit is from hand to hand, back to the giver. (319)¹

Images of the three Graces dancing together serve as a reminder of the need to strive toward an “ideal of beneficence and sociability” (Mac Carthy 7). The dancing Graces exemplify the social function of collective dances encouraging harmony among individuals who hold hands, direct others, are led by others, or create as a group. In the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino, known for his Christian Platonism, interpreted the dance of the three Graces as the process by which God bestows gifts on humanity. Dancing with grace involves a constant exchange and communication implicating all dancers and observers.

In Antiquity, charis referred to the action of creating joy. Associated with “youthfulness, warlike strength, imposing size, and flourishing health,” charis moved its observer to experience awe (Monti 49).² Through experiences of pleasure and fellowship (koinōnia), charis created social unity by opening individuals “to one another in such a way that each was disposed to act on the other’s behalf” (MacLachlan 31). Describing an “encounter with beauty” in a person or art, charis could designate either the beautiful object itself or the response that it aroused, because the observer and the observed shared the moment of charis (10). Charis could describe “the beauty radiating from the body or

¹ Denis Vidal compares this passage to concepts of the gift theorized by Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss.
² “Wonder and awe issue from the charis of good behavior, just as a beautiful woman or man radiates charis and provokes astonishment” (MacLachlan 148).
eyes of the beloved” (Monti 50).\(^1\) With regards to dance, charis is the delight experienced by the spectators.\(^2\) Unaffected beauty that acts on others and dance as a celebration of life intertwine to create the lived experience of graceful dancing. The graceful inclinations that I analyze in nineteenth-century novels reveal syncretistic approaches to understanding grace as the charis lauded by ancient Greek poets and Christian agape.\(^3\)

Etymologically related to charity and gratitude, grace implies a certain love for humanity.\(^4\) Christian grace is generally understood as a gift of mercy and love from God, yet its role in Christian thought has provoked centuries of debate.\(^5\) The biblical Hebrew word for grace, *chen*, comes from the verb *chanan* (ךַנָּ֔אָנָּה, to stoop in kindness before an inferior) which most often indicates concrete actions helping others. This term later came to denote “beauty of speech or of human form” (Moffatt 38). In Saint Augustine’s interpretation of Christianity, everything in human life depends on the gratuitous grace of God. After the sixteenth-century Lutheran Reformation, grace became a polemical

\(^{1}\) Conflating the experience of beauty and the beautiful being, historian Jean-Pierre Vernant interprets *charis* as women giving themselves to men as gifts.
\(^{2}\) In the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, a spectator watching boxing and dancing at a festival would “take delight in one’s heart, seeing the *charis*” in the dancers or boxers (qtd. in MacLachlan 24). Pindar’s Fourteenth Olympian Ode recounts the Charites’ love of festive dancing: “O Queen Agalai and Euphrosyne, lover of the dance-song, daughters of the mightiest of the gods, may you hearken to me now. Thalia, enamored of the dance-song, look upon this festive band lightly stepping, with propitious fortune” (qtd. in MacLachlan 42).
\(^{3}\) This interweaving of classical and Christian images of grace reflects the syncretism visible in Renaissance representations of the Graces.
\(^{4}\) The writings of Paul introduced the word *charis* into Christian vocabulary. See Claude Moussy’s *Gratia et sa famille*.
\(^{5}\) As the Irish philosopher and bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753) wrote, “Men are said to speak through grace, to believe through grace. Mention is made of the glory of grace, the riches of grace, the stewards of grace. Christians are said to be heirs of grace, to receive grace, grow in grace, be strong in grace, to stand in grace, and to fall from grace. And lastly grace is said to justify and to save them. Hence Christianity is [*sic*] styled the covenant or dispensation of grace. And it is well known that no point hath created more controversy in the church than this doctrine of grace” (201).
concept as theologians debated the distinction between sufficient grace and efficacious grace. Sufficient grace (gratia mere sufficiens) is grace granted to all by God but does not guarantee salvation. Efficacious grace (gratia efficax), in contrast, infallibly leads to salvation.¹ As Brian Cummings and Ida Mac Carthy observe, theological debates during the Protestant Reformation and Italian Renaissance influenced and were influenced by literary and artistic interpretations of grace. Indeed, grace denotes a certain form of beauty inextricable from the theological, ethical, and esthetic connotations of the term.

Free will’s debated role in Christian definitions of grace also applies to understandings of graceful dancing when we question if one decides to move gracefully or if grace is an innate quality. According to Jansenists, only efficacious grace sparingly distributed by God could offer salvation. Following the controversial debates between the Dominican theologian Domingo Bañez (1528-1604) and the Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina (1535-1600), Jesuits believed that grace works with the free will of human subjects whereas the Dominicans, considering God to be the exclusive cause of human existence and movement, understood grace as efficient in itself without necessitating human consent. The German rationalist philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) identified grace as available to all who seek salvation and do their best to love God sincerely. When graceful being is understood to be developed through reflection and

¹ In Pelegian thought, grace consists in free will which, with the help of biblical teachings, human subjects use to do good works and redeem themselves. Pelagianism developed out of the teaching of the monk Pelagius (360-418 CE). This theological position, condemned by Augustine of Hippo, was influential during the Middle Ages and then commonly criticized during the Reformation.
willful effort, the social and political possibilities of grace augment as grace becomes accessible to all who seek it.

For French Romantics (especially during the 1820s), divine presence was most visible in the natural world, but grace in human action gained clout in Romantic literature and in some strains of Christian thought. Nineteenth-century theological texts, particularly those of Louis Bautain (1796-1867), frequently refer to grace acting in and on individuals.\(^1\) Enlightenment notions of perfectibility infused the French Neo-Catholic movement born out of the works of Pierre-Simon Ballanche (1776-1847), Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854), and René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848).\(^2\) Notions of Christian grace originating from human acts were visible in nineteenth-century Frenchwomen’s increased involvement in charitable activities organized through the Catholic church, a place where women flocked for socializing and self-affirming projects.\(^3\) Though French citizens began to perceive “a radical separation between God and the world” after the 1789 Revolution, Christianity continued to shape French nationalism, culture, and everyday life (Bell, *The Cult 7*).

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1 Post-Kantian German idealism left an indelible trace on Bautain’s work which presents philosophy as religion and reason as founded on faith. Bautain is considered the founder of nineteenth-century French Christian Platonism.

2 For Ballanche, perfectibility consists in a continuous process of failure and redemption as an individual undergoes trials. Lamennais, in his 1820 essay *De la liberté*, defined freedom as “l’état d’un être que rien ne détoure de sa fin, ou n’empêche d’arriver à la perfection qui lui est propre” (qtd. in Bénichou, *Le temps* 128). After 1835, Sand took an interest in Lamennais’s social Catholicism. For Chateaubriand, freedom is Christian, and Christianity will perfect society.

3 Under the Restauration, dancing took part in charitable events such as the *bal des Indigents* meant to raise money for the poor. Sarah A. Curtis’s scholarship provides an in-depth examination of nineteenth-century Frenchwomen’s role in the Catholic church.
Esthetic grace is also an act of generosity. As Bayer puts it, “la grâce est un don que l’Âme fait au sensible; et, d’un mot, un *beneficium*” (7). Like the Plotinian concept of spiritual beauty, grace emanates goodness surpassing material beauty. As suggested in Sir John Davies’s 1596 poem on dancing as an act propelled by love, “Orchestra, or a Poem of Dancing,” social dances create a temporal and spatial harmony encouraging social concord: “All turn together, all together trace, / And all together honor and embrace” (ll.769-70). Graceful dancing offers its viewers a vision of a more perfect world.

**Disciplining Graceful Bodies**

Dance serves as a means of acquiring and demonstrating grace. In contrast to seventeenth-century enumerations of women’s beautiful facial features, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century descriptions of feminine beauty encompassed not just the body, as beauty became synonymous with health, but also elegant corporeal movements and physical expressivity.¹ Dance education, a typical component of upper-class men and women’s upbringing, instilled in young people the attributes of grace and good demeanor.² Through dance education, individuals learned to embody and display moral virtues such as rectitude, equilibrium, and stability.

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¹ Dancing was thought to improve women’s health and appearance. For example, the dancing master Giovanni-Andrea Gallini (1728-1805) wrote that, for women, dance is “highly serviceable to their health, and [...] their beauty, it being the best and surest way of preserving, or even giving it to their whole person” (147-48).

² It is imperative to remember that dance was only advisable when practiced in moderation. As Louis-Charles-Henri Macquart suggested in the 1798 *Dictionnaire de la conservation de l’homme, ou d’hygiène et d’éducation physique et morale*: “La danse est un exercice, en même-temps agréable et utile, lorsqu’on n’en fait pas excès, mais très dangereux pour les personnes du sexe, qui en prennent le goût, et qui dansent beaucoup de suite” (324).
Dance is a form of discipline, imposed docility through body work, in the Foucauldian sense that it transforms the body to develop visible signs (such as elegant motions and confident posture) and become useful (able to participate in balls and efficiently employ the body during physical tasks). Learning to dance involves acquiring control over minute movements and therefore disciplines the body to control its possibilities. Social dances discipline social bodies by defining their gestures, their spatial relations to each other, the order of their movements, and the global attitude of the body.\(^1\)

Dance education contributes to the creation of culturally and historically specific social agents.\(^2\) Dancing that only demonstrates a disciplined body is not graceful. Mechanical social dances are “unexciting” and devoid of grace because movements are graceful when they leave room for “the play of fantasy” (Souriau 89).

Dance education also normalizes gendered concepts of the moving body. Choreographic exercises encourage vitality and teach gender roles thereby preparing young people for adult life and, more specifically, for matrimony. Jean-André Venel’s 1776 treaty on young women’s health and education identifies dance as the physical

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\(^1\) Foucault considered Enlightenment thinkers to be the inventors of discipline. According to Foucault, “La discipline procède d’abord à la répartition des individus dans l’espace […] Elle individualise les corps par une localisation qui ne les implante pas, mais les distribue et les fait circuler dans un réseau de relations” (Surveiller 166;171). The language Foucault uses to define the techniques of discipline easily lends itself to dance education: “L’acte est décomposé en ces éléments: la position du corps, des membres, des articulations est définie; à chaque mouvement sont assignées une direction, une amplitude, une durée; leur ordre de succession est prescrit. Le temps pénètre le corps, et avec lui tous les contrôles minutieux du pouvoir” (178). Techniques of discipline, like choreographed dances, direct how bodies move within a given time and space.

\(^2\) “La discipline ‘fabrique’ des individus; elle est la technique spécifique d’un pouvoir qui se donne les individus à la fois pour objets et pour instrument de son exercice” (Foucault, Surveiller 200).
activity most appropriate for girls.¹ Since dancing provides opportunities for unattached women to advertise their feminine talents and appeal to possible suitors, it corresponds to the Rousseauian scheme of women’s education centered on learning to please and be useful to men. Stéphanie de Genlis (1746-1830), author of numerous education manuals, suggested that dance lessons teach women vanity by encouraging them to focus their energy on impressing others at balls.² The anonymous author of The Ladies Library (1751) claimed that dancing is permissible only if the goal is to learn “how to move gracefully” because dancing often to show that one dances well is a dangerous “mistake” (41). My corpus of novels reveals the extent to which the dilemma of whether dance teaches grace or vanity complicated reflections on girls’ education.

Writers on dance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries defined graceful dancing as effortless action springing from an interior state. This understanding of grace reflects Kant’s notion of purposeful art that is not perceived as purposeful, as well as the seventeenth-century artist Charles Le Brun’s concept of the passions as spiritual

¹ “La danse est presque la seule branche d’exercices corporels qui entre aujourd’hui dans le plan de leur éducation. […] Outre le mouvement universel qu’elle procure au corps, elle développe les beautés et les grâces, donne de l’extension à chaque partie et au tout, et rend le corps souple, agile, droit et ferme” (Venel 149).
² In Genlis’s epistolary novel on education Adèle et Théodore, the Viscountess of Limours seeks the advice of the Baroness of Almane regarding her children’s upbringing. As the Viscountess relates her own education, she reveals that she had access to numerous teachers and lessons but only had a disposition for dance. After six months of lessons, she became an exquisite dancer. The pedantic Baroness chastises her dedication to dance: “On ne vous avait inspiré que le désir de briller dans un bal, et vous avez su parfaitement danser en six mois: qu’on eût tourné votre amour-propre sur des objets plus solides, vous auriez réussi de même” (90).
movements provoking the body to move.¹ According to the 1787 *Dictionnaire de danse*, the uniformity of “mouvements intérieurs,” provoked by emotions, engenders grace within the harmony of expressive dance figures (168). Charles Compan, the author of the dictionary, identified the gestures and actions in the dance of “une femme aimable” as the quintessential example of grace (169). In a similar vein, Henriette Campan, educator to many prominent women at the beginning of the nineteenth century, claimed that a dancer’s noble and modest attitudes reflect her proper upbringing. In Charles Perrault’s *Cendrillon* (1697), the title character charms with her beauty; then her graceful dancing adds to her appeal: “Elle dansa avec tant de grâce qu’on l’admira encore davantage” (276). As Perrault underscored in the story’s moral, grace is more valuable than beauty.² Beautiful dancing can be learnt, but graceful dancing goes beyond a perfected execution of choreography. The dancer, not the dancing, creates grace.

The dancer as a disciplined body-machine opposes the Romantic vision of an expressive body moved by moral goodness because grace emerges in movements toward perfection not in perfection itself. In Heinrich von Kleist’s 1810 text “On the Marionette Theater” (“Über das Marionettentheater”), a dancer named Herr C suggests that marionettes are more graceful than human dancers because the movements of marionettes stem from their center of gravity (Schwerpunkt), “the path to the soul of the dancer”

¹ In his posthumous *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions* (1698), Le Brun wrote, “la Passion est un mouvement de l’Âme, […] d’ordinaire tout ce qui cause à l’Âme de la passion, fait faire au corps quelque action” (3).
² “La beauté pour le sexe est un rare trésor, de l’admirer jamais on ne se lasse; mais ce qu’on nomme bonne grâce est sans prix, et vaut mieux encore” (Perrault 279).
(Weg der Seele des Tänzers) (23). Like the nineteenth-century English philosopher Herbert Spencer, Kleist associated grace with aplomb, a composed self-assured equilibrium and verticality. Ballet master Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810) likewise emphasized the importance of aplomb for dancers yet did not identify it as synonymous with grace, which he considered to be a minor aspect of dance. The marionette’s superiority, according to Kleist, lies in its immutability. Unlike the human dancer, the marionette never displays affectation because the soul, the origin of movement, never strays from its center of gravity. Movements originating in a dancer’s limbs instead of her center show signs of sin and imperfection, namely these movements indicate effort as she attempts to perform virtuosic steps. Effort reveals an attempt to imitate movements that the human body does not naturally perform. For Kleist, “imitation conceals the idealization it performs” (De Man 281). Furthermore, puppets are immune to the force of gravity and physical exhaustion making them superior to human dancers, who must return to the earth and eventually stop dancing. Similar to Schiller’s understanding of naïve art, Kleistian grace appears in the passivity of the mechanical doll without a

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1 Lucia Ruprecht, in Dances of the Self in Heinrich von Kleist, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Heinrich Heine, maintains that Kleist, Hoffmann, and Heine analyzed physical movement by contrasting the frail, expressive body against the stoic, neoclassical body to create an alternative esthetic of dance that articulates “cultural and personal narratives embodied in dances of the self” in which cultural processes, not physicality, shape performance (xv-xvi). These three writers’ dance scenes “become the symptomatic expression” of the “cultural trauma” of the “repressive economy” that underlies classical dance (137). In Ruprecht’s reading of Kleist, the flawless beauty advocated by neoclassicism appears as a compromised ideal. Noting that Diderot also used the marionette metaphor to describe a well-trained actor, Ruprecht surmises that Kleist’s text is more telling about his dissatisfaction with the state of acting than about dance.

2 The text employs analytical geometry “to articulate the phenomenal particularity of a spatial entity (line or curve) with the formalized computation of number” (De Man 266).
conscious or in God, who has “infinite consciousness” (Kleist 26). Though Kleist’s marionette may demonstrate the esthetic principle of grace as a lack of artifice, this concept of grace is incompatible with notions of human grace that depend on spiritual and moral feelings.

Graceful inclinations are not reducible to economized effort. Effortlessness “involves an element of difficulty” yet requires minimal “willpower” because “the action is pleasurable” (Montero 188-89). Contributing to the belief that grace is effortlessness, Kleist understood effort as artifice. Whereas the absence of willpower reveals an authentic enthusiasm to act, the absence of effort implies an absence of reflection, attention, and care. Moreover, the marionette is sexless. Kleist’s essay aligns with Schiller and Arthur Schopenhauer’s belief that art should not stir human desires. Unlike the enchanting je ne sais quoi of graceful movement, the passionless, mechanical grace lauded by Kleist is describable and replicable. Imperfect human grace infused with emotions leaves its beholders speechless by showing them ideas that escape simple descriptions. The dance scenes in my corpus suggest that apathetic dancing is pallid and unmoving even when performed perfectly and naturally.

As it is evident in texts by Rousseau, Staël, and E.T.A. Hoffmann comparing fashionable society or obedient women to marionettes or automata, the marionette is a metaphor for affectedness and submission to others. Devoid of inner agitations, the doll

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1 Bianca Theisen reads Kleist’s convoluted description of the puppeteer displacing himself into the puppet’s gravitational center as challenging “the presupposition of an immovable mover” or god (524). For Terrence Cave, Kleist presents the cognitive activities of the puppeteer as governing the puppet’s movements.
opposes grace. In Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Saint-Preux compares Parisian society imbued with social spectacle to marionettes, mindlessly acting out the expectations of others.¹ In *Le Mannequin, proverbe dramatique en deux actes*, one of Staël’s plays composed in 1811, the protagonist Sophie tricks her fiancé the Count d’Erville into wishing to marry her cousin, who in fact is a painted doll. Seeking a silent woman who witlessly admires him, the Count finds Sophie too brilliant and quickly becomes enamored with the doll’s docility. When he asks the doll if she is fond of dancing, Sophie, pretending to translate her German cousin’s answers, tells him that her cousin has never danced because such an activity would be unwise. For the Count, this refusal to dance is a sign of feminine accomplishment. As I will show in chapter one, a mechanical doll also serves as a metaphor for a silent, submissive woman in Staël’s 1807 novel *Corinne*. The protagonist of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman* (1816) falls in love with an automaton and dances awkwardly with her. She then destroys his chance at happiness. Throughout my corpus, I find descriptions of women being treated as objects made to move, instead of subjects creating their own movements. By contrasting human dancers and metaphors of dancing dolls, I examine how dance scenes condemn

¹ “Tout le monde y fait à la fois la même chose dans la même circonstance; tout va par temps comme les évolutions d’un régiment en bataille: vous diriez que ce sont autant de marionnettes clouées sur la même planche, ou tirées par le même fil” (Rousseau, *Julie* 309). In another letter, Saint-Preux compares aristocrats to dolls manufactured by fashion contending that this conformity leads to indifference in selecting a lover or a spouse: “toutes ces poupées sortent de chez la même marchande de modes” (331). This urban phenomenon, according to Saint-Preux, is particularly prevalent among women, who appear as “un simulacre de la mode” (332). The qualification of cosmopolitans as mechanical dolls reappears in *Lettre à d’Alembert*. 

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patriarchal ideologies and practices dehumanizing women by suppressing their subjectivity.

For a human subject to move gracefully, she must conscientiously use her body to create meaningful motions all while hiding the challenges of her effort. Graceful dancers are not machines. Discipline and effort alone may result in correct or elegant dancing, but not necessarily graceful dancing. Graceful movement, perfected through effort, reveals sincere passions and ethical desires. American modern dance pioneer Martha Graham (1894-1991) defined grace as a result of “faith in life, in love, in people, in the act of dancing” and the “reverence for such forgotten things as the miracle of the small beautiful bones and their delicate strength” (96). Graceful dancers enthusiastically embrace their humanness and their freedom, by which I mean their ability to move beyond their current situations.

**Voluptuous Grace**

Sexuality takes part in graceful dancing. The philosopher Paul Souriau (1852-1926) considered graceful movement to be “one of the most powerful elements of seduction” (95). For me, grace is one the most powerful elements of attraction. Seduction implies that one is led astray as if sexuality were incompatible with moral goodness, but attraction is the act of bringing together different individuals. In my readings of dance scenes, I analyze how dancing characters express or suppress their sexuality. As Michel Foucault and Thomas Laqueur argue, the early nineteenth century saw the rise of a new

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1 Eighteenth-century dance master Giovanni-Andrea Gallini advised dancers to avoid appearing affected by employing no more technical prowess and art than “what serves to grace nature” without obscuring it (62).
understanding of sexuality. For Laqueur, the relationship between men and women came to be understood as one based on the incommensurability between the sexes. According to Foucault, sexualities, especially those considered to be perverse, became an increasingly prevalent object of enquiry through confessions and scientific discourse.

Since dancing as a couple allows partners to know each other through their carnal bodies, dance scenes provide the site par excellence for studying representations of sexuality, this “science faite d’esquives,” in novels that avoid explicit references to sexual acts (Foucault, *Histoire* 72). Both dance and sexual love are bodily expressions of “the body’s orientation toward pleasure,” the sharing of space, physical effort, and touch (Hanna, “Dance and Sexuality” 212). If sexual desire is a secret under threat of discovery, as formulated by queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, then dancing as an expression of sexual being performs the fact of sexuality as being always already discovered. Dancing only to demonstrate one’s health and suitability as a future mate exemplifies movements impelled by social contracts and an institutional rationalization of sex, displaying neither grace nor love. Dance scenes favoring affective inclinations, however, illustrate grace born out of love and a desire to attract others. Voluptuous grace,

\[\text{\underline{\text{\textsuperscript{1}}}}\] For historian Pierre Legendre, dance is always a question of reproduction and “une preuve théâtrale de l’amour” (9).
meaning graceful movements acknowledging the dancer’s sexual subjectivity, allows for representing women beyond the triptych of the virgin, the mother, and the whore.¹

Descriptions of partner dances play out different forms of heterosexual relationships.² Dance reinforces heterosexual narratives of arousing the “desire to advance copulation” while also countering these narratives by “replacing intercourse as the primary aim with excitement and pleasure” (Engelhardt 78).³ Social dances demonstrate gendered dominance patterns through the dancers’ placements, gestures, and interactions. By studying dancing couples, I examine how nineteenth-century women writers critiqued power structures in male-female relationships or proposed alternative models for the heterosexual couple.

Dance partners perceive and gain knowledge about each other through touch, which, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, began to supersede vision as the most accurate mode of perception. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anatomists and philosophers questioned how perception functioned throughout the body.⁴ Étienne

¹ Luce Irigaray, in her 1978 article “Le marché des femmes,” demonstrates how kinship systems impose the social roles of mother, virgin, and prostitute onto women. These roles in turn determine women’s value as commodities within a sexual economy.
² As Cheryl Wilson found in her study of dance scenes in nineteenth-century British literature, in many novels, “the intricacies of a marriage plot parallel the prescribed exchange of partners in a dance formation” (4).
³ Molly Engelhardt, in her research on Victorian fiction, shows that Jane Austen used dance scenes to “help women protect themselves in the potentially dangerous field of courtship and marriage by investing them with the authority to read male bodies,” while, in novels by Anne Brontë, Charlotte Mary Yonge, and Catherine Gore, young women’s success or failure on the dance floor determines their future (20). Whereas dancing is intricately connected to marriage plots in many nineteenth-century British novels, dance scenes written by nineteenth-century French women novelists, following Marie-Madeleine de La Fayette’s example, are more likely to complicate or initiate relationships between characters who never marry.
⁴ As early as the seventeenth century, Descartes, in La Dioptrique, considered touch less deceptive than sight. Diderot’s 1749 Lettre sur les aveugles puts forth the argument that, when perfected by exercise,
Bonnot de Condillac (1714-1780) identified touch as the fundamental sensation animating living beings and allowing a subject to identify as a self. According to Johann Gottfried Herder’s 1778 treaty on sculpture, only touch reveals bodies as truth and not mere pictures. Descriptions of couple dances emphasizing the excitement of physical contact engage with these debates on what it means to see, touch, feel, and reflect on human relationships. Dancing together, individuals experience what Maurice Merleau-Ponty called “intercorporeity,” meaning a sensibility shared among distinctly different bodies of flesh. For him, flesh is an element “midway between the spatiotemporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (141). Drawing attention to shared experiences of the here and now, dance allows couples to contemplate their phenomenological unity in difference as they move together in their sexually different situations.

Dance reveals itself as a created phenomenon through the lived experience of the dancers and observers. I read dance scenes through an existentialist perspective, in particular Simone de Beauvoir’s concepts of existential projects and recognition in encounters. Although Beauvoir (1908-1986) was not a dance theorist, she danced, attended dance performances, and wrote about dance in the majority of her novels and touch can become more refined than sight. For Diderot, our experiences, not our sensations alone, allow us to understand objects. According to biologist Georges-Louis de Buffon, touch is the first sense acquired and, therefore, the most perfected sense. A 1790 medical encyclopedia edited by Félix Vicq-d’Azyr states that all senses are forms of touch as the exterior world comes in contact with the human subject. Comparing painting to other arts, thinkers, such as George-Marie Raymond, François René Jean de Pommereul, and Pierre Chaussard, continued to stress the primacy of vision.

Agreeing with John Locke’s theory of knowledge derived from the senses, Condillac claimed that the eye depends on tactility to learn the appropriate movements permitting vision which must be accompanied by an intellectual analysis.
autobiographies. Her descriptions of dance demonstrate the challenges in attaining meaningful freedom through other people’s recognition of one’s actions. I draw on Beauvoir’s theory of reciprocity, meaning the acknowledgement that I am simultaneously an object for others and a subject, to examine how observers watch dancers or how couples dance together. When a dancer treats her partner as only an object of her movements, reciprocal recognition cannot occur.

Dance can also reflect a non-sexual love based on respect and admiration. To distinguish dancing correctly and dancing affectionately with a partner is to investigate the presence of enthusiasm and love in the dancer’s movements. In her *Journal de jeunesse*, Staël compared a dance with her husband, the ambassador Éric-Magnus de Staël (whom she married for religious, diplomatic, and financial reasons), to a dance with her father, whom she greatly admired:

M. de Staël avec sa jolie figure, ses connaissances dans l’art de la danse, formait bien ses pas, mais l’âme manquait à ses mouvements, mais ses regards fixés sur moi n’étaient animés ni par l’esprit ni par le cœur. Sa main en prenant la mienne me semblait de marbre blanc qui me serrait en me glaçant. Mon père tout à coup lui dit: ‘Tenez, Monsieur, je vais vous montrer comme on danse avec une demoiselle dont on est amoureux.’ Alors, malgré sa taille forte, malgré moins de jeunesse, ses yeux charmants, ses mouvements animés exprimaient la tendresse avec grâce, avec énergie. Dieu, feindrais-je! quel serrement de cœur j’éprouvai dans ce moment, quelle comparaison déchirante. (237)
The aging Necker overcame his physical limits through his paternal love for his daughter. Knowledge allows for the creation of dance figures, whereas love and enthusiasm transform a dance into an exchange of sentiments. Grace is an expression of love, namely a love for humanity. Bayer equates the metaphysics of grace to the metaphysics of love because, in an imperfect world, grace interprets love and harkens back to the time before hate first appeared. Graceful dancing suggests how love could manifest.

**Dancing in Novels**

Representations of dance in literature shape ideas about dance history and the possibilities of how dance can affect people. Matteo Majorano calls dance a hypothesis present in everyone and therefore relevant to all readers who read literature to understand human existence. I have limited my corpus to novels and novellas. Before the novel became “worthy of men’s attention” in the 1830s, novels were stigmatized as silly texts for women (Naginski 54). Romantic and idealist novels, as Margaret Cohen shows, engaged in political debates through descriptions of sentiments revealing the individual’s struggle to consolidate her needs with the needs of society. Moreover, through utopian and dystopian descriptions, these novels criticized the present by looking toward the future. *Malvina, Delphine, Corinne, Valérie,* and *Ourika* influenced a generation of writers before the death knell of Romanticism sounded. In contrast to the realist and

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1 Despite the existence of dance notation systems since the end of the fifteenth century, dancers and choreographers throughout history have relied predominantly on oral transmission to pass choreographic knowledge from one generation to the next.

2 In the chapter on the waltz, I diverge slightly and consider a few of Sand’s short stories.

3 Jesuit Priest Charles Porée argued in *Discours sur les romans* (1736) that novels were dangerous because they could inspire amorous passions.
symbolist novels of the second half of the nineteenth century, early French Romanticism emphasizes the emotional experience of dance thereby showing how dance effects the dancer or the observer. Nevertheless, the realism in sentimental novels underscores the need for imagining different ways of being.

These novels reveal the inner turmoil of the dancers or their spectators within the realistic setting of balls and parties. Dance scenes draw attention to the physical space of the ball and the historic temporality of fashionable dances. Descriptions of social dance in novels therefore create chronotopes, the temporal and spatial markers that organize the narrative events of a novel and define their “artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality” (Bakhtin 243). Chronotopes assimilate historical time and spaces to the temporality and sites of the novel. The philosophical and political ideas explored in a novel “gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work” (250). As the novel recreates the real world, dance scenes grapple with questions about human existence in a context identifying a historically specific time and place.¹ Alain Montandon proposes the concept of the sociopoétique du chronotope to explain how ball scenes create a temporality conducive to restructuring a narrative through the suspension of time, regression, or metamorphosis instead of merely reflecting a reality.

Novels do not reconstruct dancing events; rather, the novelists wrote with lived experiences of dance because “writing with dance, rather than including descriptions of

¹ As Ricœur states, “le monde du texte, parce qu’il est monde, entre nécessairement en collision avec le monde réel, pour le ‘refaire’, soit qu’il le confirme, soit qu’il le dénie” (Du Texte 20).
the dancing’s lexicon and syntax, generates dancing writing” (Cordova 250). Realism in dance scenes arises from what Roland Barthes calls, in S/Z, its code of representation, the citations of what has already been read, seen, or experienced. Since these novels give little attention to choreographic gestures, I focus not so much on dance as a signifier but rather on the affective experience of the dancing moment. If we become human through our gestures, what do the effects of gestures tell us about our humanness?¹

In each chapter, I use a variety of sources to provide a history of the dances to examine their social implications in the novels and to equip modern readers with knowledge that most educated nineteenth-century readers possessed. Even though the novels give few indications about the steps, each dance possesses its own narrative that often parallels the narratives of the novels. The novels themselves contribute to the myriad of sources that constitute dance history.² With multiple possibilities, dance and literary histories are cultural processes that evolve rhizomatically connecting, breaking, and beginning in new sites.

The dance scenes that I study produce and enclose ideologies by transgressing or exalting notions of gender, nationality, or class. Literary descriptions of dance constitute social choreography by presenting dance as an “enactment of a social order” reflected in and shaped by an esthetic (Hewitt 2). Novelistic dance scenes and social choreography

¹ Studying the circulation of gestures in various media, Yves Citton’s book Gestes d’humanités tackles how gestures make us certain kinds of humans. For him, our gestures create forms of life by showing “la diversité d’idées de l’humanité qui nous anime” (26).
² As Cheryl Wilson notes, “Dance is a multivoiced art, and to impose a single narrative onto the experience of dancing in the nineteenth century would deny the delightful chaos of that experience” (19).
work out and work through “utopian, but nevertheless ‘real,’ social relations” (Hewitt 17). Descriptions of dance elucidate social structures and modes of perceiving social actors thereby becoming sites of experimentation for considering what is not yet possible but could become possible.¹

Scholarship on the various ways in which dance and literature come together has increased dramatically since the late 1990s. In French studies, scholars frequently turn to the dance criticism and libretti of Théophile Gautier in addition to works by Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, and Stéphane Mallarmé.² Felicia McCarren’s Dance Pathologies (1998) examines gender at the intersections of dance and texts by Céline, Mallarmé, and Gautier. In Paris Dances: Textual Choreographies in the Nineteenth-Century French Novel (1999), Sarah Davies Cordova focuses on the role of dance as a moment of social mixing and a mode through which the provinces took up Parisian social practices. According to Cordova, the heroines in Delphine, Corinne, and Valérie express themselves wordlessly in dance scenes serving as “a metonymy to designate the well-educated, well-born woman’s social position” (18). Molly Engelhardt and Susannah Fullerton study the social functions of dance in Jane Austen’s novels. Anne McKee Stapleton’s Pointed Encounters: Dance in Post-Culloden Scottish Literature (2014)

¹ Valeria Gramigna, in Dans l’encre de la danse: Roman et danse entre XXème et XXIème siècles, explains how dance, like literature, symbolizes an unnecessary action that aims to attain perfection. She uses Paul Valéry’s notion of “espace-temps” to show how descriptions of dance allow readers and writers to enter a different kind of reality, a world of the possible, or an escape from the material world. For Frédéric Pouillaude, dance is a transcendental art demonstrating human possibility.
² Deirdre Priddin’s 1952 book The Art of Dance in French Literature is perhaps one of the earliest works examining dance esthetics in French literature. She focuses on the dance criticism of Gautier in addition to texts by Mallarmé, Valéry, and Camille Mauclair. A 1953 review in French Studies aptly sums up the book as dealing “with the views of eminent men of letters” on how to write about dance (Knowles 163).
identifies the motif of dance as an “outwardly conforming, yet covertly subversive, expression of Scottish identity” (11). While this research centers on the meaning of dance within a given culture, other scholars of literary dances adopt a formalist approach. Allison Thompson and Jean Rousset examine how dance scenes work as key moments in narrative developments. Drawing from semiotics, Valeria Gramigna, Cheryl Wilson, Alexandra Kolb, and Susan Jones tackle literary mimesis of dance. Alan Brissenden, Nancy Hargrove, and Kimberly Myers show how dance symbolizes order, harmony, perfection, and beauty in British literature. Writing Women Dance takes part in scholarly engagements with dance in literature as a means for thinking about the cultural and philosophical stakes of dance.

In studies on the intersections between literature and dance, women writers are scarce while descriptions of women dancing are abundant. Moreover, scholarship on nineteenth-century French novels has, until recently, largely neglected the corpus of novels published before 1830, when the novel was still considered a feminine genre, written by and for women. Most of the novels in my corpus depict dancing from a male

1 McKee argues that Scottish women authors used symbolic dance scenes to represent women as potential mediators in an egalitarian society by suggesting new forms of personal and national relationships, whereas Scottish male authors used dance scenes to uphold patriarchal, clan-based authority.
2 Alexandra Kolb and Susan Jones study the intersections of modern dance and literary modernism with a focus on the first half of the twentieth century. In Performing Femininity: Dance and Literature in German Modernism, Kolb examines choreographic strategies for constructing, challenging and undermining female identities. Jones studies signs of modernity in twentieth-century choreography and writing on dance. While her focus is on British literature, she refers to French writers, dancers, and choreographers throughout her book. She argues that dance at the beginning of the twentieth century offered “a visible embodiment” of an “inward expression of transcendence” and a “poetics of potentiality” (3, 16). In The Anatomy of Dance Discourse, Karin Schlapbach studies the relationship between dance, mimesis, and language in later Graeco-Roman texts.
3 Of the 141 French novels published in 1802, 63% were written by male authors (Louichon).
character’s point of view. However, these dance scenes also indicate the dancing woman’s desire to dance or not to dance in addition to providing glimpses into the dancer’s experience of movement. Comparing dance scenes written by women to those of their male contemporaries, Cordova claims that “just as women have been repeatedly defined by male authors, they seem in reaction to have found it necessary to act out male metaphors in their own texts” (xii). Even when the dance is described from the perspective of a male character, dance scenes highlighting women’s subjective grace or criticizing masculine domination differ from dance scenes in many, but certainly not all, canonical nineteenth-century novels.

**Organization of Chapters**

Each chapter spotlights a particular dance or genre of dance: 1) contradances, 2) the waltz, 3) presentational dances (the shawl dance, quadrille, and bolero), and 4) the tarantella. The first two chapters focus on participatory social dances. The second half examines presentational dances during which social settings or the domestic sphere are momentarily transformed into sites of spectacle. There are some exceptions, namely the first contradance in *Delphine*, which Staël described more like a ballet than a social dance. When dance scenes describe women dancing expressively, the novels transform social spaces into artistic spaces and present the dancers, not as vain objects of desire, but as artistic creators. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ballrooms, non-professional dancers would strive to appear graceful, at ease, and knowledgeable of steps. Maintaining a neutral countenance, they would not have endeavored to dance expressively. The
contrast between dance as a social obligation and as an artistic medium sparks debate regarding its status as an art or a frivolous divertissement.

Each chapter investigates the encounter between the dancer and her cavalier or observers and questions if graceful inclinations are compatible with nineteenth-century women’s lived experience. The first chapter shows how contradances create images of social harmony and situations propitious for authentic love in Delphine, Duras’s Édouard, and Sand’s Le Compagnon du Tour de France. Cottin’s Malvina, Sand’s Indiana, and Staël’s Corinne, however, place contradances within a system of masculine authority. Chapter two deals with novels condemning the waltz as dangerous for women because of men’s deafness to their refusals to dance. However, in Sand’s fantasy novel Laura, voyage dans le cristal, an intellectual woman contemplates scientific principles while waltzing and dances to protest patriarchal laws, thereby suggesting that the waltz can produce graceful inclinations by being a means of asserting subjective bodily presence. In chapter three, Krüdener’s Valérie, Duras’s Ourika, and Sand’s La Filleule reveal how dancing women are reduced to archetypes: the virtuous mother, the African, and the Gypsy. In Ourika and La Filleule, a putative instinct to dance emerges as grace, which leads me to question how representations of non-white women shaped nineteenth-century notions of grace. The tarantella scene in Corinne, analyzed in chapter four, presents the ultimate graceful dancer whose enthusiasm and love for humanity propel her to dance. Unlike most literary heroines, Corinne maintains her autonomy while dancing with a male partner. In Corinne and Sand’s Lavinia and La Daniella, hybrid characters, simultaneously exoticized and European, offer a paragon of intelligent, expressive,
voluptuous, and ethical dancers embodying sensual grace. Staël’s notion of glory, which like grace is a matter of reciprocity, appears in the three dance scenes studied in this final chapter. Throughout my corpus, a tension exists between the idea of a sensual dancer and that of a virginial, bodiless dancer, which at the end of the century Mallarmé summed up by labeling a dancing woman a dehumanized metaphor.¹

Allusions to exoticism, Orientalism, and race reappear throughout this corpus. The concept of exotic dance designates the experience of incomprehension observing a performance from a culture different from one’s own culture.² I use Srinivas Aravamudan’s theory of Enlightenment Orientalism to consider how exoticized bodies became a testing ground for thinking about female sexuality. Centuries of travel narratives and literature created the trope of the voluptuous Asian, African, or Mediterranean dancing woman. Orientalism transforms feminine sexuality into a form of alterity that a white woman can perform, as if portraying a character, without revealing her inherent sexuality. The fetishization of non-white women as free to move their bodies in accordance with their desires creates an alternative to white women’s veiled sexuality. Moreover, exoticized dancing characters or comparisons between European and non-European dancers uphold the Rousseauian notion of the noble savage whose natural grace contrasts with marionette-like urban dwellers.

¹ In “Crayonné au théâtre,” Mallarmé wrote, “la danseuse n’est pas une femme qui danse, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu’elle n’est pas une femme, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme” (201).
² Colonialists and primitivists however appropriated the term to exploit other cultures. See Anne Décoret’s Les danses exotiques en France: 1880-1940 and “L’exotisme et la danse; clés d’une recherche.”
Given that the dance scenes range from a few sentences to several pages, certain texts receive significantly more attention than others. Since each chapter delves into works by different authors, I conclude this introduction with a brief biographical presentation of the principal novelists in this study. My references to the novelists’ biographies, especially with regards to their exposure to dance, are not attempts to find biographical connections between the texts and their authors. I seek to avoid the sexist tradition of reading women’s novels as personal confessions. At the same time, I do not adopt a Barthian approach of designating the readers and critics as the authors or a Foucauldian understanding of textual origins as a function of discourse. Instead, I read these texts as products of their writers creating in historically specific social, political, and intellectual milieus.

Although I create a constellation of dance scenes and not a genealogy, intertextual references between two generations of novelists reveal a literary heritage of dancing heroines. With the exception of Sand and d’Agoult, most of these novelists grew up during the eighteenth century. Like their predecessors, Sand and d’Agoult were readers of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers, especially Rousseau. Refining the concept of human progress, these novels reveal a bridge between Enlightenment thinkers and nineteenth-century French Romantics before and after the 1830 “Battle of Hernani.”

**Biographical Portraits**

Germaine de Staël (née Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, 1766–1817) was a philosopher, novelist, and political writer. Exiled by Napoleon Bonaparte, she brought together at Coppet, her Swiss estate, influential writers and thinkers, introduced German
culture to France, and refined eighteenth-century notions of perfectibility through the concept of enthusiasm, which she defined as the feeling of the infinite (le sentiment de l’infini) or an energy to act. The Protestant daughter of Jacques Necker, Louis XVI’s finance minister, and the illustrious salonnière Suzanne Necker (née Churchod), Germaine grew up surrounded by influential figures in art, literature, philosophy, and politics. Given her advocation for divorce and progressive female protagonists, some scholars label Staël a protofeminist despite her wavering stand on women’s social and political rights. Using her descriptions of dance as a starting point, I show how she delineates possible feminine (not to be confused with feminist) ideals for upper-class women. In most of Staël’s literary works, her phenomenally accomplished heroines are unable to marry the men they love and die young. These protagonists demonstrate what women could become if they refused to follow social rules limiting their existence to appearances and an exchange value on the marriage market.

Born into a wealthy Protestant family, Sophie Cottin (née Marie Risteau, 1770–1807) published several widely disseminated novels before falling into obscurity. Little is known about her life although wild stories about her lovers who committed suicide have transformed her into a femme fatale. An émigré during the Revolution, she spent time in England, desired religious freedom, supported the implementation of a constitutional monarchy in France, and viewed Napoleonic rule as a positive alternative to the violence following the Reign of Terror (1793-1794). As her most recent biographer Silvia Lorusso shows, Cottin’s life was full of contradictions. A woman writer herself, she wrote virulent attacks on women writers, particularly Staël and Genlis. Although Protestant, she wrote
texts glorifying Catholicism. Her first novel *Claire d’Albe*, published in 1799, and her second novel *Malvina*, published in January 1800, received widespread commercial and critical success. After her death, Italian choreographers and librettists found inspiration in her novels. Francesco Clerico choreographed the 1824 ballet *Matilde e Malek-Adel* based on her 1805 novel *Mathilde*, and in 1847 Giovanni Briol composed a ballet by the same name. Antonio Monticini’s 1828 ballet *Elisabetta, ovvero gli esiliati in Siberia* staged her 1806 historical novel *Élisabeth, ou les Exilés de Sibérie*. Cottin influenced writers such as Alphonse de Lamartine, Balzac, and Flaubert, yet today her texts hardly receive the attention they deserve.

Barbara Julianne von Krüden (née Barbe Juliane von Vietinghoff, 1764–1824) is best known for her 1803 novel *Valérie, ou Lettres de Gustave de Linar à Ernest de G* and her mystic preaching. Born in Riga in 1764, she was the daughter of the baron Otto Hermann von Vietinghoff, a political figure in Livonia and Russia, and the pious Lutheran Anna Ulrika. The young Julie, a native German speaker, spoke French fluently, and traveled throughout Europe. At the age of 17, she married 38-year-old Alexis Konstantin von Krüdenner, who later became the Russian ambassador in Venice, Copenhagen, and Berlin. In 1783, she and her husband moved to Venice, where they resided for four years, a stay that would inspire the setting of *Valérie*. A few days after the Estates General of 1789, she arrived in Paris and joined elite literary circles. After the success of *Valérie*, Krüdenner began preaching her own form of mysticism throughout Europe. She later became involved in Tsar Alexander I’s formation of the 1815 Holy
Alliance aiming to restrain European liberalism and secularism. In 1822, he exiled her from Russia after she publicly urged him to reconquer holy sites.

Claire de Duras (née Claire Louisa Rose Bonne de Coëtnempren de Kersaint, 1777-1828) may have fled the Terror to Martinique and then Philadelphia to recover her maternal family’s fortune after her liberal father, the author of *Moyens proposés à l’Assemblée nationale pour rétablir la paix et l’ordre dans les colonies* (1792), was guillotined in 1793. With her mother and aunt, she moved to Switzerland and then London, where, in 1797, she married Amédée-Bretagne-Malo de Durfort, who became the Duke of Duras. Under the First Empire, the couple returned to France and settled in Touraine before establishing themselves in the Palais du Louvre during the reign of Louis XVIII. In Paris, Claire de Duras opened an influential salon attracting celebrated figures such as François-René de Chateaubriand, Staël, and Delphine Gay de Girardin. Appealing to a large readership throughout Europe, *Ourika* (1823) and *Édouard* (1825) are the only works that Duras published during her lifetime. She also wrote a novel entitled *Olivier ou le secret*, which was circulated among her entourage but not published until 1971, and several other unpublished texts, including *Mémoires de Sophie*. Set during the final decades of the eighteenth century, these novels examine obstacles to happiness and matrimony.

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1 Historical evidence of her journeys to the Caribbean and her family’s connection to slave trade remains vague.
According to her memoirs *Histoire de ma vie*, George Sand (née Amantine Aurore Lucile Dupin, 1804-1876) was surrounded by dance and music from the moment of her birth, which she described as the interruption of a contradance,

ma mère un peu souffrante quitta la danse et passa dans sa chambre. Comme sa figure n’était point altérée et qu’elle était sortie fort tranquillement, la contredanse continua. Au dernier *chassez-huit*, ma tante Lucie entra dans la chambre de ma mère, et tout aussitôt s’écria: ‘Venez, venez, Maurice, vous avez une fille.’ (501)

Childhood innocence, nature, and dancing coincide in many of Sand’s novels. As a child, she took dance lessons with a former “danseur à l’Opéra,” Mr. Gogault (738). These lessons, according to her memoirs, were futile since she lacked the grace and lightness necessary to perform fashionable social dances. Nevertheless, her grandmother Aurore Dupin de Francueil had high hopes for her granddaughter. In an 1818 letter, the grandmother advised the younger Aurore, then living at the English Augustinian Convent of Our Lady in Paris, to hold her head high and maintain eye contact with her cavalier during contradances because “c’est avec sa tête et ses bras que l’on danse, les jambes ne sont qu’un accessoire; cela a l’air d’un paradoxe, rien n’est plus vrai, j’ai tant d’envie de te voir parfaite au moral et au physique” (*Correspondance* 1:18). This belief in the beauty of a dance originating from the dancer’s moral beauty stands out in Sand’s novels *Valentine* (1832) and *La Petite Fadette* (1848). Separated by several decades, Staël’s *Corinne* and many of Sand’s texts grapple with women’s freedom to be artists; however, in Sand’s corpus, class enters the debate. Influenced by Pierre Leroux’s socialism and the
Saint-Simonian belief in humanity’s collective efforts toward improvement, Sand explored spiritualism, politics, and human possibilities through descriptions of dance.

Marie d’Agoult (née Marie Catherine Sophie de Flavigny, 1805-1876) wrote a few short stories, one novel, articles on music, and various essays on history, politics, and ethics. Apart from her memoirs, her publications appeared under the masculine pseudonym Daniel Stern. The daughter of a German mother and a French émigré, she was initially raised as a Lutheran but then converted to Catholicism given that being Protestant in France decreased her chances at an advantageous marriage. After living in Frankfurt, the young Marie moved to Paris, where she took dance lessons with Marie-Antoinette’s former teacher Monsieur Abraham. Though she was forbidden from waltzing in public, d’Agoult once fell while waltzing at home permanently scarring her right cheek. At her mother’s “soirées dansantes,” she often partnered with the poet Alfred de Vigny, who was “not a good dancer in the quadrilles” (Bolster 54). In 1827, she married the Count Charles d’Agoult. After meeting the composer Franz Liszt in 1832 and becoming pregnant with his child, she left her husband to travel with Liszt throughout Switzerland and France. Thanks to her friendships with Delphine Gay, Hortense Allart, and George Sand, she became immersed in the literary world of late French Romanticism.

**Chronology**


1802 Germaine de Staël. *Delphine*. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author/Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Julianne Barbara von Krüdener. <em>Valérie ou Lettres de Gustave de Linar à Ernest de G.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>Germaine de Staël. <em>De l’Allemagne.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1823 | Claire de Duras. *Ourika.*
Claire de Duras. *Mémoires de Sophie.* (unpublished) |
| 1825 | Claire de Duras. *Edouard.* |
| 1832 | George Sand. *Indiana.* |
| 1833 | George Sand. *Lavinia.* |
| 1835 | George Sand. *Leone Leoni.* |
| 1838 | George Sand. “L’Orco.”
George Sand. *La Dernière Aldini.* |
| 1840 | George Sand. *Le Compagnon du Tour de France.* |
| 1846 | Marie d’Agoult (Daniel Stern). *Nélida.* |
| 1853 | George Sand. *La Filleule.* |
| 1857 | George Sand. *La Daniella.* |
| 1865 | George Sand. *Laura, voyage dans le cristal.* |
Chapter 1 Contradances: Searching for Grace and Social Harmony

Grace was in all her steps, Heaven in her eye,
In every gesture dignity and love.

John Milton, Paradise Lost.

Contradances in novels by Germaine de Staël, Sophie Cottin, Claire de Duras, and George Sand create illusions of social harmony, enforce masculine domination, or highlight characters’ enchanting grace. In Staël’s Delphine (1802) and Cottin’s Malvina (1800), graceful dancers amaze onlookers who climb onto furniture to witness the enchanting sight. In Staël’s Corinne, ou l’Italie (1807) and Sand’s Indiana (1832), the contradances demonstrate monotone executions of a social duty displaying women’s elegance but not their active grace. Contradances become joyous moments of social mixing despite indelible reminders of class differences in Duras’s Édouard (1825) and Sand’s Le Compagnon du Tour de France (1840). Representative of Enlightenment values and the political power of collective dances, these dance scenes reveal women’s hesitation to dance in public and the effect that their performances have on their partners and admiring crowds.
Creating spatiotemporal experiences that differ from quotidian life, dance can express ideas deviating from the reigning ideologies of a given historic moment. Dance illustrates ideals, in the Staëlian sense that an ideal models a desired, but not yet possible, existence. Not to be confused with an ideal itself, graceful inclinations are movements toward ideals. In this chapter, I use Staël’s notion of perfectibility, a projection toward a perfected state of humanity, to analyze how dance scenes promote moral or social improvement and critique social barriers to human advancement.¹

Just as Naomi Schor argued for George Sand’s idealism, I understand the Staëlian quest of human perfectibility as “a powerfully mobilizing force for change” (Schor, *George* 14). Idealism in the novels of Staël and Sand, eschewing mimetic realism, portrays a hoped-for reality within recognizable settings. In *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) and the preface to *Delphine*, Staël defined the imaginary as a movement toward perfection within everyday situations. For women writers living under sexism, idealism is an “alternative representational mode available to those who do not enjoy the privileges of subjecthood in the real” (Schor 19). In the nineteenth century, possible conditions of emancipation considered within everyday realities produced what Michèle Riot-Sarcéy calls subversion through “le reel de l’utopie,” meaning utopian ideas founded on imagining concrete actions to overthrow

¹ Staël’s idealism developed out of her readings of German Idealists (a school of thought developed between the 1780s and 1840s), English romantics, and French Enlightenment thinkers. Emmanuel Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism especially influenced her philosophical approach to the ideal. According to Kant, objects observed and understood through human cognition are appearances, not the things in themselves. If an idea is a pure concept produced by reason, then an ideal is the concept of an individual object that embodies an idea of pure reason.
actual oppression and restructure society. Contradances, in some novels, present utopian images of human interactions charged with the possibility of changing gender and class politics. In other novels, they are a perfunctory display of masculine fantasies.

**Collective Figures: A History of Contradances**

In their earliest practices, contradances provided well-mannered English people an exercise in following rules and training the body. John Playford’s *The Dancing Master* (1651), a compilation of popular English contradances, defines dancing as a “commendable and rare Quality fit for young Gentlemen and Ladies, if opportunely and civilly used” (np). The emergence of contradances at French aristocratic and bourgeois festivities in the eighteenth century marked the beginning of a monumental change in the body politics of dance. Hierarchies began to disappear as collectively forming figures on the dance floor replaced the goal of highlighting the importance of select dancers. Whereas seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century court dances, like the *jardin à la française*, emphasized order, contradances allowed for the freedom visible in the *jardin à l’anglaise*.¹ Distances between men and women decreased as physical contact became a more integral aspect of the choreography. Steps became more grounded as dancers chasséed, hopped, and spun. No longer glorifying the masculine body, dance became an overt mating ritual as men and women concurrently showed off their poise and vigor.

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¹ Sylvia Granger develops this analogy arguing that contradances are perfectly adapted to the spirit of Enlightenment thinkers, “qui à la rigoureuse ordonnance du jardin à la française, symétrique et statique, se met à préférer le foisonnement faussement désordonné du parc à l’anglaise” (16).
Nevertheless, in many contradances, women could only move up and down the figures with a male partner.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, contradances enlivened balls with their sprightly steps. The 1765 *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* defines a contradance as a lively figure dance performed by a group, “sorte de danse vive et légère, qui a ses figures propres, & où plusieurs personnes dansent ensemble” (270). For some historians, the term derives from what the English called *country dances*, first documented in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Others contend that the term means counterpart because the figures repeat and the dancers face each other.\(^1\) The exact origin of contradances and the etymology of *contredanse* remains debatable. Most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts on contradances stress their role in making Baroque dances obsolete as well as their physically exhausting demands.\(^2\) As Classicism faded away, contradances reoriented dance esthetics.

Derived from folk dances, contradances became fashionable among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English and French nobles. After gaining popularity and undergoing various modifications in upper-class settings, contradances made their way back into village assemblies and lower-class entertainment. Between 1700 and 1750,

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1 Alexis Bacquoy-Guédon, in *Méthode pour exercer l’oreille à la mesure, dans l’art de la danse* (1777), claimed that contre-danse came from the Latin contra and the German Tanz.

2 The 1771 Jesuit *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* provides an account of how contradances transformed French balls: “Sorte de danse moins grave que les anciennes, & où plusieurs personnes figurent ensemble, de manière qu’elles font les mêmes mouvements chacune de leur côté. Le bal commence par des menuets, & finit par des contre-danses. Le goût des contre-danses a fait négliger & oublier les anciennes danses. […] Les contre-danses sont presque toutes des gavottes qui se dansent d’un air familier & badin; mais dont les figures s’exécutent avec tant de rapidité, qu’elles échauffent extraordinairement. Les danses réglées ne font presque plus d’usage” (2:867).
contradances and court dances known as “la belle Danse” coexisted. More exhausting than the stately minuet and other Baroque dances, contradances typically constituted the final dances at balls. The second half of the eighteenth-century saw the acme of French contradances. Making the minuet outmoded around the time of the 1789 Revolution, they remained a prominent aspect of French balls and village fêtes until their decline after the Bourbon Restauration (1814–1830). The trajectories of contradances between different social classes highlight a nascent universalization of dance belonging to historic moments instead of socioeconomic groups.

Often named after nationalities, contradances provide a glimpse into how dances and ideas about dancing spread and evolved throughout Europe. The French did not simply appropriate English country dances; instead, they incorporated them into their existing dances. Describing Versailles during Louis XIV’s reign, the Marquis de Dangeau was the first to document the execution of English contradances in the French court. In 1664, he wrote, “Le soir, il y eut appartement; on y dansa pour la première fois les contredanses qu’un maître anglais, nommé Isaac, avait apprises à toutes les dames” (56). Isaac d’Orléans taught French aristocrats English country dances and, between 1706 and 1711, composed dances for Louis XIV’s birthday celebrations. According to the English dance master Thomas Wilson (1774-1854), the English possessed “the best dances” but “the worst dancers” whereas the French excelled in performing English

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1 The term belle Danse developed during the reign of Louis XIII when the adjective beau was used to signify that an art or practice belonged to the nobility. See Nathalie Lecomte’s Entre cours et jardins d’illusion. Le ballet en Europe (1515-1715).
country dances, “an amusement worthy of being copied by any people who call themselves social beings” (An Analysis xvi).

As French choreographers codified English dances, they transformed the choreography and its social meanings. In 1685, Louis XIV received André Lorin’s two manuscripts of notated English country dances. In the introduction to his notations, Lorin, who had studied under Isaac d’Orléans in England, expressed his desire to enrich the beauty of French dances, “afin que par la variété des contredanses je puisse donner dans le génie d’une nation, qui est naturellement portée à la diversité des plaisirs” (24). Lorin informed his reader that, although the English used the terms man and woman to identify the cavalier and the lady, he used the designations Seigneur and Dame conforming to French social protocol. Dedicated to Louis XIV, this manual gives the King a role in these dances devoid of hierarchies. According to Lorin, the royal couple oversees the contradances by deciding when the dancing occurs. During the late 1600s and early 1700s, French monarchical values overrode the English democratic spirit underlying the choreography. Uniquely French contradances emerged after Raoul-Augé Feuillet’s 1705 publication of the figures for a cotillion whose starting points in a square significantly differ from those of English figures. Supposedly, this square formation came about because the French danced in smaller spaces than those of English assemblies.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, certain French dance masters and aficionados scoffed at contradances because of their lack of gravity. Choreographer and dance master Pierre Rameau (1674-1748) wrote that, despite being composed of “mouvements doux et gracieux, qui ne dérangent pas le corps de ce bon air qui est si fort
estimé et usité par notre nation,” English figure dances fail to please admirers of “la belle Danse” (107). For him, contradance choreography lacked excitement, variety, and refinement.\(^1\) Similarly, Charles Pauli, in his 1756 treaty on dance, claimed that members of the French court despised these dances, “trop badines et folâtres pour des personnes du bel air” (66). Despite such criticism, contradances were adapted for French tastes and widely popularized.\(^2\)

Typically executed by four or more dancers, contradances are composed of various figures tracing an imaginary drawing on the floor. In English contradances, partners face each other in two lines that they descend and ascend. Performed in a square, French contradances include figures as well as entrées. The dancers trace the figures as they execute simple steps, resembling many of those seen in court ballets and folk dances, such as the pas de gavotte (stepping on to the ball of the foot and bringing the heel of the other foot toward the ankle), pas de bourée (series of three crossing and opening steps), chassées, and hops. During the final years of the eighteenth century, contradance choreography also integrated various steps seen in theatrical dances. Early-nineteenth-century contradances privileged complicated steps but simplified the spatial figures. Unlike Baroque dances, contradances are based on movement, not positions. Dancers execute contradance figures as experiences through space, not as designs to be

\(^1\) Rameau wrote, “c’est toujours les mêmes figures, sans aucun pas assuré, toute la plus grande perfection de ces contre-danses est de se bien tourmenter le corps, de se tirer en tournant, de taper des pieds comme des sabotiers, et de faire plusieurs attitudes qui ne sont point dans la bienséance” (107).

\(^2\) Cheryl Wilson shows how country dances in William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848) embody cultural tensions between France and England.
contemplated.¹ Imitating social relations in everyday life, the dancers come together, separate, encounter new partners, and eventually reunite.

By organizing individuals in a moving unit in which each participant partakes in the same experience, collective dances harmonize the group. Given that the dancers face each other and move in relation to a counterpoint, the group performance overshadows the specific performances of each dancer. In England, country dances originally strove to create a kinetic, rhythmic, and visual model of social cohesion.² In literature and art, country dances often represent bucolic innocence and a natural impulsion to dance as a celebration of communal life. As figures weave solidarity within a group, couples execute contradances on an equal footing thereby transforming abstract cohesion into a physical action.

In France, contradances and, as I explain in the next chapter, the waltz took part in a political moment as “the body of society” replaced that of the monarch in defining the nation (Foucault, *Power* 55).³ Balls were politicized following the Terror (1793–1794). Afraid to display their aristocratic belonging, members of the nobility ceased giving balls in their homes during the Directory (1795–1799). During this period, public balls

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¹ Dance historian Yves Guilcher declares that the contradance is “mouvement, non position, et les figures qu’elle propose aux danseurs sont autant de parcours à éprouver, plutôt que des dessins à contempler” (*La danse traditionnelle* 84).
² During Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate government that banned dancing and theater, dance master John Playford, a Royalist, used country dances as a form of resistance by encouraging an outlawed activity and collective dissent. See Amy Stallings’s 2016 dissertation *Cabinet of Monkies: Dancing Politics in Anglo Culture, from Jacobite to Jacobin and Royalist to Republican*.
³ The effect of power operating on collectives of individuals constitutes what Foucault identifies as the social body.
emerged. It was not until the beginning of the Consulate (1799) that private balls reappeared.¹

Despite becoming less liberating in aristocratic settings, contradance choreography remained imbued with English values of community.² Describing contradances at a ball held in 1721 at the Spanish court, the Duke of Saint-Simon recounted these dissolving hierarchies in his Mémoires. According to him, the Queen, but not the King, partook in these dances that imposed social mixing: “comme aux contredanses on se mêle, et, suivant l’ordre de la contredanse, chacune se trouve danser avec tout ce qui danse, l’un après l’autre, et se retrouve au bout avec son meneur, la reine y dansait de même avec tout le monde” (86). Whereas court ballets make social and political ranking visible, contradances confused these differences.

Most dances encourage some form of sociability. For example, rounds, dating back to the Middle Ages, create a monolithic solidarity among dancers who face their fellow dancers while turning their backs to non-participants. Accentuating the moment of the social encounter, contradance figures highlight the couple and the relationships between partners. To illustrate the two laws defining beauty in social relations—“have consideration for the freedom of others” (Schone fremde Freiheit) and “show your freedom” (Zeige selbst Freiheit)—Friedrich Schiller described the moving patterns

¹ See Paris Dances: Textual Choreographies in the Nineteenth Century French Novel by Sarah Davies Cordova.
² Contradances, emphasizing community, order, and temperance, model a way to live in line with Montaigne’s notion of the best way to live: “Les plus belles vies sont à mon gré celles qui se rangent au modèle commun et humain avec ordre mais sans miracle et sans extravagance” (Essais 3:504).
created in English contradances: “Everything has been arranged such that the first has already made room for the second before he arrives, everything comes together so skillfully and yet so artlessly that both seem merely to be following their own mind and still never get in the way of the other” (Kallias 173-74). Contradances demonstrate how equality and cooperation function, how social rituals mask and suspend violence.

Illustrating stories of possible human encounters, contradances require dancers to recognize and move with other individuals. Evolutions in the execution of contradances paralleled subtle changes in male-female relationships. Before 1789, cavaliers took their ladies’ hands and led them. After the Revolution and the rise of bourgeois manners, women slipped their hands through their partners’ proffered arms. For Melusine Wood, this barely visible sign suggesting more egalitarian relationships between the sexes was “the death knell of the old order” (147).

The contradances studied in this chapter play different roles in the novels depending on whether the narrator focuses on an individual dancer, a couple, or the collective. Delphine depicts three contradances—a polonaise, an anglaise, and an allemande (this last dance appears in the novel’s denouement which Staël excised in the

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1 The Kallias-Briefen are a collection of letters on theories of beauty that Schiller wrote to his friend Christian Gottfried Körner between 1792 and 1793. In the original German, Schiller wrote on 23 February 1793: “Ich weiß für das Ideal des schönen Umgangs kein passendes Bild als einen gut getanzten und aus vielen verwickelten Touren komponierten englischen Tanz. Ein Zuschauer aus der Galerie sieht unzählige Bewegungen, die sich aufs bunteste durchkreuzen und ihre Richtung lebhaft und mutwillig verändern und doch niemals zusammenstoßen. Alles ist so geordnet, daß der eine schon Platz gemacht hat, wenn der andere kommt, alles fügt sich so geschickt und doch wieder so kunstlos ineinander, daß jeder nur seinem eigenen Kopf zu folgen scheint und doch nie dem andern in den Weg tritt. Es ist das treffendste Sinnbild der behaupteten eigenen Freiheit und der geschonten Freiheit des andern.”

2 As Gerhard Neumann and Aurélie Diwengremel interpret this text, “Ce qui fascine Schiller dans l’objet de cette observation, c’est l’agression masquée et domestiqué à travers le rituel social de la contredanse, la violence mise en sursis dans le rituel” (39).
fourth edition). The first dance scene in *Malvina* emphasizes the dancer’s grace as she executes unspecified French contradances. In *Corinne*, stately but mechanical English contradances oppose the eponymous heroine’s electrifying tarantella, which I will address in chapter four. The contradances in Staël’s first novel evoke untainted grace and pure love, whereas, in her second novel, the contradance is an execution of feminine submission and boring social duties. In Sand’s *Indiana*, the title character dances unnamed contradances with various men charmed by her ethereal beauty. The protagonists of Duras’s *Edouard* participate in a contradance at a ball hosted by an English ambassador, who inspires the hero’s admiration of English social values. Although Sand does not explicitly identify the contradances performed in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, they are most likely cotillions given that one individual acts as the master of ceremony announcing the figures and that the dancers face a person of their sex. Although the novelists provide few indications about the actual steps in these dances, an understanding of the gendered relationships established by the choreography will help us read as dancers.

**Delphine: Dressed in Beauty or Grace**

Staël’s 1802 epistolary novel *Delphine* tells the story of a young widow who struggles to love both liberty and a man enslaved to public opinion. After publishing *De la littérature* (1800), Staël claimed to cease political writing to dedicate her career to literature. When she began *Delphine* in the summer of 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte, threatened by her political stance, declared her a traitor to French values. His chief diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, according to Staël, taught Bonaparte
“toutes les nuances fines de l’amour-propre chez les anciens nobles,” in order to reestablish *ancien régime* mores.\(^1\) Although she claimed that *Delphine* avoids political entanglement, the novel attacks Napoleonic principles by disparaging Parisian court life, criticizing Catholicism, and arguing for the right to divorce.\(^2\) The letter describing Delphine’s dances denigrates the return to eighteenth-century aristocratic practices and celebrates Enlightenment values.

Interweaving stories of love and betrayal among multiple couples, the novel contrasts unrealized ideal love and marriage as a financial contract. Delphine d’Albémar desires to help her aunt Sophie de Vernon by providing Sophie’s daughter Matilde with a dowry so that she can marry Léonce de Mondoville. A passionate attraction between Léonce and Delphine, however, complicates the events leading up to the unhappy marriage between Léonce and Matilde. Delphine’s love for Léonce and her efforts to help her friends escape extramarital or political predicaments tarnish her reputation as the onlooking society judges the appearance of her actions. Léonce’s censorious mother convinces her son that Delphine lacks the virtue and reputation necessary to be his wife. He and Delphine repeatedly separate and reunite as the former’s subjugation to public appearances destroys his love for the heroine. She flees to a convent but escapes to help an acquaintance caught up in political turmoil. In the novel’s original denouement,

\(^1\) In her memoirs, Staël wrote, “[Talleyrand] lui apprenait le monde de l’ancien régime, que Bonaparte ne connaissait pas et qu’il voulait connaître, pour tâcher de rendre sa dynastie ancienne dès le premier jour” (*Dix années* 11).

\(^2\) “Il n’y aura pas un mot de politique, quoiqu’il se passe dans les premières années de la Révolution” (Staël, *Correspondances générales* 4:326).
Delphine, struck by illness, goes to Baden with Léonce to die in his arms. Staël revised the ending so that Delphine commits suicide when Léonce is condemned to death by firing squad. Both unhappy endings paint a depressing portrait of a phenomenal woman’s attempt to perfect herself morally and intellectually while also pursuing a romantic relationship with a man marked by the prejudices of his era. At a time when Rousseau’s Julie represented “a symbol of hope in a period characterized by rigid social decorum, loveless marriages of convenience, sterile family lives, and widespread adultery,” Delphine demonstrates that intelligent, sensible, and moral women like Julie cannot obtain happiness under the reigning social regime (Trouille 54–55).

Léonce’s letter about the first ball, addressed to his preceptor Mr. Barton, meditates on dance as a phenomenon that, like love, is difficult to classify using language and palpable comparisons. Evoking admiration as a distant spectator, Léonce depicts Delphine dancing a polonaise. In the second half of the letter, he describes dancing an anglaise with her as an active encounter and expression of feelings. He concludes the letter describing his malaise and Delphine’s rash movement to help. Her silent but expressive performances appear like illusions as the intoxicating effect of dancing separates them from the humdrum landscape of the everyday. This letter exalts Delphine’s grace as an active and spontaneous exteriorization of moral goodness. During the dance, the hero and other social actors, who later scorn her compassionate actions, recognize Delphine’s extraordinary qualities, which are perhaps too amazing to be real.

In line with Schiller’s claim that grace, not architectonic beauty, elicits love, the letter compares Matilde, a statically beautiful woman, to Delphine, a graceful woman.
The opposition between Léonce’s fiancée and his love interest differentiates love built on social contracts and ideal love emerging from affection and uncalculated interest. Later in the novel, after his marriage, he refuses to dance with Matilde further opposing active love and static conjugal contracts. When urged to dance with Matilde, Léonce recalls dancing with Delphine, “rejeta la main de Matilde avec violence,” and runs out of the room (D 199). For Sarah Davies Cordova, this refusal indicates a sacred oath that Léonce has made to dance only with Delphine. His legal commitment to be Matilde’s husband comes in conflict with his unspoken promise to be only Delphine’s dance partner.

The ideas to which Delphine aspires—freedom, virtue, activity—echo Schiller’s notions of grace as “beauty of form under freedom’s influence, the beauty of those appearances that the person determines” (On Grace 134). Though Schiller describes grace as natural and instinctive, he also suggests that it is intentional. Without commenting on Schiller’s notion of grace, Staël criticized On Grace and Dignity for relying too heavily on metaphysics and abstractions without putting its philosophical principles into motion (De l’Allemagne 529-30). Yet, resonating with his theory, her own brief definition of grace in De l’Influence des passions contrasts it with vain efforts to please and describes it as developing out of “le repos du naturel et de la confiance” (192). By repos, Staël refers not to immobility but to peaceful actions.¹ Affirming the novelist’s

¹ The 1802 Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française defines repos as “quiétude, tranquillité, exemption de toute sorte de peine d’esprit” (520). Johann Heinrich Samuel Formey, in his article on repos in the Encyclopédie, claimed that since movement and repos are relative, bodies that appear to be at rest never truly cease to move. Louis de Jaucourt’s article on the religious use of the term interprets repos as “soulagement, affranchissement des maux,” and a metaphor for heaven (139).
belief in the fruitfulness of philosophical critique attached to recognizable impressions and temporalized acts, Delphine proposes a vivid theory of experiencing grace.¹

Léonce’s letter about the ball (Letter 27) describes grace and physical beauty as distinctly different qualities. He comments on Matilde’s choice of a flattering Spanish dress that he interprets as an amiable reference to his Spanish origin (on his mother’s side).² Admiring how Matilde’s gown and adornments emphasize the beauty of her physique, Léonce appreciates her as a beautiful object, not as a woman who creates beauty. Similarly, in an earlier letter describing his first impressions of both women, Matilde appears beautiful in her countenance and clothing whereas Delphine’s conversation, gaze, and movement enrapture him. Matilde mirrors an expected beauty while Delphine’s dynamic beauty separates her from other women. Exalting Delphine’s various merits, Léonce writes to his preceptor:

Je n’imaginais pas qu’il fût possible, mon cher Barton, qu’une seule personne réunit tant de grâces variées, tant de grâces qui sembleraient devoir appartenir aux

¹ In Essai sur les fictions (1795), Staël advocated for fiction that makes moral truths comprehensible through the characters’ actions.
² In earlier drafts of the novel, Léonce, not Matilde, is dressed in a Spanish manner. It is possible that Staël included this costume to mock Bonaparte, who, according to her memoirs, wore a Spanish-style costume at a ball in Munich where he performed the Monaco, which she incorrectly called an outdated French contradance: “on l’a vu danser avec ses généraux; on prétend même qu’à Munich, […] il prit un soir le costume espagnol de Charles VII, l’électeur de Bavière qui prétendait à la couronne impériale, et se mit à danser une ancienne contredanse française, la Monaco” (Dix années 39). The Monaco, a lively contradance performed in 2/4 time sharing certain similarities with the cotillion, attained widespread popularity in France after the 1789 Revolution. According to Frédéric Masson’s 1894 Napoléon et les femmes: l’amour, the Monaco was the Emperor’s favorite dance. The placement of this anecdote in Dix années d’exil suggests that the event occurred shortly before Joseph Bonaparte concluded the 1801 Treaty of Lunéville with the Maximilian IV, elector of Bavaria. Given that there is no evidence that Napoleon Bonaparte was in Munich during this time, the veracity of this account is more than questionable. Even if it does not turn Matilde’s costume into jab at him, this anecdote accentuates the inanity of Matilde’s costume.
manières d’être les plus différentes. Des expressions toujours choisies, et un
_mouvement toujours naturel_, de la gaieté dans l’esprit, et de la mélancolie dans les
sentiments, de l’exaltation et de la simplicité, de l’entraînement et de l’énergie!
mélange adorable _de gênie et de candeur, de douceur et de force_! (D 92, my
emphasis)

Leonce falls in love, not with the sight of Delphine’s physical beauty, but rather with the
identity that “shines through” her body and “becomes beautiful” because it is her body
(Cavarero, _The Narratable Self_ 112). Her actions and speech display her unaffected
sentiments, intelligence, and moral qualities. Expressing a wide range of emotions, she
reveals the possibilities of authentic human passions. For thinkers like Staël, Charles
Fourier (1772–1837), and Auguste Comte (1798–1857), sentimentality is the foundation
for all human progress since emotions guide us to truths. Actively exposing their inner
beauty, graceful individuals express a large scope of ideas and emotions as part of a
project toward human perfection.

Matilde possesses beauty worthy of worship; however, seemingly static, she lacks
the active grace that provokes love. At the ball, her beauty fails to maintain Léonce’s
attention while they engage in a “conversation de bal si facile à conduire” as he
impatiently awaits the sight of Delphine, whose spirit and eloquence charm her listeners
(105).¹ A strict follower of Catholic doctrine and aristocratic social codes, Matilde is like

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¹ This insipid conversation brings to mind a similar ballroom chat in Benjamin Constant’s novella _Amélie et Germaine_, written a year after the publication of _Delphine_. In Constant’s fiction inspired by his real relationships with STAEL and Amélie Fabri, the narrator recounts a watery conversation with the woman
a mechanical doll repeating platitudes. According to Staël’s essay “Quelques réflexions sur le but moral de Delphine,” Matilde lacks grace in her spirit and her manners, despite being virtuous and honest. There is little to reproach in Matilde’s comportment, yet there is nothing to laud about her character or her actions. For Staël, individuals who, like marionettes, follow rules to maintain a status quo are morally inferior to those who bypass imitating known models in their quest toward bettering themselves.

Although grace is active, sartorial beauty reflecting inner beauty and naturalness can exemplify grace. As is typical in ball scenes, a description of the heroine’s dress precedes the dance. Léonce lauds Delphine for arraying herself with grace and originality: “Elle était vêtue d’une simple robe blanche, et ses beaux cheveux étaient rattachés ensemble sans aucun ornement, mais avec une grâce et une variété tout à fait inimitables. Ah! qu’en la regardant j’étais ingrat pour la parure de Matilde!” (105-06). Delphine’s white dress attests to her modesty but contrasts with the black nun’s habit she wears when the couple reunites near the end of the novel. This account of her draped in white suggests that she is wearing a neoclassical chemise—an uncorseted, unpanniered representation of classical dress popular at the end of the eighteenth century.1 According to the anonymous author of The Mirror of the Graces; or, the English Lady’s Costume (1811), late-eighteenth-century enthusiasm for Greek art made the corset unfashionable as “the easy shape and flowing drapery again resumed the rights of nature and of grace” whom he wishes to marry: “J’ai assez causé hier au bal avec Amélie. Je n’ai rien, absolument rien trouvé, ni dans sa tête ni dans son cœur. C’est un parlage perpétuel, presque toujours en ricanement, ou cousu de phrases qui ne se suivent pas et auquel il est impossible qu’elle attache aucun sens” (32-33).

1 See Harold Koda’s Goddess: The Classical Mode.
(24). For French anglophiles, the gown’s rustic simplicity “imported the country living, chic negligence, and personal liberty associated with England” (Rauser 479). By sculpting the heroine in the Grecian draperies worn during the Directory (1795–1799), Staël distanced Delphine from the women of the ancien régime wearing onerous gowns limiting their mobility.

Fashion became intertwined with politics during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Delphine’s dress is inscribed in the revolutionary esthetic shift that allowed women to negotiate their “status as arbiters of fashion and taste” (Cage 195). Simple, light-weight white gowns, often worn by citoyennes during Revolutionary festivals, mirrored revolutionary values of transparency and liberated bodies. This sartorial revolution appeared on stage after choreographers Jean-Jacques Noverre (1727–1810) and John Weaver (1673-1760) called for dressing dancers in Grecian tunics to make their movements more visible. In a 1783 representation of the ballet Diane et Endymion, Victoire Saulnier performed in a Grecian frock that, according to an account in the Mercure de France, added to the grace of her movements, produced an authentic classical effect, and, although revealing, was reasonably decent. Similarly, Delphine’s

1 As Claire Cage shows, fashion magazines often explained the art of this style as that of a sculptor.
2 Staël’s friend Juliette Récamier was well known for embracing this style, supposedly despised by Bonaparte. Artists like Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842) and Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) immortalized these flowing garments in their masterpieces.
3 “La beauté de ses formes, la noblesse & la fierté de son air, de ses attitudes, la grâce sévère de sa démarche & de ses moindres mouvements, sont, ainsi que son costume, fidèlement modelés sur l’Antique. Elle paraît presque nue, & son aspect repousse toute idée de licence. Elle rappelle les belles Spartiates, qui, sur les bords de l’Eurotas, n’étaient, selon l’expression de Rousseau, couvertes que de l’honnêteté publique. […] on peut dire que Mlle. Saulnier, dans cet habit court, léger & transparent, est vêtue de décence & de fierté” (126).
gown accentuates the grace of her movements, evokes an idealized antiquity devoid of artifice, and hints at a socially acceptable display of sexuality. Unlike Matilde’s outfit purposely meant to flatter Léonce, the simple white gown forefronts Delphine’s natural beauty. Whereas panniers and corsets hindered women’s freedom to move, the neoclassical chemise liberated their ability to dance.

**Watching Her Dance**

The first contradance in *Delphine* appears like a staged ballet in which the dancer performs expressively instead of choosing to follow the dictates of taste. Under the Consulate and the First Empire, the rising technical demands in contradances meant that many people attended balls to watch rather than to dance. During the 1790s, public life became theatricalized as new behaviors contributed to patriotic fervor and new understandings of bodily comportment replaced class-defined manners.¹ Jean-Henri Gourdoux (1772–1841), a Parisian dance teacher, lamented these changes as the end of graceful movements: “cette légèreté dans les mouvements, ces manières civiles, aimables et gracieuses, ces grâces furent, dans les temps désastreux, contraintes chez les uns, méconnues chez les autres, et remplacées chez plusieurs par un ton déformé et grossier” (6). Set before 1789, the dance scenes in *Delphine* hint at the public performances to come and new forms of grace, distant from superficial urbanity.

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¹ See Mona Ozouf’s *La Fête révolutionnaire (1789-1799)* and Judith Chazin-Bennahum’s *Dance in the Shadow of the Guillotine*. 
The letter about the ball reveals how Léonce gains knowledge not through reason but through sense impressions. He understands his affection for Delphine from his singular, sensuous standpoint although public opinion distorts his feelings for her throughout most of the novel. Acting as a turning point in the narrative, the twenty-seventh letter describes Delphine dancing as well as Léonce’s belief that he is deeply in love. Emphasizing her sensuality and decency through hyperboles and comparisons, the letter highlights the challenges of representing an idealized woman in a realist esthetic exposing her fleshy materiality. Tucked away in a window embrasure, Léonce watches her as if he were an anonymous spectator in a theater. He experiences what René Descartes classified as the first of all passions: admiration. In Les Passions de l’âme (1649), Descartes defined admiration as the soul’s sudden shock of surprise or wonder when considering a seemingly rare and extraordinary object that leaves an impression in the mind and agitates the spirit to fortify this initial impression. Surprise, according to Montesquieu, is an effect of encountering a je ne sais quoi. Grace acts on its observers by soliciting admiration, attracting them, and then inspiring love. The description of Delphine at the ball indeed portrays her beholder’s state of awe.

1 In Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), John Locke asserted that sense impressions provide the basic components of human knowledge.
2 His nonvisual perception of Delphine suggests that she acts on him through her moral and intellectual goodness. In a sort of synesthesia, he senses her presence through smell and the physical sensation of pleasure as she arrives at the ball: “Tout à coup je sentis un air embaumé; je reconnus le parfum des fleurs que Delphine a coutume de porter, et je tressaillis” (D 105). This turn to perception by odor as he experiences delight brings to mind Emanuel Swedenborg’s theory of the affections in heaven and concupiscence in hell. According to Swedenborg, whose works Staël read, infernal and divine delights are “felt when they approach, especially when they are converted into smells; for every delight corresponds to some smell,” and the delight of heaven corresponds to “the smell of a garden” (Angelic Wisdom § 304).
As a moment of showing off her talents and grace, Delphine’s dance conforms to a concept of balls as mating rituals where young people perform before potential spouses. Yet, she does not put herself on display by her own volition. The first time Delphine dances at the ball, she dances out of obligation rather than desire. Accustomed to showing off his talents to mask his lack of wit, Mr. d’Orsan asks Delphine to dance a polonaise that they learned from a Russian dance teacher. By making the instructor Russian, Staël adds an exotic (but still Christian) aspect to the dance. When Delphine looks at Léonce as if to complain of the ennui caused by this request, Léonce gleans joy from the knowledge that Delphine appears forced to oblige, “forcée de céder à son importance” (107). Reading her actions as a reflection of his desires, Léonce watches her execute social acts as duties keeping her from being with and for him. In this moment of admiration, love equates to a perceived possession over the beloved’s desires.

The polonaise is a simple dance, consisting in a sliding movement (un coulé) and a reverence performed by inclining the upper body while slightly bending the knees. The unique aspect of this dance is the possibility for partners to change at any moment:

Tout le monde peut prendre part à cette danse; et lorsqu’un cavalier ne trouve point de dame, ou qu’il souhaite danser avec une femme déjà invitée, il s’avance vers elle, fait un salut et frappe des mains; à ce signal, le danseur, averti de céder au nouveau-venu sa danseuse et sa place, livre l’une et l’autre avec politesse, et va dans la foule cacher son dépit ou s’apprêter à exercer bientôt le même droit. (Voïart 155)
François Fertiault, in his 1854 dance history book, described this practice as a cycle of exerting vengeance and power as male dancers wield their right to dance with whomever they choose. Typically performed as a rest between more tiring dances, the slow-paced polonaise allows non-dancers to admire the dancers’ appearance. According to Vigée-Lebrun, the polonaise, “une promenade pour laquelle on marche tranquillement deux à deux,” suits beautiful women because “on a tout le temps d’admirer leur taille et leur visage” (1:281). This contradance exemplifies dance’s role in defining gender roles as it spectacularizes men’s dominance in the sexual marketplace and women’s desirability.

Frustrated by his distance from Delphine, Léonce seems unaware of how the polonaise functions as a social dance in which a man can interrupt any couple to dance with the woman of his choosing. Remaining in the crowd of onlookers admiring Delphine, Léonce develops his admiration for her in his thoughts without expressing a desire to be with her under the gaze of other guests. Whereas he enjoys the sight of Delphine entering the ballroom as if he were the only person watching her, the excited crowd climbing on benches to watch her dance breaks the illusion that she exists only for his admiring eyes:

Les hommes et les femmes montèrent sur les bancs pour voir danser Delphine; je sentis mon cœur battre avec une grande violence, quand tous les yeux se tournèrent sur elle; je souffrais de l’accord même de toutes ces pensées avec la mienne, j’eusse été plus heureux si je l’avais regardée seul. (107)

Léonce’s jealousy in this instance foreshadows his reoccurring vacillation between wanting to love her exclusively and wanting her to be loved by society. At the ball,
Léonce admires Delphine but cannot influence her actions. As the novel progresses, we learn that he desires her to be venerated as his inferior, later telling her: “Je voudrais être à la fois votre protecteur et votre amant. Je voudrais vous diriger et vous admirer en même temps” (361). Revealing how the dance intermittently displaces the observer, Léonce’s description oscillates from suggesting that he alone experiences the polonaise to scorning the intrusion of other spectators as if admiring Delphine were his exclusive privilege.

Delphine enchants not just Léonce but all the attendees, men and women alike. Describing the applause for Delphine, Léonce distinguishes men’s and women’s reactions: “Quand Delphine eut cessé de danser, de si vifs applaudissements se firent entendre, qu’on put croire pour un moment, tous les hommes amoureux, et toutes les femmes subjuguées” (108). Do Delphine’s grace and talent give her ascendancy over female admirers as if her femininity were superior to that of most mortal women or does she bring them to a state of awe? If a dancer’s grace attracts female onlookers through admiration, she becomes what twentieth-century philosopher Luce Irigaray calls a divine woman creating a horizon toward which other women aspire.¹ Here and elsewhere in Staël’s oeuvre, the gap between her phenomenal heroines and other female characters

¹ As Irigaray explains in her 1986 essay “Divine Women,” the masculine God-figure acts as a horizon that allows men to become, meaning to move infinitely toward a defined state of wholeness. Seeking a feminine ideal, Irigaray reads Christian scripture to find a space for divine women, whom she identifies as women faithful to themselves, their sex, and their mothers. In Christianity, men strive to emulate God the Father and Christ the Son, while women, according to Irigaray, are left without any feminine divine models, namely women to admire as exemplars.
implies that the glory of a few remarkable women elicits wonder because most women either remain mediocre or concoct conniving schemes to advance their social positions.

**Applauding Malvina**

Certain similarities exist in the description of the crowd watching Delphine dance and the elation during the contradances in Cottin’s *Malvina* (1800). In this novel, the young widow Malvina de Sorcy becomes the adopted mother of her deceased friend’s daughter, leaves France, and moves to Scotland to live with her deceitful cousin Mistress Birton, who wishes to marry her nephew Edmond to Lady Sumerhill. Edmond, however, falls in love with Malvina. Promiscuous and morally inconsistent, Edmond misinterprets Malvina’s friendships with other men and disowns her multiple times. The couple finally marries, provoking Mistress Birton to besmirch Edmond’s reputation and separate Malvina from her adopted daughter Fanny. A day after his wedding, Edmond waltzes and sleeps with Mistress Fenwich, who ensures that Malvina learns of her husband’s treachery. Heartbroken, Malvina goes mad and dies.

Dances in *Malvina* allow characters to exert influence over others either through grace or revengeful schemes. During one of their many periods of quarreling, Malvina and Edmond cross paths at a ball. A certain Lord Stanhope, mesmerized by Malvina’s charm, requests to dance with her. She refuses under the guise of being unfamiliar with Scottish dances. Edmond likewise asks Malvina for a dance, although he has already
promised to dance with Lady Sumerhill, who, like Matilde, is beautiful but uninspiring.¹ Edmond tells Malvina, not wanting to offend Lord Stanhope, that she can change partners in the French dances because French contradances, “inconstantes comme tout ce qui vient de ce pays,” do not require fidelity to one partner (M 2:143). Throughout the novel, France represents “un paradis perdu” associated with the insouciance of childhood (Huet-Brichard 40). Yielding to Edmond’s request, Malvina’s choice in dance takes part in a nostalgia for innocence and national origins. Wrongly accused of infidelity by numerous English characters, Malvina is presumed to be fickle simply because, as in the dance, she has the option to choose and change partnerships thanks to her widowhood. Allowing or denying another the right to unite as a temporary couple in public, agreements to dance act as means for proposing future unions, seeking revenge, and creating public displays of authority or desirability.²

Malvina and Edmond never dance together. This first dance scene prefigures their brief unconsummated marriage during which Edmond dances and sleeps with another woman. Instead of symbolizing an amorous union, the contradance exposes Edmond’s volatility as he seeks to chastise Malvina but instead punishes himself. After one of

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¹ “Lady Sumerhill était une jeune personne de vingt ans à peu près, blonde, blanche et belle, mais de cette beauté régulière qu’aucune expression n’anime, et qui fait l’admiration de ceux qui la contemplent, bien plus que le bonheur de ceux qui la possèdent” (M 2:140).
² Frances Burney exquisitely depicts the gendered relations between possible dance partners in her 1778 novel Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World. The manner in which men invite young women to dance disconcert the heroine at her first ball in London: “The gentlemen, as they passed and repassed, looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honour of their commands; and they sauntered about, in a careless indolent manner, as if with a view to keep us in suspense. […] far from humouring such airs, I would rather not dance at all, than with any one who would condescend to take me” (30).
Malvina’s enemies tells Edmond that she was seen in an intimate tête-à-tête with her friend Mr. Prior, Edmond breaks his commitment to Malvina and dances with Lady Sumerhill:

[…] au moment où les contredanses s’ouvrirent, il vint jusque sous ses yeux prendre la main de lady Sumerhill: celle-ci accepta avec emprise, et comme elle se levait pour aller prendre sa place, sir Edmond regarda Malvina dans l’espoir de la braver; mais loin de réussir, elle lui jeta un cou-d’œil froid et tranquille qui le terrassa, et accepta la main d’un jeune Français, qui causait avec elle depuis un moment. (M 2:151)

Engagements to dance materialize through the act of taking a partner’s hand, then finding a place in the initial formation. When a woman accepts a man’s hand, even if she does so enthusiastically, she participates in the repetition of gestures defining gender and power. Agreements to dance are often born out of a forced consent, that is to say the education that trains women to yield to other people’s wishes.¹ In contradances, the participants interact with various partners as they travel through the figures. Their initial and final positions, however, make visible the man’s choice to dance with a particular woman and her acquiescence motivated by admiration, indifference, or social compulsion.

         Gestures express human relations by reconfiguring spatial arrangements of visible and viewing bodies. Approval of a dancer becomes evident as observers rush toward the dance floor to marvel at the sight. Malvina’s and Delphine’s dances magnetize spectators

¹ See Du Consentement by Genviève Fraisse.
who communicate their fascination through their actions. In *Malvina*, the guests at the ball climb onto chairs to see the heroine’s noble and modest dance:

La figure, et surtout les grâces de Malvina, attirèrent bientôt tous les spectateurs autour d’elle; il n’était question, dans la salle, que de la charmante Française; on montait sur les chaises pour la mieux voir; et si *son air noble et décement* n’eût imposé à toute l’assemblée, on lui eût prodigué mille applaudissements. (151-52, my emphasis)

The crowd admires her not simply for her beauty and elegance but for her noble grace refusing to elicit praise. Malvina appears superior but humble, worthy of applause but uninterested in praise. She dances with nonchalance, or what Baldassare Castiglione called *sprezzatura* in *Il libro del cortegiano*.¹ Sprezzatura is a studied manner of appearing effortless and artless in action.² Creating an esthetic efficiency, sprezzatura suspends the apparent relationship between the production of gestures and their determined effect on an audience.³ It is an effortlessness achieved through effort. According to Castiglione, this nonchalance, especially when completing difficult actions, makes graceful movements enchanting.⁴ Originally meaning a refusal to evaluate, 

¹ *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528) was an influential courtesy book on the behavior and morality of courtiers that circulated throughout sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European courts.
² Søren Kierkegaard describes a similar appearance of grace in *The Seducer’s Diary* (1843). The narrator lauds a woman walking with an allure revealing “a natural nobility, but an absence of self-consciousness,” suggesting that she had only a few dance lessons (45).
³ Jacques Rancière defines esthetic efficiency as “l’efficacité de la suspension de tout rapport direct entre la production des formes de l’art et la production d’un effet déterminé sur un public déterminé” (*Le spectateur* 64).
⁴ “Da questo credo io che derivi assai la grazia; perché delle cose rare e ben fatte ognun sa la difficoltà, onde in esse la facilità genera grandissima maraviglia” (63).
sprezzatura, as Castiglione defines it in his manual on the ideal courtier, is a demonstration of valuing the experience of living over the appearance of living. Whereas Staël depicts Delphine’s polonaise as if it were an expressive ballet performed by a great artist, Cottin employs a more restrained language to show her heroine decorously participating in a social act. Malvina’s decorum reflects honesty, modesty, and moderation. Grace emanates from the dancer, not the exhibition of her talent.

Graceful dancing opposes vindictive invitations to dance as the adulation for Malvina thwarts Edmond’s attempt to upset her. Frustrated and jealous, he must suffer through a tedious contradance with Lady Sumerhill: “Rempli de ces idées, sir Edmond n’écoute rien de ce que lui disait lady Sumerhill, lui répondait tout de travers, brouillait toute la contredanse, et attendait avec impatience qu’elle fût finie” (M 2:152-53). His disgruntlement manifests in his movements as he tries to dance as a couple with a woman toward whom he is apathetic. Instead of celebrating the choreographic encounter, he confronts the vacuity of his impetuous plan of revenge. His inability to dance well reveals his disinterest as his movements expose his sentiments. Intent on preventing Malvina from dancing with other men, he advises a marquis against asking her to dance by telling him that, given her cloistered life away from society, such an honor would trouble her. Disregarding Edmond’s advice, the marquis dances with Malvina, and, once again, the placement of the partners on the dance floor solidifies her independence from Edmond:

In De Officiis, Cicero defined decorum as a “division of moral rectitude” characterized by “considerateness and self-control, which give, as it were, a sort of polish to life; it embraces also temperance, complete subjection of all the passions, and moderation in all things” (97-98).
“[Edmond] eut le mortel chagrin de les voir prendre place ensemble lorsque les autres contredanses recommencèrent” (155). Although he interprets Malvina’s actions as an affront to his pride, he recognizes her complete lack of vanity: “elle semblait ignorer l’effet qu’elle produisait: c’était la première fois que sir Edmond voyait une femme insensible à une pareille gloire” (156). Malvina dances out of obligation and, without purposefully inciting it, inspires awe. Her grace becomes more evident as this admiration fails to lift the veil of sprezzatura cloaking her efforts. Nevertheless, as Staël shows in Corinne, glory (not to be confused with vanity) and grace are not incompatible.

The distinction between grace which attracts love and superficial beauty which stimulates lust is apparent in the final volume of Malvina. After marrying Malvina, Edmond journeys to the home of Mistress Dorset before seeking Fanny’s father to reunite Malvina with her adopted daughter. Hoping to foil Edmond’s plans, Mistress Birton urges Mistress Fenwich to seduce Edmond during his stay. After a heady evening of champagne and waltzing, which I study in the next chapter, Mistress Fenwich succeeds in luring Edmond into her bedroom. Before this whirlwind of betrayal and cunning seduction, the omniscient narrator compares Malvina’s modest manner of dancing to Mistress Fenwich’s voluptuous movements:

On parle de danser, c’est le triomphe de mistriss Fenwich, c’est là que ses grâces se déploient; si sa danse n’est pas noble et décente comme celle de Malvina, elle est légère et voluptueuse; ses mouvements, ses regards ne vont point à l’âme, mais troublent les sens; elle ne cause, il est vrai, qu’une impression momentanée.

(75-76)
Here, Cottin uses the term *grâces* to mean superficial qualities meant to please, “un certain agrément,” not grace revealing inner beauty (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie* 654). Actions seeking to seduce other people lack sprezzatura. Flirtatious charisma attracts short-lived astonishment whereas decorous grace leaves lasting traces on others. The seduction of Mistress Fenwich’s dancing arises from a premeditated desire to conquer her admirers. Momentarily troubling the observers’ senses, her talent fails to incite a lingering awe. Despite her moral superiority, Malvina becomes a victim of egocentric revenge. The graceful heroines in *Malvina* and *Delphine* inspire wonder and veneration yet fail to survive amidst vain characters obsessed with appearances. Most discernable in the spatiotemporally exceptional site of dancing, graceful being is not yet sustainable in morally corrupt societies.

**Dancing Beyond the Ordinary**

From the Renaissance onward, philosophers and art historians have defined grace as possessing a *je ne sais quoi*. In *Epigrams*, the Latin poet Martial associated a *je ne sais quoi* (nescio quid) to genius (genium). The genius of grace lies in its ability to escape rational explanations. Associations between grace and femininity point to Western reductions of femininity to a mysterious dark continent.

Dancing can become a moment of metamorphosis in which the dancer becomes a representation of grace pointing toward a perfected human state. In *Delphine*, Léonce falls in love with an ephemeral image of the heroine as she dances. As the novel progresses, Delphine’s love of freedom and justice cannot cohabit with his mediocrity in a society that regards women as objects to be admired. Delphine is not simply
“representative of liberty” (Kadish, *Politicizing Gender* 94). Her actions align with her commitment to freedom and belief in equality.

A first dance alludes to the possibility of a first sexual encounter and allows the two individuals to witness the beauty of each other’s movements. Igniting the romance between Delphine and Léonce, the dance scene in the twenty-seventh letter creates an intertextual nod to Marie-Madeleine de La Fayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), a novel which Staël lauded for depicting the nuances of love. In La Fayette’s novel, Monsieur de Nemours falls passionately in love with Madame de Clève during a dance in which she charms all onlookers. In the short period of a dance, Madame de Clève enchants a man and triumphs over his fiancée the Dauphine de France, whose “parfaite beauté” does not capture his attention in the same way as Madame de Clève’s beauty in movement (342). Similarly, during the ball in *Delphine*, Léonce ascertains his love for Delphine and not Matilde. In both Staël’s and La Fayette’s novels, love on the dance floor does not conclude in marriage. Grace and love clash with patriarchal notions of duty but cohere within a realm akin to danced experiences where social, temporal, and spatial laws can stray from everyday norms.

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1 In the prologue to *Delphine*, Staël salutes Mme de La Fayette as the first great novelist to write about love within a structure relying on both sentimentialty and realism. In a literary landscape without novels, where “la patrie absorbait alors toutes les âmes, et les femmes ne jouaient pas un assez grand rôle pour que l’on observât toutes les nuances de l’amour,” *La Princesse de Clèves* united “la peinture de ces mœurs brillantes de la chevalerie” with “le langage touchant des affections passionnées” (8).

2 “M. de Nemours fut tellement surprise de sa beauté que, lorsqu’il fut proche d’elle et qu’elle lui fit la révérence, il ne put s’empêcher de donner des marques de son admiration. Quand ils commencèrent à danser, il s’élève dans la salle un murmure de louanges” (La Fayette 342).
Great dancers fascinate observers through sights and sensations distant from commonplace representations of human movement. As a socially situated body morphs into images of diverse ideas, dance subverts “the distinction between the real and the phantasmatic” and therefore appears uncanny (Castle 5). Léonce’s description of the polonaise accentuates the preternaturalness of the dance and its effect on the spectators:

Jamais la grâce et la beauté n’ont produit sur une assemblée nombreuse un effet plus extraordinaire; cette danse étrangère a un charme, dont rien de ce que nous avons vu ne peut donner l’idée; c’est un mélange d’indolence et de vivacité, de mélancolie et de gaieté tout à fait asiatique. (D 107)

This enumeration of antitheses approximates the ineffable effects of the dance. Lists take into account the “variety beyond what could ever be adequately categorized” and destabilize “any ontological claims to certainty about what dance is or does” (Foster, Valuing Dance 25). Antitheses present the world as simultaneously divided and united, intractable and malleable. Literary critic Antoine Albalat (1865–1935) identified the antithesis as a generative “figure de pensée” opposed to “figures de mots” (192). Splitting an idea, the antithesis elucidates abstract ideas without reducing them to concrete objects. It is not simply an artificial stylistic technique but, according to Albalat, “une culture et une habitude d’esprit” (193). The antithesis is useful for describing grace which Montesquieu, Edmund Burke, and others identified as a certain je ne sais quoi. This

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1 For Albalat, the antithesis is a defining aspect of French literature: “L’antithèse est la clef, l’explication, la raison génératrice de la moitié de la littérature française, ou, si l’on veut, du style français écrit par nos meilleurs auteurs, depuis Montaigne jusqu’à Victor Hugo” (192-93).
unknowability associates grace with charm (charme). Derived from the Latin carmen, meaning a magical incantation or a song, charm attracts admirers through a force so distant from everyday experiences that it seems supernatural. Graceful and charming dances therefore present abstract ideas by blurring illusions and realities.

Evoking a profusion of emotions, Delphine’s dance resembles a theatrical performance instead of a typical ballroom dance. Her polonaise embodies continuously fluctuating feelings as if her movement exteriorized her changing thoughts: “Delphine marchait quelques pas la tête penchée, les bras croisés, comme si quelques souvenirs, quelques regrets, étaient venus se mêler soudain à tout l’éclat d’une fête” (D 107). Léonce understands the movement, not as a series of steps choreographed to the music, but rather as an expression of her inner agitations. For Noverre, to dance is to paint authentic passions and sentiments through gestures. He condemned the quest of perfection that transforms the dancer into an insentient machine. Prioritizing expressivity over execution, Léonce reads Delphine’s movements like a fascinating pantomime.

Though perceived predominantly through vision, dance and grace provoke sentimental reactions as beholders attempt to understand what they see. In the novel, the use of antitheses shows how the dance unravels what it means to feel. Noverre noted that the eyes are not the only organ for which expressive dance is destined since dance can affect the spectator’s heart and soul. According to Condillac’s Traité des sensations (1754), alternating passages between pleasant and unpleasant sensations, such as melancholy and joy, prevent a stagnant state in which a person is unaware of what she
wants.¹ In this way, we know ourselves through movements and feelings, not just vision and language. Interpreting the polonaise, Léonce seeks to glean a message regarding Delphine’s inner agitations based on his own shifting feelings. Observation becomes a mixture of analyzing the dance and projecting his wonder and uncertainty onto the movements.

Delphine dances as a creator of her movement not a mechanical doll trained to execute choreography. Like a poem, the dance traces ideas and sentiments without naming them: “Cette danse expressive et pour ainsi dire inspirée, exerce sur l’imagination un grand pouvoir; elle vous retrace les idées et les sensations poétiques, que sous le ciel de l’Orient, les plus beaux vers peuvent à peine décrire” (D 107). As in Noverre’s Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets (1760), comparisons between dance and poetry elevate the status of dance within the hierarchy of arts while also underscoring its expressivity that affects spectators through ideas and sensations rather than reason.² During the final decades of the eighteenth century, grace was often called “poésie” because it attempts to represent the invisible and the transient (Jamain 10). In the chapter on poetry in De l’Allemagne, Staël connected the undefinable to the divine enthusiasm dwelling in the human heart. She claimed to rely on the impressions of nonlinguistic expressions of beauty to understand the concept of poetry:

¹ Condillac wrote, “le passage alternative du plaisir à la douleur et de la douleur au plaisir, doit occasionner des mouvements dans son corps. Si elle n’était pas organisée pour être mue à l’occasion des sensations agréables ou désagréables qu’elle éprouve, le repos parfait, auquel elle serait condamnée, ne lui laisserait aucun moyen pour rechercher ce qui peut lui être utile, et pour éviter ce qui lui peut nuire” (102).
² In 1847, Alphonse de Lamartine, in an open letter to the dance master Henri Cellarius published in L’Illustration, asserted that a kinship exists among all arts elevated by “l’idéal au sentiment du beau” and that dance is “la poésie des mouvements et la mélodie des corps” (“Correspondance” 504).
Il est facile de dire ce qui n’est pas de la poésie; mais si l’on veut comprendre ce qu’elle est, il faut appeler à son secours les impressions qu’excitent une belle contrée, une musique harmonieuse, le regard d’un objet chéri, et par-dessus tout un sentiment religieux qui nous fait éprouver en nous-mêmes la présence de la divinité. (*De l’Allemagne* 263)

Although Delphine never writes poetry in the novel, she appears as a poet during the polonaise and possesses what Staël called “le génie poétique,” meaning the talent and character of those prone to make generous sacrifices (263). For Staël, altruism and poetic creation coexist since both originate from the same “conscience du beau” felt within an individual (263). In this sense, poetry, like graceful dance, requires the creator to convey inexpressible beauty.

Some eighteenth-century thinkers understood dance as a pre-linguistic or primeval form of expression. In the *L’Encyclopédie*, librettist Louis de Cahusac defined dance as the primitive expression of sensations developed after singing. For him, singing and dancing are natural human activities that have always existed and will always be a part of human existence.¹ Suggesting that dance is intrinsic to humanity, his 1754 treatise *La Danse ancienne et moderne ou traité historique de la danse* designates spiritual agitations as the origin of gestures performed with grace and measure.² Condillac’s 1746

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¹ “Dès qu’il y a eu des hommes, il y a eu sans doute des chants & des danses; on a chanté & dansé depuis la création jusqu’à nous, & il est vraisemblable que les hommes chanteront & danseront jusqu’à la destruction totale de l’espèce” (623).
² “Les différentes affections de l’âme sont donc l’origine des gestes, & la Danse qui en est composée, est par conséquent l’Art de les faire avec grâce & mesure relativement aux affections qu’ils doivent exprimer” (17).
Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines postulates that communication through movement preceded speech and that the goal of any dance should be to surpass limits of linguistic expression. In a similar vein, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) maintained that the “natural language of the soul” expresses itself “through the entire body” (79). From this perspective, dance conveys ideas and sentiments beyond the bounds of discourse.

Theories of preverbal language draw the dancer closer to the human subject before her subjugation to social laws, thereby pinpointing the expressive dancer as a subject who communicates without artifice. This belief gave rise to stereotyped images of non-Europeans as primitive people with an excessive penchant for dance. As suggested in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Mr. Darcy’s assertion that “every savage can dance,” moving to music was believed to come from an innate, uncivilized impulse (19).

Staël’s fiction, like that of many Romantics, negotiates a dissatisfaction with her present historical moment and national context. Allusions to non-European cultures, such as Delphine’s polonaise qualified as “tout à fait asiatique,” allowed Staël to construct fictions out of vaguely understood societies to propose ideas, especially regarding conflicts between passion and duty, that were incompatible with hegemonic European thought. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, recourse to Orientalism allowed writers to evoke eternity and antiquity while also placing geographically faraway customs on the same plane as their local situations. According to Srinivas Aravamudan’s notion of Enlightenment Orientalism, “utopian aspirations of Enlightenment” bent on
understanding the self as well as the other influenced eighteenth-century European knowledge of Eastern cultures more than any materialist or political interest (3). Enlightenment Orientalism is a “nebulous form of transcultural fiction” that interrogates imagined representations as well as scholarly investigations of the East (4). Unlike later forms of Orientalism, Enlightenment Orientalism possessed an imaginative license not yet impinged upon by state power.¹ Through recourse to Orientalist imagery, Staël grappled with possible representations of women. Providing “glimpses of condensed variants of life as it is or might be,” dance opens a space for rethinking gendered notions of being in the same way that Orientalist comparisons allowed Staël to move beyond the known in order to formulate new social and artistic possibilities (Hanna, Dance 251).²

Sensuality tempered by childlike innocence, recalling European accounts of Eastern people as gay but indolent, permeates Staël’s portrayals of grace that awakens amorous sentiments without detracting from a woman’s chaste appearance. In Dix Années d’exil, Staël described young Russian girls dancing gracefully at the Moscow School of the Order of Saint Catherine with Christian modesty and Oriental sensuality: “La beauté de leurs traits n’avait rien de frappant, mais leur grâce était extraordinaire; ce sont des filles de l’Orient, avec toute la décence que les mœurs chrétiennes ont introduite parmi

¹ This concept of Orientalism corrects the essentialist and dualistic aspects of Edward Said’s 1978 thesis that Orientalism was born out of the politics of knowledge. Nonetheless, it is imperative to take into account Said’s argument in Culture and Imperialism that “ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination” supported nineteenth-century colonialism (9). Representations of non-European people as lazy and always dancing depict these cultures as needing European intervention.
² Saint-Simonian-inspired ballets, such as La Révolte des femmes (1833), used Orientalist themes to stage changes in gender relations.
les femmes” (233). Within the laws of respectability, the dance allows the girls to celebrate love, youthfulness, and their national traditions: “Cette danse prend quelquefois le caractère voluptueux de l’amour; mais, exécutée par des enfants, l’innocence de cet âge s’y mêlait à l’originalité nationale” (233). Through references to romanticized images of the Orient, Staël depicts sexuality beyond its carnality, in line with Schiller and Kant’s theories that human sexuality “requires idealization, or it will be vulgar” (Moi, Henrik Ibsen 78). Allusions to Oriental women’s sensuality allowed writers, dancers, and artists to present female sexuality as a mask that white Christian women donned during moments of performance. The exoticization of feminine sensuality made white women’s sexuality other to their lived bodily experience and reduced non-white women’s bodies to symbols of carnality.

The twenty-seventh letter further desexualizes Delphine by disregarding her partner’s bodily presence. The description zooms in on her expressivity and its effect on Léonce and attributes the applause at the end of the dance to her alone. This solo-like duet, eclipsing the cavalier’s role, is not surprising. According to Jean-Michel Guilcher, the polonaise often included a solo at the culminating point of the performance. For her solo, Delphine performs a shawl dance, derived from a type of tableaux vivants popularized by Emma Hamilton and Julianne Barbara von Krüdener, which I will expand upon in the third chapter.¹ By ignoring a dancer’s cavalier, an observer at a ball can

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¹ “[… ] reprenant la danse vive et légère, elle s’entourait d’un schall indien, qui, dessinant sa taille, et retombant avec ses longs cheveux, faisait de toute sa personne un tableau ravissant” (D 107).
watch in the same manner as a theater spectator imagining a woman dancing uniquely for him and, perhaps, fantasizing about dancing with her.

**No Longer a Spectator**

Dance spotlights the shared experience of existing through the human body. Watching dance, a relationship develops between the spectator and the dancers as “the viewer’s rapport is shaped by common and prevailing senses of the body and of subjectivity in a given social moment as well as by the unique circumstances of watching a particular dance” (Foster, *Choreographing Empathy* 2). When two people dance together, they create a moment, define their space, and fashion a unique, ephemeral creation through movement. As their bodies touch, they “engage in the potential of an individuation,” meaning “the capacity to become beyond identity” (Manning xv). They experience a form of inventive empathy imagining what the other feels, while also creating and expressing sentiments together. Although couple dances provide an opportunity for mutual recognition, the dancers’ understandings of their ambiguous existential positions as simultaneously subjects and objects determine the dancing encounter.

In the second half of the twenty-seventh letter, touch becomes more prominent than vision. Léonce, recovering from a severe wound after being stabbed in the chest by an unknown bandit, takes the initiative to dance an anglaise with Delphine: “Quoique je sois encore faible et qu’on m’ait défendu tout exercice qui pourrait enflammer le sang, je ne sus pas résister au désir de danser une anglaise avec Delphine” (*D* 108). After she dances phenomenally, he sees his own bodily disposition as no longer limited by its
immanence. While a polonaise followed by an anglaise would be quite typical, Léonce’s choice to join in this fast-paced dance reveals a poor choice considering his convalescence but a wise choice for expressing his affection for Delphine. Unlike the polonaise in which the cavalier could lose his right to dance with his partner at any moment, the anglaise typically afforded the male dancer exclusive possession of his partner for the entire evening.

The anglaise, also known as the *chaîne anglaise* and *le pantalon*, begins with two columns, one of women and the other of men. In what Elise Voïart called a “course fatigante,” the couples unite to descend the space between the columns, return to their original places executing either “sautillés” (skips) or “chassés” (sliding jumps), and then go down the chain successively turning around each dancer of the opposite sex (145). In the 1750s, the anglaise lost favor and was replaced by the *contredanse française*, until it reemerged thanks to revolutionary Anglomania at the end of the century. During this period, party guests sometimes danced the anglaise three or four times in one evening. Physically demanding, this contradance requires all dancers to move energetically as they touch the hands of each participant of the opposite sex.

The anglaise portrays a story between couples traveling up and down the columns, made by the other couples, to find each other. It allows for fleeting moments of physical contact between the dancers: “La danse commença, et plusieurs fois mes bras

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1 According to Philip Richardson, the name *pantalon* comes from the nickname of the musician referred to as Vincent Pantalon because he was permitted to wear a pantalon when performing in court. Guilcher, however, attributes the name to Maloisel’s arrangement titled *Les nouveaux pantalons* which become a popular dance accompaniment.
serrèrent cette taille souple et légère qui enchantait mes regards; une fois, en tournant avec Delphine, je sentis son cœur battre sous ma main” (D 108). Léonce’s interpretation of the dance as a story of lovers repeatedly drawn apart before finding each other again parallels the novel’s plot punctuated by Delphine and Léonce’s dramatic separations and reconciliations.¹ As such, the couple’s first and only dance together, which ends with Léonce keeling over in pain, foreshadows the erratic development of their relationship and its unhappy ending. Grazing Delphine’s body with his hands, the most human part of the body according to the eighteenth-century naturalist Georges de Buffon, Léonce engages in a corporeal form of observation.

The passage from the description of the polonaise to the anglaise reveals two modes of watching dancers: anonymous distant viewing and tactile close perception. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, influential thinkers began to locate vision in the subjectivity and corporeality of the observer. However, viewing of the female body “not only as an eroticized object of delectation, collection, and display but also as a figure for nature and beauty, a figure through which men of taste enacted claims to esthetic knowledge” marked the late eighteenth century (Robinson 6). This form of observation necessitates a distance between the spectator and woman.² Couple dances

¹ Writing about a festival in Rome, Goethe described an Italian adaptation of the anglaise in which a pantomime of “the falling-out and reconciliation of two lovers, who part and meet again” illustrates the implied sentiment associated with the constant separation and reunion between the partners (Italian Journey 466).

² Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard advanced a theory of appreciating beautiful women from a distance in The Seducer’s Diary (1843): “if a person were unable to possess an image in recollection at the very moment of presence, he must ever wish to be at a distance from beauty, not so close that the mortal eyes cannot see the beauty of that which he holds in his embrace and which the external eyes have lost,
make it difficult for dancing men to perceive their partners as reified objects of their vision while they move together in a shared space. Through touch, dancers perceive each other’s pulse and texture. They know each other through the body. As John Davies’s poem “Orchestra or a Poem of Dancing” declares, dancing is “Love’s proper exercise,” teaching men to love (1.126). Grasping each other’s bodies, dancers cannot ignore the lived, material being of the other. As Schiller concludes in The Aesthetic Education of Man, we endure an object of touch whereas we create the form of an object of the eye. Revealing his penchant for Kantian philosophy, Schiller suggests that esthetic contemplation, in which the beholder tames and conquerors nature, is not possible through tactile perception. Touching a dancer, the admirer cannot easily surpass reality to contemplate the pure appearance (Schein) of her beauty.

The impulse to dance often arises from the craving to celebrate, at least in appearance if not in fact. Overwhelming joy while dancing can trigger an irrepressible jouissance. The dance and proximity to Delphine enrapture Léonce: “J’étais si heureux, si transporté, que je voulus recommencer encore une fois la même contredanse” (108). At the same time, he perceives an increasingly attentive excitement in Delphine’s attitude: “la danse de Delphine prenait par degrés un caractère plus animé, ses regards

which he, to be sure, can regain for the external vision by distancing himself from it, but which he can, in fact have before the eye of his soul when he cannot see the object because it is too close to him” (20-21).

1 See Marina Nordera’s chapter “Prendre par la main” in Histoires de gestes.
2 “Der Gegenstand des Takts ist eine Gewalt, die wir erleiden; der Gegenstand des Auges und des Ohrs ist eine Form, die wir erzeugen” (Schiller, Über die ästhetische Erziehung 104).
s’attachaient sur moi avec plus d’expression” (108). Ignoring the other dancers, he sees her movements only in relation to his desires: “quand les figures de la danse nous ramenaient l’un vers l’autre, il me semblait que ses bras s’ouvriraient presque involontairement pour me rappeler” (108). He loses himself in the illusions produced in and through the dance. His account of the dance is not necessarily indicative of Delphine’s love. Performances of choreography can deceive when it is the “imagined feeling that governs the dance, not real emotional conditions” (Langer 31). Dance is made up of esthetic gestures. Therefore, falling in love during a dance often implies falling in love with a fantasy.

Late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century contradances rarely involved an exchange of weight as women gently placed their hands in their cavaliers’ grip or the dancers lightly touched their partners’ waists. However, both partners depended on each other to correctly perform the steps connecting and disconnecting their hands. Since Léonce is injured, he assures Delphine that he will depend on her support when she questions the prudence of his desire to dance. Yet, in the description of the dance, he perceives her taking pleasure in pressing into his hand: “malgré sa légèreté parfaite, elle se plaisait souvent à s’appuyer sur moi; les délices dont je m’enivrais me firent oublier que ma blessure n’était pas parfaitement guérie” (D 108). Acting as a buttress, Léonce

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1 In Goethe’s epistolary novel The Sufferings of Young Werther, the masculine narrator, dancing a country dance with the woman he covets, likewise emphasizes their attachment created through eye contact: “As we danced through the line and I, God knows with how much bliss, hung on her arm and eyes, which were full of the most genuine expression of the frankest, purest pleasure” (18).

2 Staël likewise tackles the question of male dependency on women in Delphine through the character Mr. de Belmont. Blind and stripped of his wealth, he discovers happiness in his reliance on his resourceful and vigorous wife.
derives delight from her willingness to depend on him and showcase his masculine role.

In the original ending to Delphine, before the heroine’s death, the couple reminisces about this first dance together as she, now in poor health, relishes his support:

Ô Léonce! te souviens-tu de moi, ce jour de fête où nous dansâmes ensemble? que de roses alors ornaient ma tête! que d’espérances remplissaient mon cœur! Il y a à peine trois années depuis ce temps, et tout est dit. Mais je ne meurs pas seule; ta main, ta main chérie soutiendra ma tête, que je n’ai déjà plus la force de soulever.

(708)

This memory evokes the return to a tactile contact between the two lovers in addition to ridiculing the romantic illusions which possessed Delphine at the ball, illusions which she cherishes despite Léonce’s numerous failures to demonstrate a greater love for her than for the opinion of others. Women’s dependency on men in contradances that do not involve an exchange of weight is completely unnecessary. Both partners can dance as equals. Léonce, however, identifies the origin of their pleasure in Delphine’s submission and physical reliance on him. The dance scene investigates the eighteenth-century belief that male-female encounters are inevitably incommensurate because women are inferior, inverted versions of men. Opposing Delphine’s perfect lightness to an ailing man boasting of his role as a needed support, Staël mocks the archetype of the noble masculine body.

**The Allemande, Free From the Yoke of Society**

Distant from cosmopolitan greed and artifice, romanticized rural communities represent the Rousseauian notion of man’s innate goodness. In the original ending of
Delphine (prior to its fourth edition), Léonce and Delphine witness rural dancers in Baden, Switzerland. During a village fête, a young couple dances in such a way that their unspoiled love creates “l’image du plus parfait bonheur” as they move together “comme Adam et Ève dans le paradis, la main dans la main, hand in hand, et goûtaient tous les plaisirs de la vie exaltés par l’amour” (697). Performing an allemande, the pair engage in closer physical contact than in most contradances because it requires partners to change position with their hands crossed behind their backs.

The allemande, based on German country dances, infiltrated French social gatherings in the 1760s. Also called the boîteuse, Schwäbische Tanz, Deutsche Tanz, Schleifer, Ländler, and Waltzer, this dance first emerged in fourteenth-century Germany under the name of the Trotto. A square dance for eight dancers, the allemande consists in simple repeating figures danced to a quick triple meter with a strong emphasis on the downbeat. Discernable in the 1774 engraving Le bal paré, the allemande includes various interlaced arm positions, especially crossed arms behind the partners’ backs (see Figure 1). The intricacy of the intertwining arms made this contradance particularly intimate as it brought partners close together. Of course, this dance and its numerous variations probably appeared quite different depending on the social setting of its performance.

1 A version of the dance was already known in France. Thoinot Arbeau described the allemande in his 1589 dance treaty Orchésographie: “L’allemande est une danse pleine de médiocre gravité, familière aux Allemands, & croie qu’elle soit de nos plus anciennes, car nous sommes descendus des Allemands: Vous la pourrez danser en compagnie: Car ayant une damoiselle en main, plusieurs autres se pourront planter derrière vous, chacun tenant la sienne, & danserez tous ensemble, en marchant en avant, & quand on veut en rétrogradant” (67).
Citing John Milton’s description of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* (1667), Staël evokes the couple’s prelapsarian innocence visible in their movements and embrace. ¹ The couple’s allemande embodies grace as they dance “avec une légèreté, avec une gaieté remarquable” (*D* 697). Unlike Milton, who described Adam’s “manly grace” as superior to Eve’s “sweet attractive Grace,” Staël depicted a harmonious egality between the man and woman (Milton 4, 1.449; 10, 1.298).² Delphine, denied marital bliss with her beloved, becomes absorbed in watching this woman heady from conjugal love, “s’enivrant de la

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¹ “So hand in hand they passed, the loveliest pair / That ever since in love embraces met, / ADAM the goodliest man of men since borne / His Sons, the fairest of her Daughter EVE” (Milton ll. 320-324).

² As Harinder Marjara explains, Milton’s concepts of beauty and grace in *Paradise Lost* rely on Renaissance distinctions between beauty and grace in art as well as the Renaissance glorification of the masculine body.
plus délicieuse coupe de la vie, de l’amour dans le mariage” (697). Through the gestures and looks that connect the couple in space, the dance reveals authentic love in contrast to marriage established through contracts, titles, and dowries.

The Swiss couple’s dance reflects not just romantic love, but a love for humanity, a feeling that Delphine cherishes more than the adoration exchanged between a man and a woman. Staël’s romanticization of these villagers as models of perfect harmony prefigures Pierre-Simon Ballanche’s designation of the plebian as the heart of humanity.¹ During the Badennois pair’s allemande, their gazes indicate a virtuous love and respect for others as they acknowledge their companions.² Their connection to the other dancers attests to how contradances functioned as “community-minded activities” in which each person interacted with the various couples (Fullerton 102). Unlike Léonce’s frequent scrutiny of others to assess how they perceive him, the couple’s solidarity with their neighbors augments their appreciation for one another. At the same time, their mutual recognition invigorates their love: “On voyait bien qu’ils existaient seuls l’un pour l’autre dans l’univers: il se cherchaient, ils ne se perdaient pas de vue, et quand il se retrouvaient, il semblait que la terre bondissait sous leurs pieds, et qu’ils étaient portés dans l’air sur les ailes d’un bonheur céleste” (D 697). This dance stages an exemplary form of human relationships. Each dancer must “move beyond the confines of self,” but the self is

¹ In Essais de Palingénésie sociale (1827), Ballanche wrote, “Le plébéien peut seul avoir les sympathies générales de l’humanité; ainsi que je l’ai dit, le plébéien c’est l’homme même” (29-30).
² “Il s’agirait les compagnons de leur enfance, ils s’entremêlaient à leurs danses, pour se montrer reconnaissants de la bienveillance qu’on leur témoignait” (D 697).
always there (Fraleigh 23). Creating a physical and psychic euphoria, the dancing moment models social unity and mutual recognition in a romantic relationship.

While executing contradances, Delphine and the Badennois couple exteriorize inner goodness without artifice and thereby perform graceful inclinations. Supporting the concept of perfectibility, the novel contrasts l’homme du monde (exemplified by Léonce) with Delphine, a graceful uncorrupted woman guided by Protestant ethics and a thirst for freedom.¹ In “Quelques réflexions sur le but moral de Delphine,” Staël qualified Delphine as “civilisée par ses agréments, mais presque sauvage par ses qualités” (D 724).² At the dawn of the nineteenth century, freedom was no longer synonymous with free will but a public expression of citizenship.³ Delphine’s talents and knowledge of social codes allow her to influence others while her rejection of social artifice, the civilizing force leading individuals to validate their self-worth based on the opinions of others, allows her to yearn for freedom and oppose injustice.⁴ Highlighting grace and

¹ My intention is not to suggest that Delphine represents an ideal model. Staël noted that neither Léonce, a blind follower of popular opinion, nor Delphine, whose selflessness becomes a form of self-immolation, is a model to follow: “Delphine est un modèle à éviter et non un modèle à suivre; l’épigraphe le prouve, et tout le roman. Elle doit intéresser malgré ses fautes, […] et il y a quelques nuances délicates peut-être au genre de fautes de Delphine, un bon sentiment en est la cause, mais un bon sentiment qu’une morale sévère ne dirige pas. Léonce est encore moins un modèle. Il est là (et tous les journaux étrangers l’on a ainsi senti) pour faire contraste avec Delphine. Comment punir une femme qui brave l’opinion, autrement que dans le cœur de celui qu’elle aime?” (Correspondance, 4:605). In a similar vein, Gerviève Fraisse contends that Staël herself represented a new way of existing as a woman but, because of her extraordinary qualities, was not an example to follow: “Pour tout le XIXe siècle, Germaine de Staël sera, en dépit d’elle-même, l’emblème de la femme nouvelle, sa référence obligée. Référence ne veut pas dire modèle, car la réalité de la femme ‘extraordinaire’ ne se prête jamais à la reproduction. L’exception joue un rôle emblématique plus qu’une fonction exemplaire” (Muse 214).

² In the novella Zalma, Staël identifies the heroine’s “âme sauvage” and cultivated spirit as the source of her enthusiastic passion (Œuvres de jeunesse 105).

³ See Michèle Riot-Sarczy’s Essai sur le politique au XIXe siècle.

⁴ Delphine bolsters Rousseau’s assertion in Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes that “le Sauvage vit en lui-même; l’homme sociable, toujours hors de lui, ne sait vivre que dans
expressivity within the context of ordinary social events, the dance scenes in *Delphine* hint at better ways of existing as a human among humans.

**Corinne, ou l’Italie: Dancing with her Eyes Cast Down**

After attending a February 1804 performance of Karl Friedrich Henseler’s féerie *Die Nymph der Donau La Saalnix* in Weimar, Staël began planning a new novel inspired by this imaginative and charming German spectacle.¹ The play stages a river nymph using her artistic talents to pursue a married knight. Each time he becomes complacent in his marriage, she enchants him with her music and dances. Written shortly after Napoleon Bonaparte named himself King of Italy, Staël’s second novel introduced its readers to the Mediterranean Peninsula (consequently, for much of the nineteenth century *Corinne, ou l’Italie* was cataloged as a travelogue at the Bibliothèque Nationale Française and readers, such as Henrik Ibsen, used it as a travel guide). In addition to reflecting on religion and art, this novel focuses on a heroine in love with a man whom she cannot marry. Whereas Delphine’s devotion to ethical actions becomes her tragic flaw, the irreconcilable tension between domestic life and the public glory of a talented woman impedes Corinne’s happiness.

The narrative takes place between November 1794 and November 1795, a period when France’s Reign of Terror came to an end but two years before the Napoleonic

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¹ Staël wrote to her father on 2 February 1804, “Hier, j’ai fait un nouveau plan de roman en voyant une pièce d’imagination et de féerie tout à fait remarquable” (*Correspondance*, 4:215). Four days later she wrote to Claude Hochet, “J’ai vu l’autre jour une pièce allemande qui m’a donné l’idée d’un roman que je crois charmant” (223).
Italian campaign. Staël therefore showcased an Italy unsoiled by foreign influence and transformed the country into “a living denial” of Bonaparte’s hegemony (Goodden 19). Oswald Nelvil, an English lord mourning the death of his father, travels to Italy with his French companion the Count d’Erfeuil. When the two foreigners arrive in Rome, they happen upon the coronation of Corinne, a beloved poet, improviser, and musician. Born of an Italian mother and an English father, she epitomizes the woman genius. Ignorant of her English heritage, Oswald falls in love with this beautiful and brilliant Italian, who likewise becomes enamored with the English lord. Yet, he seeks a wife who will be content with domestic obscurity. Passionately using her talents to excite crowds of admirers, Corinna must choose between Oswald and her fame. Despite her attempt to educate Oswald to appreciate Italian art and culture in the hopes of changing his opinions, she does not manage to pull him away from his fixed notion of a subjugated wife. Corinna recounts her past in England, where, several years earlier, his father refused her as his son’s possible wife. The disappointed lord, determined to remain faithful to Corinna, returns to England to fulfill his military duty and to seek the advice of his father’s friend. Upon his arrival, Oswald meets Corinna’s half-sister Lucile, whom his father wished him to marry. When Corinna attempts to join him in England, she discovers the reciprocal affection between her half-sister and Oswald. Heartbroken, Corinna returns the ring Oswald had given her as a sign of his fidelity and departs for Italy, where she abandons her ambitions and glory.

The novel includes two pivotal dance scenes. First, Corinna and an Italian prince give a vivacious performance of the tarantella. I study this dance in the fourth chapter.
The present chapter focuses on the novel’s second dance, which occurs at a ball given by Corinne’s stepmother in Scotland during which Corinne sees Oswald and Lucile dancing English contradances. These monotone dances accentuate Lucile’s lifeless obedience in opposition to her artistic half-sister’s independence.

Through national dances, Staël demonstrated how choreography takes part in what Montesquieu called “l’esprit général” to indicate the various elements, such as government, traditions, etiquette, and climate, that form the individuals constituting a specific population. Unlike Corinne and her cavalier’s lively tarantella, performed only once, the couples at the Scottish ball perform serious contradances like clockwork: “Oswald dansait avec Lucile ces contredanses anglaises que l’on recommence cinq ou six fois dans la soirée; mais toujours le même homme danse avec la même femme, et la plus grande gravité règne quelquefois dans cette partie de plaisir” (455). These frigid dances model an English understanding of monogamous male-female relationships as a moral and social duty.

Dancing in public can be a declaration of love or a desire to form a conjugal union for pragmatic reasons. Rousseau, in Lettre à d’Alembert, cast aside anti-dance discourses as irrational and against natural urges for amusement. Considering dances and balls an occasion for young people to take to each other under public scrutiny, Rousseau advocated for “deux personnes vertueuses et chrétiennes qui cherchent à s’unir” to engage in this “exercice agréable, salutaire, propre à la vivacité des jeunes gens, qui consiste à se présenter l’un à l’autre avec grâce et bienséance, et auquel le spectateur impose une gravité” (185). In line with Rousseau’s suggestion, the contradances in
Corinne demonstrate Oswald and Lucile’s compatibility while also prompting approval of their union from onlookers.

During the dance, Lucile epitomizes a stereotype of docile and submissive British women. As Stendhal observed, “la pudeur des femmes en Angleterre, c’est l’orgueil de leurs maris” (De l’amour 152). With regards to politics and religion, Staël was an Anglophile. Her love of conversation, wit, and salons, however, made her critical of English culture and Englishwomen’s social status. Determining social mores, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women “constituted at once a measure of a nation’s civilization and the key to the preservation of its character” (Bell 146). Whereas Delphine juxtaposes a multitude of female characters with different values and lifestyles, Corinne opposes two drastically dissimilar half-sisters. Neither novel identifies an ideal situation for women or their respective nations.

A solemn dance with the same suitor the whole evening, the contradance in Corinne is fitting for a subjugated woman. Oswald and Lucile open the ball, meaning they choose the first dance and place themselves at the head of the initial figure. A model of feminine reserve and obedience, Lucile executes the steps correctly without revealing her feelings or desires:

Lucile dansait noblement, mais sans vivacité. Le sentiment même qui l’occupait ajoutait à son sérieux naturel: comme on était curieux dans le canton de savoir si elle aimait lord Nelvil, tout le monde la regardait avec plus d’attention encore que de coutume, ce qui l’empêchait de lever les yeux sur Oswald; et sa timidité était
telle, qu’elle ne voyait ni n’entendait rien. Ce trouble et cette réserve touchèrent beaucoup lord Nelvil dans le premier moment. (455)

Her fearfulness shows that she is not at ease, not dancing with sprezzatura. Whereas Corinne’s tarantella, Delphine’s polonaise, and Malvina’s contradances enrapture their audiences, the crowd looks at Lucile to see if she loves Oswald marveling at her marriage potential. Her downcast eyes underscore her submission to her cavalier. Like representations of allegorical women adverting their gazes and sitting sideways, Lucile embodies a patriarchal ideal of “passive, feminine glory” (Allan 45).1 Making herself deaf and blind to her surroundings, her sentient subjectivity disappears.2

Dancing nobly or seriously, in a way that only shows off one’s elegance, is distinct from dancing gracefully. In the late thirteenth century, noble, derived from the Latin nobilis (of high rank or birth), came to designate someone as worthy of respect. Staël’s use of the adverb noblement to describe Lucile’s dancing indicates her elegance demonstrating a class-specific disciplining of the body. Elegance and grace are not the same. Elegance, from the Latin elegantia and eligere (to elect), indicates an attitude that has been carefully chosen, often to demonstrate an aristocratic sang-froid. From the perspective of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of distinction, elegance is the taste of the ruling class presented as a universally legitimate taste. Henry Home defined elegance

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1 Downcast eyes as a sign of feminine modesty is recommended in Thoinot Arbeau’s description of basses danses in Orchésographie: “Et les damoiselles avec une contenance humble, les yeux baissés, regardant quelquefois les assistants avec une pudeur virginale” (29). In contrast, Arbeau advised his male interlocutor to dance with a determined gaze, “la vue assurée” (62). See Mark Franko’s “Renaissance Conduct Literature and the Basse Danse: The Kinesis of Bonne Grace.”

2 “Against Corinne’s direct gaze, the novel sets Lucile’s lowered eyelids; against Corinne’s rhapsodizing voice it sets Lucile’s constrained silence” (Moi, “A Woman’s Desire” 145).
as “a motion adjusted in the most perfect manner to answer its end” (Home 363). Grace requires more than just elegant motions because elegance, as Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), is “inferior to virtue” (9). From the Latin *gratia* meaning favor, charm, or thanks and *gratus* meaning pleasing or grateful, *grace* describes generous movements whose spontaneous nature delights others.¹ Elegance simply meets expectations.

Expanding on Laurence Guellec’s demonstration of how Staël proposes a possible, but unlikely, future for women through Corinne’s discursive improvisations, I argue that Corinne’s corporeal movements, in contrast to those of the British characters, propose a new prism for thinking about feminine movement, corroborating Wollstonecraft’s call for women to strengthen their bodies and “run wild” (*Vindication* 45). Staël employed the technique of “doubling” female characters to oppose different feminine ideals (Poovey 43). Unlike Corinne, who moves with “un mélange de pudeur et de volupté,” Lucile dances without enthusiasm, and her contradances become a metaphor for the deathlike state in which many women of her period existed (*C 130*).² The different qualities of the half-sisters’ dances, closely tied to their national contexts, reflect Gutwirth’s assertion that England “becomes normalcy, continuity, immanence” whereas “Italy stands boldly for art and its triumphant victory

¹ The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* defines grace as an inclination toward others or as admiration: “inclinacionem animi ad bene faciendum alicui, colendum alicuius tam ultro qua mob beneficium ante acceptum.” As Martino Rossi Moni notes, *gratia* gained an aesthetic sense in the early years of the Roman Imperial period (27 BCE-476 CE). In Late Antiquity, *gratia* came to denote divine beauty.

² Lucile embodies the serious and silent manner that Christian educators instilled in young girls. See Sarah Curtis’s *Educating the Faithful*.
beyond personal mortality” (208). The contradance reflects England’s kinship system while the Italian tarantella exudes passions and sexual liberation.

In addition to using contradances as an example of women’s submission, Staël drew on French criticism of contradances as monotonous and devoid of the excitement necessary for a dance to act on its observers. Although touched by Lucile’s reserve and beauty, Oswald becomes bored dancing and reminisces about Corinne and the excitement of Italian dances: “comme cette situation ne variait pas, il commençait un peu à s’en fatiguer, et comparait cette longue rangée d’hommes et de femmes, et cette musique monotone, avec la grâce animée des airs et des danses d’Italie” (C 455). The English dances lack the variety and passion that constitute Corinne’s tarantella. Staël’s descriptions of enchanting contradances in Delphine suggest that the choreography is not to blame for this insipidity, rather patriarchal ideologies seeping into their execution make the dances tedious. Delphine performs expressively and freely. Lucile, in contrast, executes the correct steps like a machine and cedes to male domination. Though conformity exemplifies tact, it comes into conflict with grace which requires freedom.

The antipodal dance scenes in Corinne connect to its larger argument on women’s freedom to move. Before Oswald returns to England, Corinne writes him a letter relating her past in Northumberland, England. She describes her stepmother’s social circle of provincial Englishwomen lacking intellectually or emotionally stimulating discourse. Without recourse to gestures, they resemble static objects. The women of Northumberland hardly engage with space and time as they repeat the same actions enclosed in their parlors: “Tous les âges avaient des plaisirs semblables: l’on prenait le
thé, l’on jouait au whist, et les femmes vieillissaient en faisant toujours la même chose, en restant toujours à la même place” (352). Frozen in place, these women never improve their own situation nor contribute to the betterment of humanity. Perfectibility and grace are undeniably foreign to them. Corinne condemns the sight of beautiful young girls who demonstrate “la plus parfaite immobilité” as against nature (352). By resigning themselves to immobility, a symptom of rectitude, these women exist outside and against human progress.

Stillness or rote movements oppose the lived experience of being a creative, thinking human situated in a given time and place. Accentuating Corinne’s exceptionality, this letter reveals her dismal situation without opportunities to cultivate and share her talents: “j’aurais pu, ce me semble, envoyer à ma place une poupée légèrement perfectionnée par la mécanique; elle aurait très bien rempli mon emploi dans la société” (352). Corinne’s fear of being assimilable to a mechanical doll is “a fear of loss of humanity, a fear of not being recognized as human, a fear of not being known” (Moi, “A Woman’s” 160). The automaton doll represents three types of women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature: the vain society woman, the submissive wife, and finally the ultimate courtesan. Reduced to mindless machines, women in this condition blindly submit to masculine authority making reciprocal admiration (which, for Staël, is the foundation of romantic love) impossible. When the mechanics of fashionable society determine the manner of moving or dancing at social gatherings, the result is a

1 Frances Burney employs a similar metaphor in her novel Camilla (1796). The title character, distraught at a ball, appears as “a fair lifeless machine, whom the music perforce, put in motion” (142).
dull display of mindless conformity obliterating women’s possibility to engage in life-affirming activities and move gracefully toward the future.

Though Corinne paints a critical portrait of Italy’s ineffective political system and effeminate men, Staël underscored how Italian culture favored women’s intellectual and artistic flourishing whereas English culture suppressed their freedom.¹ The English themselves corroborated Staël’s contention that English women were far from enjoying Italian women’s autonomy.² Sojourning in Italy in 1753, the British writer Mary Wortley Montagu wrote that unlike in England, learned Italian women are not considered “ridiculous” concluding that “there is no part of the World where our Sex is treated with so much contempt as in England” (40-41). By focusing on English women’s machine-like movements, in both their social circles and in contradances, Corinne correlates constrained movements with intellectual and moral rigor mortis, the antithesis of graceful inclinations.

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¹ Although Staël paints England as a dreary nation lacking enthusiasm, her descriptions of British devotion to virtue and integrity reflect her admiration for this Northern country, whose governmental structure she hoped the French would imitate. Her political texts even approve of English women’s timidity over Italian women’s independence. In Considérations sur la Révolution française, she suggested that Protestant English norms for raising virtuous girls were superior to those in Catholic France and Italy. Her second novel is not an argument for a certain cultural practice but rather a comparative reflection demonstrating the possibilities of different nation’s esprits généraux.

² The author reviewing Corinne for an 1807 issue of the Edinburgh Review found Staël’s description of English temperament and customs rather accurate, congratulating her for having “studied with great care the character and manners of the English” and approaching “so near to the truth” (192). The reviewer defended “the almost total separation of the male from the female part of the society” as a “necessary consequence” of Englishmen’s “free use of the bottle” and resented Staël’s caustic description of “the coldness of manner in the English ladies, their reserve and want of animation” (192-93). Despite contesting Corinne’s characterization of taciturn English dames, this review confirms that most Englishwoman remained separated from intellectual and artistic life.
Indiana Floating on the Dance Floor

Social dances in Sand’s novels, as Laura Colombo shows, reveal a spontaneous expression of collective ideals while theatrical dances awaken viewers’ awareness of the relationship between the body and the mind. Though many scholars study music and theater in Sand’s immense corpus, her dance scenes receive significantly less attention. Yet, as Simone Bernard-Griffiths observes, “l’on danse beaucoup dans le roman sandien” (3). Sand’s novels demonstrate how dances function differently depending on their setting. Dancing represents collective joy in familial or agrarian contexts but accentuates tiresome social obligations at high-society balls. Sand lamented the arrival of urban contradances in her native region of Berry. According to her cultural study Promenades autour d’un village (1857), the Berrichon people appeared absurd performing these dances that made their local bourrée obsolete. In her letters, Sand repeatedly complained of her disdain for balls and fashionable dancing. Although her predilection for the bourrée du Berry and fascination with Spanish dances outshine her descriptions of contradances, she included the latter in Indiana (1832), Lavinia (1833), Cora (1833), Leone Leoni (1835), and Le Compagnon du Tour de France (1840). Apart from this last novel, these dance scenes are brief. Sand’s descriptions of contradances center on the relationships between the dancers and the psychological experience of dancing as participants perform class and gender roles.

Indiana (1832), Sand’s first novel published under the name G. Sand, was an immediate success. The ball scene emphasizes the heroine’s beauty but lack of subjectivity, as if she were merely a vision, and then suggests that an adulterous affair
might galvanize her into experiencing a bodily existence.¹ For Colombo, the ball in *Indiana* serves as a social frame. I however point out the importance of Raymon and Indiana’s first dance as a precursor to their sexual relationship. Though Sand’s dance scenes are stylistically restrained compared to those of Staël, their function is paramount to Sand’s political and social critiques.

Set near the end of the Restauration (1814–1830), *Indiana* is story about a dominated, unhappy woman who discovers joy through helping others after figuratively killing her former self. The title character meets Raymon de Ramière after her husband, the brutish Colonel Delmare, mistakes him for a thief. Raymon, who had snuck into the property for a tryst with Indiana’s non-white maid Noun, escapes from this compromising situation. When he sees Indiana without her husband at a Parisian ball, his scheme to seduce her commences. After the ball, Raymon intends to end his liaison with Noun but first spends the night with her in Indiana’s bedroom. The next day Indiana returns home early and discovers him hiding in her room. While Indiana berates him, Noun, pregnant with his child, realizes that he planned to leave her for her mistress. That evening, Noun commits suicide, and Indiana discovers her body floating down the river. Raymon wins back Indiana’s love, and she compromises herself for him before moving to Reunion Island with her bankrupt husband. Escaping her spouse, she returns to France and discovers that Raymon is married. After again returning to Reunion Island, this time

¹ Not just a sentimental novel, *Indiana* is a political and social critique. Martine Reid summarizes the novel as “un roman qui décrit et conteste une condition, celle des femmes mariées et, plus largement, l’état de la société” (25).
with her phlegmatic cousin Ralph, she learns that he loves her before they attempt to commit suicide together. Mysteriously surviving their jump off a precipice, the cousins establish themselves on the island and purchase the freedom of enslaved Africans.

*Indiana* contrasts a white woman’s fairylike grace devoid of subjective human desires and a non-white woman’s sensual, human grace. Before identifying the heroine at the ball, the omniscient narrator presents Indiana as an unknown, charming young woman making her Parisian debut.1 Like Delphine, Indiana stands out by wearing a simple white dress in a sea of ostentation.2 Neoclassical fashion continued into the 1830s through the “tendency to value the brilliance of a white body and a white face” (Chazin-Bennahum, *The Lure* 173). Indiana appears as an elfin image illuminated on stage: “C’était une créature toute petite, toute mignonne, toute déliée; une beauté de salon que la lueur vive des bougies rendait féérique et qu’un rayon de soleil eût ternie” (I 80). The word *fée*, from the Latin *fata* and *fatum* (meaning utterance or destiny), designates “un être dont la parole édicte les destins” (Bernard-Griffiths, “Fée” 406). Like a supernatural creature, the charming young woman already exists as a type eliciting awe as well as fear.

Sand contrasts the malleable concept of the exotic woman and the culturally ordained signification of the white female body. Indiana’s fairy-like beauty opposes the human beauty and voluptuous grace of Noun, disguised in her mistress’s clothing, when

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1 “Les honneurs de la soirée étaient en ce moment pour une jeune femme dont personne ne savait le nom, et qui, par la nouveauté de son apparition dans le monde, jouissait du privilège de fixer l’attention” (I 80).

2 “La simplicité de sa mise eût suffi pour la détacher en relief au milieu des diamants, des plumes et des fleurs qui paraient les autres femmes. Des rangs de perles tressées dans ses cheveux noirs composaient tout son écrin. Le blanc mat de son collier, celui de sa robe de crêpe et de ses épaules nues, se confondaient à quelque distance” (I 80).
Raymon spends his last night with his black mistress: “Elle avait de la grâce, mais de la grâce sans noblesse; elle était belle comme une femme et non comme une fée” (I 102). Indiana embodies a patriarchal idea of a dehumanized fantasy. Noun satisfies terrestrial desires as a graceful human.¹ This dichotomy between an airy white woman and an earthy non-white woman reinforces a refusal to acknowledge the corporeality of white women.²

Sand employs widely used tropes of exoticism to describe Noun’s freedom to be sexual and not just sexualized. By the end of the eighteenth century, the sexuality of black men and women had become “an icon for deviant sexuality” (Gilman 209). As T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting shows in her study of the nineteenth-century collective image of the Black Venus, “black women, embodying the dynamics of racial/sexual alterity, historically invoking primal fears and desire in European (French) men, represent ultimate difference (the sexualized savage) and inspire repulsion, attraction, and anxiety” (6). Described as “pleine de sang créole ardent et passionné,” Noun occupies a liminal position as a brown-skinned Creole (I 60).³ Sand cast her as a sensual character without offending social mores because racialized women were always already eroticized in the European imagination. Through Noun, Sand proposed the possibility of unfettered grace,

¹ For Béatrice Didier, “Noun est le miroir d’Indiana, telle que celle-ci aurait pu être si elle était restée dans sa nature primitive” (“Indiana” 564). Gustave Flaubert produced a similar effect by contrasting Mme Arnoux and her black servant in L’Education sentimentale (1869).
² See White: Essays on Race and Culture by Richard Dyer.
³ Regarding race and the colonial context of Indiana, see Pratima Prasad’s essay “Espace colonial et vérité historique dans Indiana.”
“la grâce sans noblesse,” that intrigues but, because of Noun’s outsider status, is barred from marriage and motherhood within white society (102).

Written the same year that Marie Taglioni (1804–1884) danced en pointe in Giacomo Meyerbeer’s opera Robert le Diable, Indiana includes motifs inherent in Romantic ballet, namely celestial lightness and intangible dancing women.1 With the rise of the ballet blanc in the 1830s and Taglioni’s celebrated ethereal performances, critics like Jules Janin and Théophile Gautier began to associate chaste, Christian dancing with mystic spirituality. Supernatural characters “symbolized the essence of muteness” and functioned as “allegories for unrealized dreams” (Foster, Choreography 199).2 Reviewing an 1836 ballet, Gautier described Taglioni as not a dancer, but dance itself.3 An 1827 article in the Courrier des théâtres designated the “lines of admirable purity” in her dancing to that of a “well-brought-up young person, modest, reserved, and gracious without being affected, who dances on stage as she might dance at a ball in her mother’s house” (qtd. in Guest 79). Like an obedient daughter, the ballerina displayed a disciplined body. By appearing less terrestrial and incorporating fewer acts of virtuosity, dancers like Taglioni sought to efface their bodily effort. During the Romantic ballet era (1830–1867),

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1 Although Taglioni is often cited as the first ballerina to dance en pointe, other dancers such as Mademoiselle Gosselin experimented with rising onto their toes during the 1810s and 1820s. After seeing a garish ballet in 1866, Sand reminisced about the former splendor of ballet, “Ô Taglioni. (Elle était dans une loge à côté de nous, vieille, un peu habillée en portière, la tête toujours fine et douce). Ô la poésie, la grâce, la statuaire, la vérité!” (Agendas 3:406). For Sand, Taglioni was a goddess. On a few occasions, Sand corresponded with Taglioni and the ballerina Amalia Ferraris (1828-1904). In an 1868 letter to the novelist, Taglioni claimed to be an avid reader of her books.

2 Though these characters represent purity, their muteness and otherworldliness also made them “oblivious to the protocols governing correct comportment for the female sex” (Foster, Choreography 199). They could therefore assert their sexual desires.

3 “Ce n’est pas une danseuse, c’est la danse elle-même” (Gautier, Écrits 27).
also called the “age of the ballerina,” the dancing female body was “a dependent, contingent object, lacking autonomy” (Dempster 23–24). Obscuring their weighted, sexual bodies, ballerinas appeared as magical creatures. Drastically different from the wives and mothers of theatergoers, the romantic ballerina symbolized “the fears and desires of a patriarchal culture” (Ruprecht 111).

Merging reverie and realism, Indiana’s dancing appears as both an otherworldly spectacle and an inexpressive social performance. Instead of expressing human emotions, Indiana’s movements bring to mind the fantastic images of ethereal women populating storybooks. The ball attendees perceive the heroine as a figment of their imagination or a
literary motif: “Les contes fantastiques étaient à cette époque dans toute la fraîcheur de leurs succès; aussi les érudits du genre comparèrent cette jeune femme à une ravissante apparition évoquée par la magie, qui, lorsque le jour blanchirait l’horizon, devait pâlir et s’effacer comme un rêve” (I 80). As Nigel Harkness notes, Sand associated theatrical bodily performances with femininity and linguistic performances with masculinity throughout Indiana. Writers create the fantasy of the female body with words, and the dancer performs this fantasy with her disappearing body.

This ball scene echoes eighteenth-century esthetic theories defining masculinity as stable and grounded, in contrast to women’s “floating beauty of grace” (Herder, Sculpture 85). During dance lessons of this period, women “practiced moving quickly without changing levels” to create the appearance of floating (Wynne 25). In Indiana, an anonymous woman artist at the ball notices the striking difference between Raymon’s grounded presence and Indiana’s lightness: “N’est-ce pas qu’auprès de cette jeune personne si pâle et si menue, le ton solide de l’un fait admirablement ressortir le ton fin de l’autre?” (I 81). Indiana’s gossamer body becomes an artistic object that highlights her partner’s dignity and groundings in his earthly situation. Floating beauty thus creates an inversion of masculine dignity through which male subjects affirm their authority.

When nymphlike lightness opposes strength and embodied subjectivity, the dichotomy between force and grace upholds gendered relationships of domination. The exaltation of feminine grace thereby becomes a strategy for casting feminine strength as unnatural, ugly, and undesirable. In Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting (1806), the Scottish artist and anatomist Charles Bell claimed that dancers’ muscular
efforts caused them to appear deformed instead of graceful.\textsuperscript{1} Indiana, dancing so lightly that she seems lifeless, conjures up images of the Romantic ballerina’s dreamlike appearance and the lifeless ladies of Northumberland: “En dansant, elle était si légère, qu’un souffle eût suffi pour l’enlever; mais elle était légère sans vivacité, sans plaisir” (I 80, my emphasis). Sand’s texts generally minimize attention to the material human body in favor of the contemplative and emotional experiences of the characters.\textsuperscript{2} In Indiana, the feminine body is forced to disappear when on public display. Whereas Delphine’s expressive polonaise affirms her existence, Indiana’s dancing, reminiscent of Lucile’s lifeless contradances, erases her sentient and embodied presence.

Weightlessness attracts cavaliers because to dance with a diaphanous partner is to dance with a phantasm. Opposing bourgeois rationalism and materialism, a “poétique” of ephemerality, lightness, and dreams creates an alternative universe represented as the feminine (Marquié 179). As men surround Indiana, an eager dandy encourages his friends to hurry and dance with this disappearing woman: “le coq va chanter, et déjà les pieds de votre danseuse ne touchent plus le parquet. Je parie que vous ne sentez plus sa main dans la vôtre” (I 81). As her incomprehensible lightness mocks the laws of gravity, she

\textsuperscript{1} “Violence of gesticulation is indelicate, if not unnatural, in females, and detracts from their beauty. This strikes us strongly in the necks and limbs of Opéra dancers. That which is beauty in a young man, is deformity in a female. The nymphlike lightness of a female dancer, which so much charms the eye at a distance, loses much of its grace and beauty, when, the figure advancing, the movements are perceived to be accomplished with violent straining and muscular action. This soon must destroy the natural beauty and symmetry peculiar to the female form” (Bell 172).

\textsuperscript{2} In Disguise in George Sand’s Novels, François Ghillebaert shows how the “quasi negation of the body” favors the soul in Sand’s text (51). For Margaret Cohen, Sandian sentimental novels downplay “material appearance to intensify the reader’s sympathetic response to the suffering protagonist” (The Sentimental 145). According to Béatrice Didier, Sand suggested the presence of the feminine body without describing it to force readers to use their imaginations.
remains an image without the threat of materializing into a terrestrial woman in the arms of her partner.\(^1\) Her beauty fascinates because, like images of dead maidens, it is “unnatural” and “precarious” (Bronfen 5).

Lightness evokes the weakness that draws men to dominate wives and lovers. Strength, a sign of fleshy presence and life force, rarely attracts male suitors seeking a woman through whom they can affirm their subjectivity.\(^2\) After Indiana’s physical exertion during a boar hunt appalls Raymon, the omniscient narrator states:

Les femmes ont rarement le courage physique qui consiste à lutter d’inertie contre la douleur ou le danger; mais elles ont souvent le courage moral qui s’exalte avec le péril ou la souffrance. […] Les hommes, et les amants surtout, ont la fatuité innocente de vouloir protéger la faiblesse plutôt que d’admirer le courage chez les femmes. (162)\(^3\)

Through education and socially imposed limitations, women learn to appear weak, which is why Wollstonecraft urged women to acquire bodily strength to become less dependent on men.\(^4\) During the boar hunt, Indiana demonstrates what Wollstonecraft defined as “true grace” arising from “some kind of independence of mind,” opposed to docile grace

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\(^1\) Johannes, in Kierkegaard’s *The Seducer’s Diary*, declares that “the lightness of a young girl is incomprehensible” and makes her appear supernatural (44).

\(^2\) Irigaray examines this form of phallocentric domination in her 1974 essay “La tache aveugle d’un vieux rêve de symétrie.”

\(^3\) According to Bruno Viard, the frequent references to exaltation in Sand’s novels suggest that it functions as an operative concept in her notion of perfectibility.

\(^4\) “Heroines taking action themselves and asserting their own agency is a common Sandian theme; her female heroines are often capable of drawing on some reserve of fortitude in situations that present a physical challenge” (Illingworth 80).
(99). Capable of using her body subjectively and efficiently, Indiana feigns feebleness at the ball to conform to a patriarchal concept of feminine grace.

Raised on Reunion Island, Indiana enters French metropolitan society as a foreigner. Like Bernardin de St. Pierre’s Virginie, she appears untainted by pretentious social spectacles. Indiana dances out of obligation and is embarrassed by flattering remarks and attention: “Gauche et timide comme une personne étrangère au monde, le succès qu’elle y obtenait semblait l’embarrasser plutôt que lui plaire” (I 81). Unlike vain women at balls who, according to Staël in De l’’Influence des passions sur le bonheur (1796), desire to be regarded as the most beautiful, Indiana does not seek to triumph over other women. Instead, she obfuscates her personhood. Graceful inclinations emerge in between these two extremes when an individual lifts her gaze, casts aside vain desires, and moves propelled by her subjective engagement with the world.

Raymon’s encounter with Indiana brings her to life through praise for her actions and recognition of her personhood. After learning her name, he asks her to dance and then informs her that they have already met. Commending her kindness and thanking her for nursing his injury, he leads her to dance a contradance.¹ Confuting the dandy’s prediction, Indiana comes to life when her hand enters Raymon’s grasp: “En parlant, Raymon tenait la main de madame Delmare, prêt à se mêler avec elle dans la contredanse. Il pressa doucement cette main dans les siennes, et tout le sang de la jeune femme reflua vers son cœur” (82). Touch produces jouissance in the act of mutual

¹ Although the first dances at the ball are not named, the narrator identifies this last dance as a contradance.
recognition as both individuals perceive themselves as subjects and objects of the action.\(^1\) The moment of touch creates what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls a chiasm, a bi-directional exchange between sensing and sensed bodies that forms kinship. Indiana disappears when other cavaliers take her hand because, ignoring her name and her humanity, they do not recognize her as a sentient being who can also touch them.

Though brief, this dance scene marks the beginning of Indiana and Raymon’s tumultuous love affair. Insinuating the inherent sexual valence of dance, the Colonel later accuses Indiana of dancing with Raymon for the entire duration of the ball. After Indiana and her husband have left for Reunion Island, Laure de Nangy, who marries Raymon, lauds Indiana’s charm at the ball when asking questions about the Delmares: “Je la vis, il y a deux ans, à un bal chez l’ambassadeur d’Espagne. Elle était ravissante, ce jour-là, vous en souvenez-vous?” (287).\(^2\) At this point in the novel, Raymon, having slept with Indiana, is no longer seduced by her ravishing frailty because he has already dominated her and known her as an earthly woman. Laure’s question marks the end of his attraction to Indiana. Consequently, the dandy’s prediction comes true insofar as Indiana disappears from le grand monde.\(^3\)

\(^2\) According to Anne Martin-Fugier, the Spanish and French embassies in Paris frequently gave fashionable balls throughout the 1830s.
\(^3\) Béatrice Didier explains that Indiana no longer possesses a name at the end of the novel and is doomed to the utopian ending.
**Crossing Social Boundaries in Claire de Duras’s Édouard**

Contradances in Claire de Duras’s second published novel Édouard (1825) create a utopian moment during which class hierarchies temporarily fade.¹ A frame tale, Édouard is a confession written by the title character at the request of his curious friend. Edouard’s melancholy and its secret cause fascinate the framing story’s narrator, a French soldier in the American Revolutionary War. After this anonymous narrator takes a bullet for Edouard, the latter agrees to recount his past. The only son of a bourgeois in Lyon, this romantic hero grows up with a penchant for solitude and reverie. After the death of his mother, Edouard and his father join the latter’s close friend, the aristocratic Marshall d’Olonne, in Paris where Edouard’s father hopes his son will become a successful lawyer. During their stay, Edouard falls in love with the Marshall’s daughter Natalie de Nevers, a twenty-year-old widow. The events take a turn when Edouard’s father suddenly dies, and the Marshall promises to raise Edouard as if he were his son. Mourning his father and the impossibility of declaring his love to Madame de Nevers, Edouard contemplates suicide. Shortly after they dance together at a ball, Madame de Nevers reveals her love for Edouard and her willingness to lower her social status to marry him. Unable to bear the thought of dishonoring her, he refuses. Madame de

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¹ Duras summarized the novel’s purpose in a letter to Rosalie de Constant: “l’idée est de montrer l’infériorité sociale telle qu’elle existait avant la Révolution, où les mœurs admettaient tous les rangs comme société pourvu qu’on ait de l’esprit, mais où les préjugés étaient plus impitoyables que jamais dès qu’il était question de franchir d’autres barrières” (qtd. in Pailhès, 462).
Nevers’s father banishes Edouard from his home when he learns that the young bourgeois yearns for his daughter.¹ Edouard becomes a soldier and leaves for America.

Beauty is describable but grace leaves its beholder speechless. When Edouard sees Madame de Nevers for the first time, her presence shocks him into a state of stupor and deprives him of his ability to use reason as his sentiments prevail: “Si elle n’était que belle, si elle n’était qu’aimable, je trouverais des expressions dignes de cette femme céleste. Mais comment décrire ce qui tout ensemble formait une séduction irrésistible?” (OEO 117). Later, when Edouard sees Madame de Nevers leaving for a ball, he exclaims, “rien ne peut peindre la grâce de madame de Nevers” (137). Possessing more than mere physical beauty, she appears simultaneously celestial and seductive suggesting that her grace is modest, voluptuous, spiritual, and corporal.

Whereas beauty simply provokes approval, the numerous qualities constituting grace excite a range of sensations. Madame de Nevers’s intelligence, wit, and dignity predominate in attracting Edouard’s love: “Je ne sais si d’autres femmes sont plus belles que madame de Nevers; mais je n’ai vu qu’à elle cette réunion complète de tout ce qui plaît. La finesse de l’esprit, et la simplicité du cœur; la dignité du maintien, et la bienveillance des manières” (119). Edouard questions if such perfection could be natural: “Les fées semblraient l’avoir douée de tous les talents et de tous les charmes” (119). Grace amazes those who witness it because, compared to quotidian encounters with artifice and human complacency, it appears uncanny.

¹ According to Sainte-Beuve, Édouard’s narrative is based on the plebian Mr. Benoist’s love for Duras’s daughter Clara, a tryst that the Duke de Duras prevented from concluding in marriage.
In *Corinne, Valérie, and Edouard*, the male protagonists, unseen by the dancing heroines, project their fantasies on the female characters whom they wish would dance for them exclusively. This voyeuristic distance allows the novelists to transform descriptions of social dances into spectacular performances. Aware that his social rank prevents him from attending parties at court as a guest, Edouard decides to attend as a spectator hidden in rows of seats separated from the dance floor: “Je n’avais jamais vu danser madame de Nevers, et j’avais un violent désir de la voir, sans en être vu, à une de ces fêtes où je me la représentais si brillante. On pouvait aller à ces grands bals comme spectateur; cela s’appelait aller *en beyeux*” (138-39). The locution *en beyeux* comes from the expression *les Beyeux de Saint-Quentin*, an appellation insinuating that the inhabitants of Saint-Quentin, a commune in Picardy, tended to watch foreigners closely. *Beyeux* derives from the verb *beer*, which, in Picardy, meant to watch, to desire, or to dream with open eyes.1 Duras depicts spectators *en beyeux* sitting away from the dance floor: “On était dans des tribunes, ou sur des gradins, séparés du reste de la société; on y trouvait en général des personnes d’un rang inférieur, et qui ne pouvaient aller à la cour” (138-39). Further theatricalizing the ball, these non-invited spectators buy tickets to watch. This description of the ballroom doubling as a theater accentuates the artifice involved in staging social barriers and presents the idea of classless celebration as “une fête complètement déthéâtralisée” (Ozouf 342).

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The observer’s fantasies shatter when he is recognized as an equally visible body. Though Edouard evades Madame de Nevers’s line of sight, the Duke de L. calls on him thereby attracting the attention of Madame de Nevers. Edouard approaches her but remains separated by a wall that materializes the social laws preventing their union and provoking his shame: “Nous n’étions séparés que par la barrière qui isolait les spectateurs de la société: triste emblème de celle qui nous séparait pour toujours!” (OEO 140). The physical space of the ballroom, like figures in seventeenth-century court dances, highlights social positions of superiority and inferiority. Moreover, the rules determining who dances and who watches parallel the structures defining who accesses spheres of political or social influence.

The novel, taking place before 1789, portrays England as a democratic haven in comparison to the French ancien régime. The ball’s host, the English ambassador, invites Edouard to participate as a guest. After crossing the barrier blocking his access to the dance floor, Edward watches Madame de Nevers dance from the bench where she had previously sat to talk to him over the wall. Sitting in this privileged space, he dreams about fleeing to England where his talent, courage, and perseverance would make up for his bourgeois origins. Madame de Nevers startles him from his daydream to ask why he does not dance. The dialogue that follows foreshadows Edouard’s refusal to marry her. Although critical of the rigid French social system, he obsequiously accepts social laws obstructing his happiness:

Mais ne dansez-vous pas? me demanda-t-elle. –Je crains que cela ne soit inconvenable, lui dis-je. –Pourquoi donc? reprit-elle; puisque vous êtes invité,
The possibility of overcoming social differences is only feasible in his romanticized vision of England.¹ Dance scenes can solidify the social status quo or create an ephemeral illusion of social harmony across classes.

Breaking the rules of the ball can also subvert gender roles. Throughout the novel, Madame de Nevers takes audacious measures to show her admiration for Edouard when he cannot do the same. His social class emasculates him while her aristocratic position gives her the upper hand. After Edouard announces the impossibility of asking her to dance, she asks him to dance. Unable to refuse, he dances a contradance with her. After the ball, he understands that she took on the gentleman’s role since he lacks the right to ask her to dance. Despite being hurt, he admires her generosity in accepting his inferiority as an act of charity.² By reversing gendered roles in the invitation to dance, Madame de Nevers leads Edouard to contemplate women’s duty in heterosexual love: “Mais est-ce d’une femme? est-ce de celle qu’on aime qu’on devrait recevoir protection et appui?       

¹ Quoting Milton’s verse “Among unequals no society Can sort” from Paradise Lost, Edouard’s mother predicts his misery by insisting that it is only possible to find happiness among one’s equal. Yet, the novel identifies England as a sort of refuge from class prejudices. Edouard’s father states, “En Angleterre l’institution repose sur les individus; ici les individus tirent leur lustre et leur valeur de l’institution” (116).
² “Qu’elle était bonne et généreuse à ce bal! elle a voulu danser avec moi, pour me relever à mes propres yeux, pour me consoler de tout ce qu’elle sentait bien qui me blessait” (OEO 143).
Dans ce monde factice tout est interverti, ou plutôt c’est ma passion pour elle qui change ainsi les rapports naturels” (143). Their love originates in a sincere appreciation of each other, yet their relationship reverses a socially constructed understanding of male-female interactions. Offering protection and strength, Madame de Nevers demonstrates dignity. The novel shines light on the arbitrariness of class determining a man’s right to love a woman as well as that of prejudices preventing women from deciding whom they marry.

During the contradance, Edouard transitions from an untouchable observer to a touching partner. As Stendhal wrote in the chapter on intimacy in *De l’amour* (1822), “Le plus grand bonheur que puisse donner l’amour, c’est le premier serrement de main d’une femme qu’on aime” (95). The physical contact in the contradance stirs Edouard’s sexual longing for his partner: “je pris sa main, sa main que je n’avais jamais touchée! et nous nous mimes à une contredanse” (*OEO* 142). His excitement touching her hand for the first time recalls the previous night when, after she left for a ball, he embraced her glove transforming it into a fetish object replacing sexual relations.¹ Edouard and Madame de Nevers publicly experience their attraction during the illusory moment of a dance, which, like a fetish object, stands in for an official relationship.

Dancing with Madame de Nevers, Edouard becomes cognizant of not only her graceful inclinations but also her sexual corporeality. His delight transforms into fear of

¹ According to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the fetish replaces the penis that the child once believed his mother possessed. The fetish endows women with “the characteristic which makes them acceptable as sexual objects” (Freud 200). Because the fetish’s meaning remains unknown to other people, no one can withhold it from the fetishist or prevent him from obtaining the attached sexual satisfaction. Freud concluded, “what other men have to woo and make exertions for can be had by the fetishist with no trouble at all” (201).
onlookers’ opinions: “je passais du délice de la contempler, et d’être si près d’elle, de la tenir presque dans mes bras, à la douleur de penser qu’elle faisait peut-être pour moi une chose inconvenante, et qu’elle en serait blâmée” (142). Watching from the audience, Edouard could admire Madame de Nevers in secret. Dancing with her, he exposes his admiration for all to see. After the dance, her father humiliates the young hero by reminding him that the ambassador’s invitation is surely a consequent of the Marshall’s benevolent protection. Edouard avows to never appear at another ball. His momentary acceptance into this aristocratic world is only an illusion. Nevertheless, illusions reveal what could become realities.

Contradance figures may evoke social harmony just as graceful dancing can create an ephemeral instant in which goodness and justice seem to reign. Yet, utopian moments on the dance floor do not efface prejudices and injustices. They can, however, point to a different way of being, a different understanding of human relationships. Madame de Nevers and Edouard’s dance highlights the inanity of social codes determining who has the right to enter the dance space, who can dance with whom, and who can love whom. Breaking these rules, the couple dances, and the ball continues. If only for a contradance, love liberated from class and gender prejudices seems possible.

**Class Mixing and Contradances in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France***

Sand’s 1840 novel *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, poorly received and criticized as pedantic, provides a sketch of the artisanal societies known as the *Compagnons du Devoir* and, as in several of her novels, investigates the possibility of
romantic unions across class barriers. The carpenters Pierre Huguenin, who has completed the Tour de France (a rite of passage for artisans) as a Compagnon menuisier du Devoir de liberté, and Amaury, also referred to as “le Corinthien,” work on the Villepreux family’s provincial manor. While chiseling woodwork, the two workers attract the attention of Yseult de Villepreux and her cousin the Marquise Joséphine des Frenays. Pierre develops an intellectual complicity with Yseult while Amaury regularly dances with Joséphine. Discovering the Marquise in her carriage without a capable driver, Amaury spends the night with her and, as we learn in the novel’s conclusion, impregnates her. Despite his attraction to the Marquise, he leaves her to study sculpture in Italy. His commitment to art and desire to quit his subjugated status as a craftsman trumps his love for this charming but vain woman. The daughter of a laborer, Josephine joined the noble class by marrying a marquis. Her fear of losing her class status due to her relationship with Amaury points to the fact that men bestow titles and women lose them. Pierre and the Count de Villepreux’s granddaughter Yseult also become smitten with each other. The Count, a self-proclaimed liberal indifferent to the progressive goals of liberalism, almost dies when Yseult announces her intention to marry the craftsman revealing that the Count in fact represents a return to the values of the ancien régime. After the two lovers separate, Pierre, inspired by Yseult’s intellectual appetite, devotes his time to work

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1 Agricol Perdiguier’s 1839 work Livre du Compagnonnage and the works of Pierre Leroux greatly influenced Sand’s creation of the novel’s hero Pierre Huguenin.

2 For Catherine Mariette-Clot these two antithetical couples represent different possibilities of social integration and “deux degrés de maturité dans l’avènement de l’amour humain qui sera autant individuel que collectif” (111).
and study. After living in Paris with her grandfather, she returns to Pierre hoping that they can reunite and save Joséphine’s child.

In this novel set in 1823, dance is an activity contested by certain clergymen and an opportunity for members of different social classes to express collective joy. Sunday dances constitute an *otium*, or what Rousseau called the “précieux far niente” (*Rêveries* 77). During this leisure time, the villagers are no longer bound to accomplish tasks thanks to a momentary “abolition of the hierarchy of occupations” (Rancière, *Aisthesis* 46).¹ Functioning as what Frédéric Pouillaude and Michel Guérin call a “désoeuvrement,” dance offers a refuge by ridding the dancers of worries about the past or future and of the obligation to produce something. Dance draws the mover’s attention to the presence of her living body and encourages a pure attention, “une attention sans objet” (Guérin 75).

An admirer of folk dances, Sand attacked the hypocrisy of anti-dance laws. Prior to the eighteenth century when urban ideologies began to disrupt provincial traditions, dance took part in religious worship in rural France.² In the novel, the Count becomes popular among the villagers afterconvincing the town’s vicar to allow Sunday dances: “Il dominait le curé, et, à force de cadeaux pour sa cave et pour son église, le forçait d’être tolérant et de laisser danser le dimanche” (*LC* 218). As René Bourgeois notes, Sand

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¹ Analyzing Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Jacques Rancière identifies the plebeian’s happiness in doing nothing. According to Rancière, this leisure, creates an “equality of pure sensation” that annuls the barriers of social hierarchy (*Aisthesis* 52).

² According to Philippe de Félice, dance began to disappear from French Catholic worship in the fifteenth century. After the 1879 Revolution, dance was prohibited in certain regions, notably in Bagnols and near Lyon.
seems to allude to Paul-Louis Courier’s well-known pamphlet “Pétition pour des villageois qu’on empêche de danser” (1822) beseeching the Chamber of Deputies to annul the ban on Sunday dances in Azay-sur-Cher, located in Touraine.¹

Albeit the underlying presence of class hierarchies, the Sunday dances give the illusion of social harmony as the villagers dance together under the shade of an old oak tree. Unmarked by monuments and closed doors, nature provides an open space in which social unity appears feasible.² These assemblies present the working class as a determined group instead of as individuals with the possibility of improving their situations.³ Consequently, change appears unnecessary. In the novel’s conclusion, the town of Villedprieux is no longer as joyous as during the Count’s stay because a zealous new vicar forbids the outdoor dances at which freedom seems to reign. His fulminations against adultery, liberalism and dance, “l’adultère, le libéralisme et la danse,” suggest that the sinfulness of dancing arises not just from bringing together male and female bodies but also from celebrating freedom (LC 384).

Music is, of course, an essential element at these outdoor dances. Contradance music attests to a cultural shift away from the excessive ornamentation of the Baroque period and the rigidity of classicism. According to Rousseau, in his Dictionnaire de Musique, contradance music should be “bien cadencés, brillants et gais, et avoir

¹ Following the pamphlet’s publication, the village vicar rallied for this outlaw kindling the townspeople’s already nascent animosity toward the clergy.
² Mona Ozouf argues that post-Revolutionary festivals took place outdoors because “dans la neutralité salubre d’un espace non cloisonné, toutes les distinctions paraissent devoir s’abolir” (209). Open spaces without memories imprinted into their architecture become sites of potential utopias.
³ Near the end of the novel, the Count tells Joséphine: “Le people est grand et beau comme masse, il est misérable et chétif comme individu” (562).
cendant beaucoup de simplicité; car comme on les reprend très souvent, il deviendraient insupportables, s’ils étaient chargés” (121). For Rousseau, simplicity in music prevents ennui. In *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, the Count pays a ménétier, an errant violinist animating popular festivities, to play at the dances. Violin music, formerly reserved for noble balls, gradually integrated into working-class assemblies as class-specific cultural practices evolved.1

Sunday dances provided workers an opportunity to charm members of the opposite sex with their dance skills and best dress. Sand placed particular emphasis on the men’s attention to their appearance for alluring women: “Les ouvriers du père Huguenin s’habillaient de leur mieux ce jour-là et faisaient danser, de préférence aux paysannes, les pimpantes soubrettes du château” (*LC* 219). Maids, shielded from the harsh effects of agricultural labor, receive more masculine attention in a hierarchy among the working class. Celebrating their day of rest, the workers attempt to distinguish themselves from their professions as dancing allows them to perform as individuals within a community. Pierre triumphs with his virtuosity.2 Charming women with his fetching outfit more so than with his fancy footwork, Amaury gives little heed to his

1 Courrier wrote, “Nous dansons au son du violon; mais ce n’est que depuis une certaine époque. Le violon était réservé jadis aux bals des honnêtes gens. Car d’abord il fut rare en France. Le grand Roi fit venir des violons d’Italie, et en eut une compagnie pour faire danser sa cour gravement, noblement, les cavaliers en perruque noire, les dames en vertugadin. Le peuple payait ces violons, mais n’en servait pas, dansait peu, quelquefois au son de la musette ou cornemuse” (6). Although the denizens of Azay danced to violin music as if they were in the court of Louis XIV, Courrier contended that their dances were more playful and their behaviors less licentious than those of courtiers. According to Courrier, public dances served a public function by creating an alcohol-free event. Sand likewise accentuates the innocence of the village dances in contrast to waltzing aristocrats’ lewdness.

2 “Le Berrichon y déployait toutes ses grâces, et ses entrechats ne manquaient pas de succès” (219).
success with the ladies: “Le Corinthien se livrait aussi à cet amusement, mais sans s’occuper d’une danseuse plus que d’une autre” (219). This inattention to feminine coquetry foreshadows the ease with which he later chooses devotion to his art over marriage. The first dance scene accentuates the difference between Pierre’s noble dignity and Amaury’s sprezzatura. Pierre possesses “la noblesse et la régularité de la statuaire” and looks like a “chasseur antique avec son air mâle et sa force élégante” (60, 276). Amaury’s “grâce pensive,” whiteness, and delicate features recall the nonchalant grace of Raphael’s paintings.¹ (276). Like the works of Michelangelo, Pierre’s beauty reveals an effort to appear strong and elegant.

Despite the façade of a utopian microcosm, the social hierarchy structuring France under the Restauration governs these weekly gatherings that highlight what Jean-Louis Cabanès calls the comedy of liberalism. The Count makes the event possible, uses it to increase his symbolic power over the workers, and enjoys the bucolic spectacle: “Le vieux comte venait avec sa famille […] regarder ces danses villageoises, et familiariser les bonnes gens avec sa présence seigneuriale” (219). Sitting in an exclusive area, he distances himself from the villagers who become his source of entertainment. Through exclusion and inclusion among the participants and spectators, assemblies distinguish and solidify collective identities. As in Edouard, who has the right to dance with whom sparks and parallels the romantic narrative.

¹ See Sophie Anne Leterrier’s essay “Arts et people dans Le Compagnon du Tour de France.”
Descriptions of outlandish aristocratic and bourgeois male characters participating at these festivities underscore the rigid rules of class differences. The outdoor assemblies include both contradances and the *bourrée du Berry*. Although the narrator does not name the bourrée, the fact that the Count’s son Raoul joins in a dance involving a kiss between the partners, the signature trait of the bourrée du Berry, makes its presence rather evident: “le jeune Raoul de Villepreux dansait avec les plus jolies filles, et ne manquait guère de les embrasser, ce qui faisait rouler de gros yeux à leurs prétendus” (219). Because of Raoul’s class, historically marked by the medieval *droit de cuissage* allowing noblemen to have sexual relations with subordinate women, he does not pose a viable threat to the girls’ future spouses. A locksmith, however, takes offense at this social mixing. Upholding a patriarchal notion of ownership, he claims that “il n’aurait pas laissé embrasser son amoureuse, fût-ce par le dauphin de France” (219). Equally opposed to Raoul’s mingling with village girls, the Count discretely prevents Raoul from returning to the assemblies.1 The bourgeois engineer Isidore Lerebours, an awkward outsider to both the aristocratic family and the peasants, makes a fool of himself with his pretentious attitude and Molieresque manners appealing only to immature girls.2 After Raoul’s departure, Joséphine, born of a working-class father, is the only aristocrat who regularly dances at these assemblies.

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1 “Le comte, qui ne voulait pas compromettre sa popularité, ne releva pas le propos du vieux serrurier; mais il ne le laissa pas tomber non plus, et le jeune seigneur ne reparut plus aux danses sous le chêne” (219).
2 “M. Isidore dansait, et Dieu sait avec quelle prétention ridicule et quels airs de triomphe impertinents! Les filles du village en étaient éblouies; mais les femmes de chambre, qui se connaissaient en belles manières, et la fille de l’adjoint, qui était une princesse, le trouvaient trop familier” (219)
The complexity of Joséphine’s character, split between longing for the innocence of her rural origins and desiring to be admired among her peers, stands out during the dance scenes. Revealing the limit to which she is willing to dance with lower-class individuals, she joins in the contradances, but not the bourrée. However, her choice in partners as well as her sartorial accessories declare her conflicted aversion to intermixing with the lower classes:

Madame des Frenays avait dansé avec son cousin Raoul dans les premiers jours, et n’avait pas dédaigné de mettre sa petite main dans celle du paysan qui lui faisait vis-à-vis à la chaîne anglaise. Mais cette main était couverte d’un gant, ce qui parut fort injurieux à la plupart des danseurs, et ce qui les empêcha de l’inviter, quoiqu’elle mourût d’envie de l’être, car elle dansait à raver; ses petits pieds effleuraient le gazon, et il n’est point de manants pour une jolie femme qui se voit admirée. (219-20)

Josephine hides her uncertain social position by acting excessively vain. She unhesitatingly dances with peasants but protects her skin from touching theirs as if fearful of recognizing their mutual humanity. Clasping hands to create figures as a unit, all the dancers play an equal part in the contradance. During these moments of collective joy, only the clothes that the participants wear and the effects of physical labor on their bodies make their different situations apparent.

Joséphine’s character recalls aspects of the Italian princess Quintilia in Sand’s 1834 novel *Le Secrétaire intime*. The protagonist Saint-Julien describes Quintilia as oscillating between a natural and artificial identity: “il y a en elle deux femmes distinctes, une vraie et une artificielle; une qui est née ce qu’elle est, une autre que les hommes et le siècle ont formée” (90).
Fear of overstepping boundaries and a disdain for her haughtiness prevent the workers from partnering the marquise. Working-class bodies, however, remain at the disposal of the wealthy. After Raoul’s disappearance from the weekly balls and a tedious dance with Isidore, the Marquise complains to her uncle that no one asks her to dance. Under the guise of helping the sculptor overcome his shyness, the count orders Amaury to dance with her.

Mais voyons donc si je ne te trouverai pas un danseur. Viens ici, mon enfant, dit-il au Corinthien qui était à deux pas de lui: je vois bien que tu grilles d’inviter ma nièce, mais que tu n’oses pas. Moi, je te déclare qu’elle sera charmée de danser. Allons, offre-lui la main, et en place pour la contredanse! c’est moi qui vais crier les figures. (220)

Given that the figures are called out and the men face each other in the initial formation, the novel describes a cotillion. Acting as the master of ceremonies, the Count, “un dispensateur d’illusions,” orchestrates the social spectacle and exerts his power without appearing authoritarian (Cabanès 37). Both a dance and a game, the cotillion includes a master of ceremonies, the *cotillonneur*, who announces the figures. Like a good ruler, the *cotillonneur* must possess moral authority over the dancers and avoid showing favors to any individual.¹

¹ A good *cotillonneur* must be “gai, actif, d’humeur accommodante, posséder une autorité morale sur les autres danseurs pour se faire obéir, avoir la même sollicitude pour tous et ne marquer de préférence à personne” (Giraudet 2:86).
A cotillion begins with two couples facing each other so that each dancer is directly opposite another dancer of the same sex. This dance consists in interactions between the dancers of the same sex, turns and passes within the individual couples, and finally rounds in which everyone circles through the space. For some critics, the dance was indecent because of its excessive exuberance, particularly if the women’s coiffures came undone during the turns and rounds. Understood to be a particularly French dance, the cotillion gained popularity under the Restauration.¹

Though a dance can momentarily make mutual admiration across class barriers fathomable, it can also solicit disapproval. Although Amaury recognizes the exceptionality of dancing with the Marquise, he does not change his manners since he is accustomed to the Villepreux family treating him with respect.² However, this pairing stupefies Pierre, placed in front of Amaury. The dance turns into a duel between Pierre’s virtuosity and the Marquise’s discomfort as Amaury tries to prevent her embarrassment from mounting:

Tout en sautant légèrement sur le pré avec sa danseuse, le Corinthien, qui, malgré son courage intérieur, n’avait pas encore osé la regarder en face, s’aperçut que cette reine du bal était si troublée qu’elle s’embrouillait dans les figures. Il n’y comprit rien d’abord, et, voulant l’aider à reprendre sa place sans être atteinte par

¹ In Frances Burney’s 1814 novel *The Wanderer: Or, Female Difficulties*, the cotillion represents a distinctly French dance. In the first volume of this novel about the French émigré Elinor’s struggle to survive haughty English society, an English gentleman proposes a cotillion for which he “had brought the newest steps and method from France” (11). His dance manual however is incomplete. Elinor, familiar with the steps and the figures, teaches the dance to her English hosts.

² “C’est la première fois que je fais danser une marquise, se disait-il en lui-même; c’est égal, je la ferai danser tout aussi bien qu’un autre, et je ne vois pas pourquoi j’en serais si ébloui” (220).
The ironic use of the epithet “reine du bal” to describe the fumbling Marquise highlights the difference between dancing in Parisian ballrooms and dancing outside with working-class people. In contrast to her ineptness, Pierre triumphs as an instinctual passion emerges in his “ronds-de-jambe impétueux” and “pirouette irréfrénable” (220). By specifying the names of the steps performed by Pierre, Sand adds to the conflation of “artisan” and “artiste,” visible throughout the novel, to recognize the intellectual and technical dignity of the working-class (Bara 50). At the same time, the marquise, who previously danced superbly, is unsettled by the fact that she is dancing with Amaury. As in Delphine and Indiana, the physical contact of the contradance sparks the partners’ desire. Grasping and supporting Joséphine’s body, Amaury encounters her in a bodily way, a harbinger of their sexual caprice.

Learned comportments are not fixed, and the human urge to move to music can help socially heterogeneous dancing couples find common ground. Although Amaury wants only to lead Josephine back to her seat and forget this awful cotillion, they find
themselves dancing together again. Unlike their maladroit first dance, the following contradances engender a dreamlike magic:

Mais le violon n’eut pas plutôt donné le signal de la contredanse suivante qu’il se retrouva, comme par magie, auprès de madame des Frenays, et que la main de celle-ci était dans la sienne. De quelle formule s’était-il servi pour l’inviter de nouveau, et comment l’avait-il osé? Il ne le sut jamais. Un nuage flottait autour de lui, et il agissait comme dans un rêve. (LC 220)

Even though the Count takes on the role of master of ceremonies, the music triumphs in directing the dancers. The music incites collective joy as individuals move through motions opposing their weekday gestures. This social cohesion is as ephemeral as the dance’s illusions reflecting Sand’s lament that equality is only “un beau rêve” because society is too resentful, too fearful, and too petty (Correspondance 8:507). A symbolic enactment of collective joy and equality, contradances fail to sustain this social utopia.

Unable to unite in public life, the dance terrain under the spell of music becomes the paradisiacal place where Amaury and Joséphine can fall in love. After this first encounter, they dance together every Sunday. When Amaury is not her partner, his companions, following his example, invite her to dance. Given the nature of contradances, Amaury still comes in contact with her even when they are not partners: “Quand le Corinthien ne l’invitait pas, il était toujours son vis-à-vis, et leur mains se touchaient, leurs haleines se confondaient, et leurs regards se cherchaient pour se fuir et pour se chercher encore” (220-21). This physical contact develops into a sexual love.

Unlike the Badennois couple in Delphine, Amaury and Josephine do not share an interest
in those surrounding them. Josephine seeks to please his comrades as part of her mission to seduce Amaury: “Elle désirait donc de plaire à tous les danseurs, afin de plaire davantage à celui qu’elle préférerait” (231). As the novel progresses, the Marquise’s attraction to Amaury wavers as her desire for the freedom found in carefree celebrations comes into conflict with her vain efforts to solidify her aristocratic status.

In contrast to the hierarchies in *Edouard*, gender-based laws trump class differences in Sand’s socialist novel.¹ Amaury oscillates between loving this vain woman and projecting himself toward autonomy and artistic liberty. Abhorring the idea of Joséphine being associated with his social class at large, he becomes angry when men comment on her participation in the Sunday gatherings. Amaury recognizes his love as irrational, “cette folie,” but contends that he must protect Joséphine from his fellow villagers because “une femme est toujours une femme, et l’appui d’un homme, quel qu’il soit, lui est toujours nécessaire” (232). Amaury’s first physical encounter with her, holding her by the elbow to prevent her from falling, allowed him to assert his ascendancy over her as a masculine protector.

In many contradances, the swiftness with which dancers must move to keep up with the music and the group’s movement leaves them little time to reflect on the correctness of their actions. As the omniscient narrator concludes, “Tous ces petits prodiges s’opèrent si spontanément quand on aime la danse, qu’on n’a pas le temps de se

¹ Sand addresses the intersection of patriarchal and class regimes when Joséphine censures the submissive position of aristocratic women: “Les femmes sont si malheureuses, si esclaves, si aisément sacrifiées dans le monde où je vis!” (282). Joséphine idealizes the freedom that she once experienced as a “une vraie paysanne” (285).
raviser, et que la galerie n’a pas le temps de s’en apercevoir” (221). Pierre references the temporary relaxing in social rules during the dances as distinct from the other occasions when he and Amaury cross paths with the noble women. When Yseult chats with Pierre, he compares their momentary familiarity to that which is allowed during contradances, “la voilà qui cause avec moi comme si nous étions à la contredanse” (227). Creating the illusion of social unity, the dances underscore the tension between a burning desire for change and a steadfast continuance of gender- and class-based constraints. Reconfiguring the here and now, the dances emancipate the participants by blurring divisions between individual and collective bodies.¹ The novel advocates for dissolving class hierarchies while also delineating the challenges to changing social prejudices.²

During a period of evolving social and political regimes, laws governing dance transformed throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the novels discussed in this chapter, some female characters emerge as active subjects during the dances. Others are reduced to mindless puppets or bodiless chimeras. As fantasies of weak sylphlike women circulated on stage and in literature, ideals of incorporeal women threatened real women’s embodied subjectivity. Grace remained a nebulous concept, yet Wollstonecraft’s notion of subjective grace seemed possible. Collective dances tracing ephemeral figures allow us to affirm “how we inhabit bodies through how we are with

¹ Rancière, in *Le spectateur émancipé*, defines emancipation as this blurring between individuals and collectivities, between work and leisure.
² As Françoise Sylvos notes, “Sand n’est pas contentée de relayer les doctrines sociales qui étaient dans l’air du temps. Sa synthèse originale témoigne de sa capacité à anticiper sur l’évolution sociale, sur la formation de la classe moyenne, [...] sur l’avènement futur d’une société de loisirs” (1220).
others” (Ahmed 248). They can temporarily topple social hierarchies by creating shared moments of sensation and leisure as diverse groups of people experience grace. Desires to dominate, however, seep into dancing events, destroy the illusions, and hinder graceful inclinations.
Chapter 2 Waltzes: Hallucinations and Scandal

L’air est brûlant, la valse tourne et vole,

Le cercle fuit et s’agrandit là-bas;

Allons, madame, on a votre parole,

On vous attend: ne valserez-vous pas?

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, “Invitation à la valse.”

L’âge où l’on danse, mais où l’on n’ose pas valser, – c’est le printemps.

L’âge où l’on danse, où l’on valse, – c’est l’été.

L’âge où l’on danse encore, mais où l’on préfère valser, – c’est l’automne.

Enfin, l’âge où l’on ne danse plus, – c’est l’hiver… l’hiver toujours rigoureux de

la vie.

Delphine de Girardin, La Canne de M. de Balzac.

I hate this creature I’m chained to. I hated him the moment I saw his leering,

bestial face. And here I’ve been locked in his noxious embrace for the thirty-five years

this waltz has lasted. Is that orchestra never going to stop playing? Or must this obscene

travesty of a dance go on until hell burns out?

Dorothy Parker, “The Waltz.”
Throughout much of its history, the waltz was not considered a suitable dance for women. Numerous treaties denounced it for causing violent emotions and sexual excitation that threatened to corrupt or harm women morally and physically.\(^1\) Joining discourses execrating or exalting this fashionable dance, the novels studied in this chapter use descriptions of waltzing to discuss consent and sexual desire without explicitly mentioning sex. Creating a correlation between the waltz and the heroines’ downfalls, these novels show how morally weak and domineering male characters either lose their reasoning capacities while waltzing or force women who do not wish to waltz into participating in this dangerous dance.

If grace is, as Johann Winckelmann believed, “the harmony of agent and action,” then consent to act proceeds all graceful actions (274).\(^2\) For Winckelmann, sensuality and reason come together to form grace, which he defines as reasonable pleasure (vernünftig Gefällige). Men and women, in Eckart Goebel’s reading of Winckelmann, can experience grace in the same manner because grace announces a universal possibility to create beautiful movement. Graceful inclinations encompass thoughtful movements toward others, not coerced movements. Like consent, graceful inclinations rely on freedom, personal expression, and collective experiences of time and space.\(^3\) When an individual

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\(^1\) Other physical activities like bicycling, football, and gymnastics also have a long history of being thought to threaten women’s reproductive health and mental stability.

\(^2\) According to Eckart Goebel, Winckelmann was the first German to develop a theory of grace using the word Grazie instead of Anmut.

\(^3\) As Geneviève Fraïsse defines consent, “il s’agit de liberté, de savoir, d’expression personnelle ; et plus encore de sentir avec” (*Du Consentement* 27).
waltzes without giving her enthusiastic consent, the twirling becomes nightmarish instead of graceful.

All but one of the texts studied in this chapter present the waltz as immoral chaos or a distressing event that the heroine endures but does not choose. In Sophie Cottin’s *Malvina* (1800), one of the title character’s enemies seduces Malvina’s husband with an intoxicating waltz. Julienne Barbara von Krüdener, in *Valérie* (1803), described the trancelike effects of two waltzes destabilizing a young man in love with a married woman. In Claire de Duras’s unfinished novel *Mémoires de Sophie* (1823), the waltz symbolizes coquetry and opposes Christian virtue. Similarly, in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), George Sand contrasts the excess of waltzing aristocrats with the bucolic innocence of contradances. Sand’s *Leone Leoni* (1835) and Marie d’Agoult’s *Nélida* (1846) present the waltz as a terrifying sexual initiation. Greatly differing from these novels, Sand’s fantasy novel *Laura, voyage dans le cristal* (1864) portrays an intellectual woman dancing as a form of protest and perceiving the world through a new perspective thanks to the waltz.

**Revolutionary Circles: The History of the Waltz**

The history of the waltz reflects cultural changes in fashion, social hierarchies, and sexuality. The waltzing craze took off in Europe at a time of intense political and social change, namely the French Revolution, the reapportioning of national borders after the Napoleonic Wars, the War of 1812 between the United States and England, and the rising position of the bourgeoisie. After the 1789 Revolution, dance took part in the festivities educating French citizens as they constructed a new nation. This reeducation
project intensified under the Terror (1793-1794) before being continuously reoriented throughout the following century. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, circular figures became an emblem of national harmony in architecture and art.\textsuperscript{1} Waltzing expressed French citizens’ “spirit of popular rebellion against aristocratic tradition” by favoring “the social significance of the romantic couple over the hierarchies of paternalistic aristocratic tradition” (Claire, “Monstrous” 205). The 1789 Revolution legitimized and generalized the waltz. As Alfred de Musset wrote in his 1838 poem “À la mi-carême,” “Lorsqu’au bruit des canons dansait la République / […] / La valse d’un coup d’aile a détrôné la danse” (ll.54, 64). During the Bourbon Restauration (1814-1830), the waltz, because of its association with the Revolution, fell out of popularity among aristocrats, who began to concoct elaborate quadrilles.\textsuperscript{2} Waltzing, however, remained a favorite at bourgeois events. During the July Monarchy (1830-1848), the cotilllon and galop reigned in Paris, further causing waltzomania to wane. Nevertheless, the waltz was danced in diverse settings throughout the long nineteenth century.

The waltz and contradances made the minuet, the last of the belles danses, obsolete. For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the minuet, derived from a peasant dance known as the branle de Poitou, flourished in aristocratic ballrooms. The minuet consists in sophisticated choreography, an “emphasis on gracious manners,” and a limited number of participants (Yaraman 1). The waltz is made up of a simple set of repeating steps as numerous couples spin around the space. Opposing the determined gait

\textsuperscript{1} See Mona Ozouf’s La Fête révolutionnaire.
\textsuperscript{2} Nevertheless, Sand described waltzing aristocrats in Le Compagnon du Tour de France set in 1823.
of minuet dancers, the gliding steps of the waltz recall the sliding steps defining fifteenth-century *basses danses*. As the waltz embraced the Romantic movement’s penchant for the “spontaneous unpredictability of individual expression,” curvilinear lines and dispersed dancers replaced the symmetrical formations of court dances showcasing the noble body (Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz* 26).¹

The waltz, considered synonymous with a bourgeois “desire for sophistication,” demanded skill but proposed few choreographic challenges (Yaraman 5). Without complex choreography necessitating lessons, the waltz “allowed for freedom of expression and provided an opportunity for proving oneself” (Katz 374). Delphine de Girardin (1804-1855) lamented this simplicity as esthetically displeasing: “vous appelez cela danser: faire trois pas en avant, avec les pieds en dedans, le corps penché et les épaules arrondies; puis hasarder une glissade à droite sans quitter terre, et comme si vous étiez fixée au parquet” (*Lettres* 61). Although the repeating choreography makes the waltz appear easy, its vigorous turns test each dancer’s bodily control amid a fast-moving group.²

Waltzing staged the chaotic tenacity of a growingly individualist society struggling to function as a unit. Although many people can perform the waltz at the same time, it is not a group dance nor is it a dance in which one partner leads the other. As

¹ Even Bonaparte promoted the waltz as a symbol of “a unified republican spirit of post-revolutionary liberty and egalitarian access” to luxury (Claire, “A Moral Defence” 167).  
² Describing a ball in Vienna, where the guests waltzed “avec une telle fureur,” Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun wrote, “je ne pouvais concevoir comment toutes ces personnes, en tournant de la sorte, ne s’étourdissaient pas au point de tomber; mais les hommes et les femmes sont tous si bien habitués à ce violent exercice, qu’ils ne s’en reposent pas un seul moment” (1:281).
sociologist Remi Hess explains, the waltzing couple becomes one dynamic entity. Whereas couples execute contradances side by side, each waltzing couple turns on itself in a small circle while simultaneously tracing a circular motion around the space, spiraling until they reach their starting point. For dance ethnologist Jean-Michel Guilcher, the rise of couple dances such as the waltz and the polka transformed the ball into a display of solitary couples.¹ Contesting Guilcher’s conclusion, Hess argues that each couple, always aware of the space, seeks its place within the larger group as the dancing ensemble creates a cosmic force of rotating masses revolving around a larger axis. Through its continuous turns, the waltz leads the dancers into a trance that is simultaneously experienced on the individual and group level.² Promoting the autonomy of the individual couple within a collective action, the waltz reflected France’s emerging liberal values.

¹ In La contredanse: un tournant dans l’histoire française de la danse, Guilcher wrote, “Le bal ne manifeste plus un accord unanime; il juxtapose des solitudes” (180).
² “Le couple est ivre dans un collectif qui partage sa transe” (Hess 314).
Waltzing gives the illusion of autonomy and ownership within the dancing couple. According to an 1833 article in the *Revue musicale*, the administration of the Paris Opera, under the direction of Louis-Désiré Véron, eliminated monotone contradances from the orchestra’s repertoire so that the *bal de l’Opéra* only included stylish dances like the waltz and the polka. The article emphasizes the advantages of these modern dances in which each woman is bound to one cavalier: “elles permettent aux cavaliers de ne jamais quitter la main de leurs dames, et ne les obligent pas à les livrer à des mains étrangères au gré des combinaisons des figures de la contredanse” (“Bals” 402). Nonetheless, the waltz’s choreography proposes relatively egalitarian gender roles. Emphasizing the couple as a socially sovereign body, the waltz differs from
contradances and court ballets presenting bodily perfection as delicate women and robust men. Both waltzing partners must possess sufficient balance so that neither pulls the other around the room. The English dance master Thomas Wilson advised that the lady and her cavalier be of “an equal height in stature, or nearly so,” to avoid difficulties and an “appearance of extreme awkwardness” (l). Whereas the man leads the woman in most social dances, both members of the waltzing couple lead and are led. Evident in James Gillray’s 1800 drawing Walzer au Mouchoir (Figure 3), this approximation of equality on the dance floor ruffled members of the old order.

Beginning and ending with the instrumental accompaniment, the dance is intricately married to the music which, like the choreography, lacks a dramatic high point. After 1819, thanks to compositions by Carl Maria von Weber and Johann Strauss, waltz tempos accelerated. At the beginning of the century, the waltz rhythm was much slower, yet couples could still turn quickly by completing a full rotation in three measures instead of four.1 In a continuous $\frac{3}{4}$ time, everything in the waltz repeats, yet each repetition involves a change as “each rotation carries the couple to a new place” and the dancers trace a clockwise spiral floor pattern (Engelhardt 14).

This double dose of turning tests the dancers’ ability to combat dizziness and disorientation, creating effects considered to be “either monstrous or divine” (Claire,

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1 Each measure equates to a set of three steps. In the first set, the woman faces inward and steps on her right foot as the man, facing outward, steps on his left foot. In the second set, the roles are reversed.
“Monstrous” 206).¹ Like Mevlevis (Whirling Dervishes) performing double rotations, waltzers demonstrate a mastery of equilibrium as they enter a hypnotic state. Drawing on Sigmund Freud’s theory of the repetition compulsion, Molly Engelhardt argues that waltzing summons the libido because the repetitive circling “allows the dancer to reexperience something identical over and over, which provides a means of escaping into the realm of fantasy without the pleasure gained being compromised by impending danger” (Engelhardt 56). As Cellarius stated in La danse des salons (1847), the purpose of the waltz lies in the pleasure of the waltzers. Though denunciations of circular motions in social dances already existed, the spinning of the waltz became a metaphor for chaos still prevalent today.²

Though the first composers of waltz music are unknown, the dance and its three-meter compositions likely evolved from the German country dances known as the Ländler, the Weller, and the Almrischer.³ In the Tyrolian region of Bavaria, the Ländler was born out of the final section of the Schuhplattler in which men imitated the mating rituals of the Bavarian black grouse “wooing the woman with his dancing” as she played “the demure hen, teasing but also repulsing the man’s attentions” (Knowles 20). After dancing without any physical contact, the man and woman moved together in what would

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¹ As Sophie Jacotot shows, turning encompasses many facets: equilibrium, virtuosity, ecstasy, community, and seduction. For this reason, most dances include some type of turning or pivoting motion.
² For example, Guillaume Coppier, in his 1663 Essays et definitions de mots, defined dance as “un cercle dont le démon est le centre” (qtd. Louison-Lassablière, 156-57).
³ According to Thomas Wilson, who regulated and institutionalized the waltz in England, an early version of the waltz first appeared in the Bavarian region of Swabia. Fritz Klingenbeck suggests that the waltz rhythm originated in the songs of Neithart von Reuenthal, a thirteenth-century German troubadour. Throughout Western history, triple-meter dance music has prevailed over other meters. For Raymond Bayer, triple meter allows for the most graceful music.
become the *Ländler*, a slow waltz step executed as the man held the woman’s waist while she placed her hands on his shoulders. To conclude the dance, he would lift her in the air and then place her on the ground. Comparable to animal mating rituals, social dances ceremoniously bring together possible mates.

The German origin of the waltz remains open to debate. The German verb *Walzer*, meaning to turn or to revolve, first appeared in 1525, and the first known use of the French term *valse* occurred in 1635.¹ For some dance historians, in particular Marcelle Mourgues, the waltz derived from the French volta, a five-step galliard danced in 6/4 or 6/8 meter in which the man lifts the woman, spins her in the air, then sets her down as in the finale of the *Schuhplattler*.² Thanks to the volta, two people turning together became a symbol of erotic interactions.³ Originating in twelfth-century French courts and reaching the acme of its popularity in Renaissance courts, the volta and, in particular, its final lift were considered suggestive or obscene.⁴ Nothing proves a genealogy connecting the volta and the waltz.

French Romantics exalted the waltz’s German origin. In Musset’s poem “A la mi-carême,” the narrator apostrophizes the “Muse de la valse” and addresses her as the

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¹ In a letter from the poet Honorat de Bueil de Racan to Jean Chapelain, discussing the pedantic grammarian Gilles Ménage, Racan wrote, “Les boiteux et les goutteux ne se peuvent pas empêcher de marcher, mais il n’y a rien qui les oblige à danser la valse ou les cinq pas” (340).
² Francis de Miomandre and Jacques Baril likewise suggest that the waltz originated from the volta.
³ The volta’s name comes from the fifteenth-century Provençal expression “si a prez a la volta,” meaning to do a half turn. Expressions like “tourner autour de quelqu’un” and “se tourner au-tour” derive from the erotic connotation of turning during dances (Jacotot 136).
⁴ In *De la démonomanie des sorcières* (1587), political philosopher Jean Bodin blamed the impudent movements of the volta for causing homicides and abortions: “La volte, que les sorciers ont amenée d’Italie en France, outré les mouvements insolents et impudiques, a cela de malheur, qu’une infinité d’homicides et d’avortements en adviennent” (82).
“Belle Nymphé allemande” (ll.33-34). Whether the waltz derived from French or German dances remains a mystery; however, its role in nineteenth-century French Germanophilia is undeniable.

As the waltz spread throughout Europe, a myriad of variations developed. In the early years of nineteenth century, the German waltz was different from the French waltz, which consisted in slower music and the inclusion of balletic steps. Although numerous dance scholars qualify the waltz as a Republican dance distant from the baroque traces of the minuet and other court dances, Thomas Wilson’s dance manual on waltzing describes the French Waltz, or la valse mondaine, as similar to eighteenth-century court dances. According to Wilson, the couples took their places and, beginning with the feet in a balletic fifth position, performed four marching steps before falling into the waltz movements. The French waltz was made up of three movements performed in succession: first the slow waltz, then the sautéuse waltz, and finally a jeté or quick sautéuse waltz. These phases, according to Wilson, included ornamentations such as pirouettes, leaping steps, and interlaced arms (Figure 4). In contrast, one repeated series of movements makes up the German waltz. Whereas the German waltz was danced flat-footed with a constant rotating glide, dancers performed some steps of the French waltz on the balls of their feet. These variations demonstrate how the choreography took on aspects of different dance traditions as it traveled across national borders.
One version of the French waltz was in fact the contradance known as the allemande. Describing a French waltz performed at the Jardin de Tivoli, Sir John Dean Paul, the author of *Journal of a Party of Pleasure to Paris in the Month of August, 1802*, found the women elegant and their cavaliers lewd: “the attitudes of the women are tasteful and sportive, to say no more of them, but of the men I can say nothing, they were so dirty and vulgar that they only excited disgust” (48). In his sketch accompanying this account, the couples hold on to each other in various manners, suggesting that they danced a waltz performed like an allemande (Figure 5). Yet, the women’s hair blowing about shows that spinning certainly remained integral to the dance. Under the name of the French waltz, this choreography with less turning than the closed couple waltz became popular in England after 1815. The allemande with its various attitudes and the repeatedly twirling waltz coexisted in France during the First Empire, after which only
the latter persisted. The dance scenes studied in this chapter, with the exception of that in Mémoires de Sophie, most likely describe the German waltz since they accentuate the heady effects of continuous turning and make no mention of attitudes, pirouettes, or marching entrances.

Figure 5 John Paul Dean, Journal of a Party of Pleasure to Paris in the Month of August, 1802. (Gallica)

The waltzing couple’s sexually suggestive embrace, known as the prise-fermée, allows the dancers to pivot together. When a man and a woman waltz together, the man holds her right hand and grasps her waist while she places her left hand on his shoulder. This firm clasp prevents the couple from losing their balance and twirling apart as their constant eye contact “orients each partner with respect to the other, thus minimizing the effect of the whirling by creating the sensory illusion of standing still” (Yaraman 6).
Locked together by their embrace and their gaze, the two dancers feel each other’s sweating skin and heavy breathing making the waltz sexually evocative.¹ Alfred de Musset’s 1836 novel La confession d’un enfant du siècle describes a heady waltz before segueing into a meditation on the bewitching power women have over men. The narrator Octave exalts the superiority of the waltz over other dances because it best allows him to possess a woman.² At the same time, as the partners take turns leading and being led, Octave cannot distinguish who is the object of whom. The novel blames men, especially those who waltz with virgins and then flee, for making the dance lewd. Octave claims that the waltz brings out women’s sensual modesty, though he ignores their capacity to consent or refuse to dance. Muddling accepted beliefs about gender roles and sexuality, waltzes shocked onlookers.

As Gemütlichkeit (a feeling of well-being) and sentimentality became priorities at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the act of losing oneself in the waltz reflected this

¹ In certain texts, the waltz makes other forms of physical closeness permissible. For example, in Théophile Gautier’s conte fantastique “La cafetière” (1831), the story’s hero waltzes with a shepherdess and becomes excited by this proximity: “Le sein de la jeune fille touchait ma poitrine, sa joue veloutée effleurait la mienne, et son haleine suave flottait sur ma bouche” (257). Exhausted, the shepherdess wishes to sit but only one chair remains available. Having already embraced her body, the protagonist suggests that she sit on his knees. In Guy de Maupassant’s La Maison Tellier (1881), a waltz turns into an opportunity for kissing.

² Octave proclaims: “je me lançai dans le tourbillon de la valse. Cet exercice vraiment délicieux m’a toujours été cher; je n’en connais pas de plus noble, ni qui soit plus digne en tout d’une belle femme et d’un jeune garçon; toutes les danses, au prix de celle-là, ne sont que des conventions insipides ou des prétextes pour les entretiens les plus insignifiants. C’est véritablement posséder en quelque sorte une femme que de la tenir une demi-heure dans ses bras, et de l’entraîner ainsi, palpitante malgré elle, et non sans quelque risque, de telle sorte qu’on ne pourrait dire si on la protège ou si on la force. Quelques-unes se livrent alors avec une si voluptueuse pudeur, avec un si doux et si pur abandon, qu’on ne sait si ce qu’ont ressent près d’elles est du désir ou de la crainte, et si, en les serrant sur son cœur, on se pâmerait ou on les briserait comme des roseaux. L’Allemagne, où l’on a inventé cette danse, est à coup sûr un pays où l’on aime” (Musset 71, my emphasis).
new perspective on the individual’s discovery and experience of the world. By allowing dancers “to lose consciousness of time and space” and escape rules governing erotic expression, the waltz created a representation of a sensual world “void of responsibility” (Katz 376). As described in “Invitation à la valse,” a poem by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859) published posthumously in 1860, the constant rotation produces a sensation of flying through space: “Valsez, planez comme les tourterelles / Planent le soir dans l’azur sombre et doux / À votre essor on vous prendrait pour elles” (ll. 21-23). The out-of-body experience brought on by circling around the axis of the couple and the axis of the group can create a liberating sensation as dancers glide across the floor without feeling grounded to the earth. This unremitting twirling makes the waltz propitious for joyful occasions. As Isabelle de Montolieu wrote in her novel Caroline de Lichtfield (1786), discussing the title character’s recourse to dancing as a distraction from her worries, “Caroline n’imaginait aucun chagrin dont une valse ou une contre-danse ne dût la consoler” (30). Whether producing states of joy or diabolic intoxication, the dizzying effects of waltzing lie at the core of its seduction and censure.

In numerous literary works, the waltz produces dreamlike states. The most notable, Goethe’s 1774 epistolary novel The Sufferings of Young Werther, increased the popularity of the waltz in France. By presenting a corporeal dynamic that draws attention to an erotic code of vertigo and “fusion,” the waltz in Werther created a new model of perception and representation for nineteenth-century European novels (Neumann 43). In

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1 Little scholarship exists on this novel that Krüdener cites as belonging to the same genre as Valérie.
letters to his friend Wilhelm, Goethe’s eponymous hero shares his philosophical musings and his fascination with Lotte. The ball scene exemplifies the transformative period when partygoers performed the minuet, contradances, and waltzes during the same evening. Lotte possesses a love for dancing yet also recognizes the possible sin in such a passion. After refusing to dance the second country dance with Werther, she promises him the third, a “German variation” that she adores (18). Prioritizing her desire to dance over social dogma, she breaks the local custom that “every couple that belongs together remain together for the German dance” because her partner “waltzes badly” (18). Determined that Werther will dance well, she tells him to ask her unnamed partner for leave. Lambasting the partner’s lack of ascendancy over her, Werther vows never to allow his beloved to waltz with another man. The novel thus sparked an international

1 Though many similarities exist between The Sufferings of Young Werther and Valérie, I do not claim that Goethe’s novel inspired Valérie nor deny a lineage between the two novels. According to the poet Charles-Julien Lioult de Chêndollé’s journal, Krüdener said that Werther was void of thought. Comparisons between the two works vexed Goethe. On 21 April 1804, he wrote to Henrich Carl Abraham Eichstädt that Valérie lacked merit. Later, Goethe advised the chancellor Friedrich von Müller to read Krüdener’s novel. Although contemporary studies of Werther greatly surpass scholarship on Valérie, at the time of their publication, both novels attracted a substantial readership across Europe.

2 Gerhard Neumann argues that Goethe opposed ritual (contradances) and anti-ritual (the waltz) to create a subversive socio-utopian order. “We weaved around one another in minuets; […] Lotte and her partner began an English country dance, and you can imagine my delight when it was her turn to begin the figures with us” (Werther 17-18).

3 “If this passion is a fault, said Lotte, I gladly confess to you that I know nothing better than dancing” (Werther 17). Werther extols her complete engrossment in the music and movement as she dances a country dance: “You see, she is so absorbed in it with her heart and soul, her whole body one harmony, so carefree, so natural, as if this were the only thing in the world, as if she thought or felt nothing else; and in such moments everything else surely does vanish from her mind” (18). Absorbed in the dance and embodying the music, Lotte is no longer a woman dancing. Freeing herself from social laws, she becomes the dance.

4 “I vowed to myself that a girl whom I loved, to whom I was attached, should never waltz with anyone but me [mir nie mit einem andern walzen sollte als mit mir], even if it were to cost me my life” (18).
debate on whether a man should allow his adored lady to waltz with other men, “given the dance’s ways of establishing ecstatic intimacy” (Claire, “Monstrous” 211).

Establishing a precedent for the novels discussed in this chapter, Werther’s waltz leads him into an oneiric state dominated by his love for Lotte. The dance transports him beyond his sublunary circumstances and limitations: “Never have I danced so effortlessly. I was no longer a mere mortal. [Nie ist mir’s so leicht vom Fleck gegangen. Ich war kein Mensch mehr.] To hold the loveliest creature in my arms and to fly with her like the wind, so that everything else around me vanished” (Goethe 18). Goethe thus replaced the static “coup de foudre” with the intoxicating waltz giving priority to touch, movement, and hallucinations over sight (Neumann 45). In the nineteenth century, the whirling waltz, hashish, and alcohol became means for entering dreamworlds, escaping melancholy, and sparking the imagination.

The opiate-like waltz’s literary presence continued into the twentieth century. In Leo Tolstoy’s short story “After the Ball,” written in 1903 and published posthumously in 1911, the narrator tells a tale about an evening of his youth during which he waltzed so much with a young woman that he lost awareness of his bodily presence: “Whenever there was a waltz figure in the mazurka, I waltzed with her for a long time, and breathing fast and smiling, she would say, ‘Encore’; and I went on waltzing and waltzing, as though unconscious of any bodily existence” (190). When his listeners refute the possibility of becoming unaware of his arm around his partner’s waist, he cries out, “There you are, moderns all over! Nowadays you think of nothing but the body. It was different in our day. The more I was in love the less corporeal was she in my eyes. Nowadays you see
legs, ankles, and I don’t know what” (190, my emphasis). Indeed, nineteenth-century notions of heterosexual love depended on women’s disappearing bodies and sexless grace.

Political and religious attacks on the waltz turned to scientific arguments supporting dominant understandings of proper bodily conduct. In 1797, Salomon Jakob Wolf published an anti-waltz pamphlet titled Beweiss dass das Walzen eine Hauptquelle der Schwäche des Körpers und des Geistes unserer Generation sey (Proof that waltzing is a main source of the weakness of the body and mind of our generation), which sold out two printings. A year later, the German doctor Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland published a guide for living longer, Die Kunst das menschliche Leben zu verlängern, in which he blamed the waltz for tiring vital forces and causing women to age quickly. Attacks on the waltz most frequently focused on its dangerous consequences for women. These efforts, however, did little to prevent its rising popularity.2

Anti-waltz discourse likewise resounded in France where the waltz represented French citizens’ emancipation from the ancien régime and was forbidden at the court of Louis XVIII. Royalist Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis, in her 1818 Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour, reproached the embrace and befuddling effects of the waltz, yet recognized its popularity as a youthful caprice without intent to attack

1 Waltzing, like many forms of movement, indeed posed a danger for women donning large hooped skirts. For example, Oscar Wilde’s half-sisters, Emily and Mary Wilde, died after their crinolines caught fire while waltzing at a ball.
2 Across Europe, pro-waltzing discourses counterattacked these diatribes. In A Description of the Correct Method of Waltzing, Wilson lamented the prejudices qualifying the waltz as “an enemy to true morals, and as endangering virtue” spread by individuals ignorant of “the beautiful, truly graceful and pleasing union of attitudes and movements constituting genuine Waltzing” (xxix-xxx, xxxii).
Christian morals. In *L’Ami des femmes* (1804), the doctor P.J. Marie de Saint-Ursin warned against waltzing because the dance mimics sexual intercourse: “Les regards confondus, absorbés l’un dans l’autre; genou contre genou, les mains entrelacées, corps à corps, j’ai presque dit bouche à bouche, […] cette sueur amoureuse, et cette bouche balbutiante, et ce sein agité par des battements de cœur” (63). If the closed embrace brings to mind sexual intercourse, it is perhaps the man and woman’s equally active, and therefore exhausting, roles executing the dance that alarmed the doctor. Medical texts blamed the waltz for producing a wide range of illnesses and sexual manias, such as tuberculosis, miscarriages, and nymphomania. Novelists, memoirists, poets, and librettists also took part in condemning the dance Victor Hugo called “valse impure, au vol lascif et circulaire.” Censorship of the waltz, in fact, contributed to its growing fame.

**Kitty’s Waltz in Malvina**

In Sophie Cottin’s 1800 four-volume novel *Malvina*, the eponymous character first refuses to dance when she dances a contradance. Antipodal to the novel’s first dance scene, the second description of dancing, found in the final

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1 “Une jeune personne, légèrement drapée, se jetant dans les bras d’un jeune homme qui la presse contre son sein, et qui l’entraîne avec une telle impétuosité, que bientôt elle éprouve un violent battement de cœur, et qu’épêrdue la tête lui tourne !… Voilà ce que c’est qu’une *walse* ! …… Les vieilles femmes trouvent cette espèce d’allégorie fort étrange. Elles disent que les *périgourdines*, à la mode de leur temps, étaient plus décentes, et beaucoup plus gaies…… Mais on sait que les vieilles femmes sont frondeuses et malignes, et qu’aujourd’hui la jeunesse est si parfaitement innocent, qu’elle n’entend finesse à rien, et que c’est avec une extrême simplicité que l’on chante avec une expression passionnée, que l’on danse des *walses*” (355).

2 Dance as a preparation for sexual acts was not always decried. The article on dance in Pariset and Villeneuve’s *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* suggests that dance is an appropriate exercise to prepare women for their conjugal duties (5).

3 This verse appears in Hugo’s poem “Oh! Qu’que vous soyez, jeune ou vieux, riche ou sage” in *Les Feuilles d’automne* (1831).
volume, stages a Bedlam of waltzing and champagne. The day after Edmond and Malvina secretly marry, he leaves to reclaim his reputation and foil Mistress Birton’s plan to separate Malvina from her adoptive daughter Fanny. During his journey, he stops at the home of Mistress Dorset. There, Kitty Fenwich, informed of his marriage, allures him as part of Mistress Birton’s conniving scheme. He refuses to participate in a bet that only he can succeed in seducing Kitty, but his initial signs of fidelity disappear when he spends the night with Kitty, locked in her bedroom.

The two dance scenes differentiate the waltz from contradances in addition to opposing Malvina’s modest dancing and Kitty’s sensual movements. Whereas Malvina dances out of obligation, Kitty seeks out her cavalier determined to seduce him. In a strategic maneuver, Kitty asks Edmond to waltz as party guests praise her talents.

Peu à peu la tête de sir Edmond se monte; mistriss Fenwich, attentive à toutes ses impressions, s’en aperçoit, et profite de ce moment pour demander une walse; elle sent que le succès de ses premières tentatives lui permet d’en hasarder une autre, et elle laisse voir à sir Edmond le désir de ne walser qu’avec lui. Comment s’y serait-il refusé? lors même qu’il n’eût point éprouvé d’attrait à tenir cette charmante créature dans ses bras, son amour-propre y eût été excité par les propos de plusieurs jeunes gens qui, pendant le bal, lui avaient parlé de mistriss Fenwich avec enthousiasme, et l’avaient peinte comme la plus délicieuse, mais la plus indifférente des femmes. (M 76-77)

Edmond loses control over his reasoning before he begins to spin. Kitty seduces this fickle man whose scruples are easily defeated. She takes advantage of his vanity by
linking her desire to dance with him to his superiority. Seeking another waltz, she whispers to him, “La walse va commencer, je l’aime avec passion; mais, parmi tous les hommes qui sont ici, le seul qui ne soit pas étranger pour Kitty, est le seul avec qui elle voudrait la danser” (80). She opposes the myth of women as passive recipients by expressing her sexuality through movement and language. However, speaking in the third person, she becomes other to herself. She is a predatorial femme fatale employing a Robert-Lovelace-like tactic of seducing aggressively while feigning sincere fondness. Although the novel clearly censures women’s sexual desires, Kitty avoids the fate of literary vixens like Manon Lescaut and averts punishment.

Throughout the century, descriptions of the waltz question if the dance is ontologically immoral or if the dancers’ intentions make it dissolute. As Wilson argued, how one dances and not what one dances determines the respectability of the waltz. In Malvina, male pride bolstered by possessing a woman’s body fuels its sexual valence. The embrace and his friends’ jealousy suppress Edmond’s hesitations, lead him to forget his wife, and pursue Kitty by his own volition:

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1 My use of the adjective *predatorial* is inspired by Simone de Beauvoir’s praise of Bridget Bardot’s film performances in the 1959 article, “Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita syndrome,” showing how Bardot’s onscreen activeness and aggressive eroticism liberates her from the taboos oppressing women’s sexuality: “Dans le jeu de l’amour elle est le chasseur autant que la proie. Le mâle est un objet pour elle, exactement comme elle est un objet pour lui. Et c’est précisément ce qui blesse l’orgueil masculin” (369). For Beauvoir, women’s frustration in their sexual experiences emerges from their lack of the activeness. As explained in *Le Deuxième sexe*, they envy men’s position as predators. Although Beauvoir’s description of Bardot’s sexual movements and Cottin’s description of Kitty’s seductive waltz are inscribed in drastically different historical contexts, this comparison allows us to consider Cottin’s portrayal of assertive sexuality as what Jacques Rancière calls an *anachrony*, an event or notion that departs from the restrictions of its time and causes beliefs to change.
Il voit ses amis remarquer avec envie et surprise la préférence dont il est l’objet; il ne résiste pas au désir de jouir de son triomphe à leurs yeux, et bien décidé à quitter mistriss Fenwich après la walse, il s’avance, entoure de ses bras une taille charmante, voit le sein de Kitty palpiter à travers la simple gaze qui le couvre, respire son haleine, et commence avec elle cette danse dangereuse, que la volupté imagina pour éveiller le désir, amollir le courage et enflammer l’innocence. (81)

Sensual pleasure from the closed embrace tests the moral stability of its dancers, but Edmond’s lust prevails over his conjugal devotion before he begins to swirl. Dancing with the most desirable woman at the party, he establishes his superiority among his male peers. Yet, away from the approving glances of his friends, he continues to pursue Kitty. Cottin indeed condemned the waltz as debauched. Nevertheless, by presenting both waltzers as unscrupulous characters, the novel suggests that the dance excites preexisting propensities toward immoral behavior.

The waltz is not the only sign of the evening’s excesses. A Rabelaisian smorgasbord of sumptuous dishes and bubbly libations accompany the twirling chaos, to the extent that the party resembles the extravagance of eighteenth-century French aristocrats instead of a gathering of po-faced Scots, “on croirait voir un souper de Paris, sur les confins de l’Écosse” (81). Kitty encourages the drunken revelry by continuously opening bottles of champagne. The combination of alcohol and turning throws the reprobate husband into a hallucinatory state: “Mais déjà la tête d’Edmond, que la walse avait commencé à enflammer, s’exalte et se perd; les ris bruyants, les fumées du vin, les regards agaçants de sa charmante voisine, tout conspire contre sa sagesse et contre le
bonheur de Malvina” (82-83). Rhetorically creating a sense of excess, this enumeration of disagreeable sensations contrasting with Malvina’s calm happiness places the reader in Edmond’s drunken confusion.¹ His body succumbs to this moral perversion as he reaches toward his temptress: “Sa main égarée rencontre celle de Kitty, il la serre avec ardeur: à ce mouvement, mistriss Fenwich ne doute plus de sa victoire” (83). Reminiscent of the courting rituals evoked in the Bavarian Schuhplattler, the novel portrays the waltz as an animalistic prelude to the sexual encounter. Its originality lies in the woman’s position as the sexual victor. Cottin does not completely reverse the script of the man asking the woman to dance and taking her hand. Edmond is the active subject initiating the dance by wrapping his arm around his partner. Nevertheless, Kitty strategically orchestrates the evening and proves that he is unworthy of Malvina.² The contrast between the waltz and the contradance in Malvina accentuates the dichotomy between grace spontaneously present thanks to a person’s authentic and generous actions and superficial beauty used to gain an advantage.

**Valérie: Forced Waltzes**

In Barbara Julianne von Krüdener’s 1803 novel Valérie, ou Lettres de Gustave de Linar à Ernest de G ... , the dance scenes indicate a tension between dance as a graceful art and dance as a perilous activity. Rivaling with the popularity of Atala (1801) and Delphine, Krüdener’s novel was a success throughout Europe with five French editions, ¹ Marie-Catherine Huet-Brichard describes the esthetic of this novel as a “valse-hésitation” in which contradictory tensions never find a resolution and reveal a deep pessimism as well as “une tentative désespérée pour échapper à un nihilisme radical” (31-32).
² In a way, Malvina investigates the repeated claim in Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa that “bad women” are far more “cruel and insulting” than “bad men” (1060).
three in German, one in English, and one in Dutch. The first and last dances of the novel are waltzes, bookending the heroine’s expressive shawl dance, which I discuss in the next chapter. Although written before Krüdener’s renown as a mystic, the novel places dance between sin and a spiritual performance.

*Valérie* is an epistolary novel composed mostly of letters from Gustave de Linar to his friend Ernest.¹ Gustave, a young melancholic Swedish aristocrat, sets off to Venice with the Count de M, his deceased father’s friend. During the journey, Gustave becomes infatuated with the Count’s adolescent wife Valérie. While the old Count reminds us of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Mr. de Wolmar or Adélaïde de Souza’s Mr. de Sénange, the childlike eponymous character comes across as a vision residing in Gustave’s fantasies.² Gustave oscillates between desiring to be loved by Valérie and wanting to remain faithful to the Count, whom he respects as if he were his adopted father. The first half of the novel portrays Valérie as capricious and naively generous. After her pregnancy and the ensuing death of her newborn, she solemnly enters adulthood. Unable to satisfy his desires, the Romantic hero dies rejoicing in the knowledge that Valérie has learned about his love for her.

The novel warns readers, male and female alike, about the potential moral and physical dangers of the waltz. For Michel Mercier, although the waltzes in *Valérie* reveal an increase in the love that overtakes Gustave, they are secondary episodes in the

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¹ There is also one letter from Gustave to Valérie, a few letters from Ernest to Gustave, and the final letters exchanged between the Count and Ernest.
² Multiple similarities exist between *Valérie* and Adélaïde de Souza’s 1794 epistolary novel *Adèle de Sénange, ou Lettres de Lord Sydenham*. 

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narrative serving to frame Valérie’s shawl dance. Disagreeing with Mercier, I argue that the waltzes are paramount for understanding the moralizing tone of the novel since the waltzes spark Gustave’s manic love for Valérie and precede the death of her son.

The first waltz underscores two aspects of the dance—its German origin and its debated appropriateness. Gustave, Valérie, and the Count spend a night in an Austrian village where local musicians play waltzes in the inn: “Tu sais combien on cultive la musique en Allemagne” (AV 82). A group of seemingly lower-class, coquettish young women waltz, and afterwards, when only the musicians remain as onlookers, Valérie waltzes with her husband, then with Gustave. The novel presents the waltz as both a playful proletarian dance and a controversial upper-class dance. The girls visiting the innkeeper show no signs of immodesty while waltzing: “elles étaient presque toutes jolies, et nous nous amusions à voir leur gaîté et leur petite coquetterie villageoise” (82). This description brings to mind Elise Voïart’s claim that waltzing increases women’s beauty: “La femme cède à ce doux entraînement; et l’espèce de vertige que lui cause la walse donne à son regard une vague expression qui augmente sa beauté, ou la rend plus touchante” (157). For Voïart, this phenomenon is most visible when German women waltz because they dance it with such decency.1 Approving of the youthful merrymaking, Valérie sends for her chambermaids in order to give them “le plaisir de la danse” (82).

1 According to Voïart, the waltz expresses innate German characteristics: “Simple comme toutes les danses primitives, elle a des grâces qui lui sont propres et caractérisent en quelque sorte les mœurs de la société allemande en général, ainsi que les relations intimes et innocentes qui existent entre les jeunes gens des deux sexes. Il y a dans l’attitude réciproque des danseurs quelque chose de fier et d’ingénue; chacun est bien à sa place: l’homme soutien sa compagne, et par un mouvement rapide et circulaire, semble l’enlever à tout ce qui l’entoure” (157).
Without cavaliers, the dance is devoid of its sexual connotations and exemplifies innocent adolescent dreams of future flirtations. Krüdener does not limit the waltz to an amorous embrace but rather depicts it in various contexts suggesting that the intentions of the dancers influence its moral nature.

Yielding to an invitation to dance, instead of consenting to dance, upholds the social contract underlying masculine domination. Although partners normally share a counterpart role in the dance, Krüdener effaces Valérie’s moments of leading by grammatically making her a held object moved about by her cavalier. When the Count desires to partake in the twirling after the group of women have left, Valérie attempts to evade performing this dance marked by scandal: “Le comte est venu prendre Valérie et l’a fait valser, quoiqu’elle s’en défendit, ayant une espèce d’éloignement pour cette danse que sa mère n’aimait pas” (82, my emphasis). Here and elsewhere in the novel, maternal figures symbolize the arbiters of righteousness. Valérie, forced to ignore her mother’s wisdom, remains the passive object of her husband’s actions when he gives her to Gustave to finish the dance. Dancing with a partner allows one to observe the vitality of the other. The elderly Count’s act of handing his adolescent wife over to a man her age recalls the waltz scene in Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan’s 1797 novel L’Emigré, in which the young Countess of Lœwstein suddenly becomes attentive to her husband’s senescence.

For Fraisse, the distinction between yielding and consenting is the “rapport de force” maintaining masculine domination: “Céder n’est pas consenter. Par cette distinction, on restitue aux femmes l’infériorité de leur détermination” (73).
after waltzing with a youthful baron.1 By singling out men as the initiators in this contentious amusement, Krüdener contests texts rebuking women’s excessive passion for waltzing and covertly criticizes deafness to refusals to consent.

The closed embrace of the waltz acquaints shy young men like Gustave with carnal desire. Stendhal compared the first moments in a romantic encounter to a waltz: “une valse rapide, dans un salon éclairé de mille bougies, jette dans les jeunes cœurs une ivresse qui éclipse la timidité, augmente la conscience des forces et leur donne enfin l’audace d’aimer” (De l’amour 33). In Valérie, the physical contact sends Gustave into a frenzy of discomfort and joy awakening his desires though he remains timorous: “Mon cœur a battu avec violence; j’ai tremblé comme un criminel; j’ai hésité longtemps si j’oserais passer mon bras autour de sa taille.—Elle a souri de ma gaucherie.—J’ai frémi de bonheur et de crainte” (82-83). The embrace simultaneously provokes Gustave’s fear of the female body and his desire. From this point forward in the narrative, Valérie embodies the liminal space between his fantasy and her lived experience. As an undefinable object, her body is the abject, to borrow from Julia Kristeva, that disturbs his system of separating the artificiality of the material world from the pureness of his

1 After spending the afternoon frolicking outdoors, the countess and baron dance: “le soir ma mère me fit danser une allemande, et valser avec lui; je me sentis émue. M. de Lœwenstein arriva pendant le souper, et je lui trouvai des rides que je n’avais pas encore aperçues. Pendant plusieurs jours je songeai, non pas précisément au jeune baron, mais à son âge rapproché du mien, mais à cette conformité de goûts, de plaisirs qui se trouvent entre gens du même âge” (9).
dreamworld, thereby troubling the distinction between his self and the object of his fantasy.\(^1\) Like a cadaver, she is a body but, in the eyes of Gustave, not a living subject.

After this first dance between Gustave and Valérie, physical proximity between them triggers his angst. In the letter after the one describing the first waltz, Gustave explains why he avoids walking alone with Valérie and wonders if love is the sensation of sharing space with a loved object. Sitting in an opera loge with Valérie, he enters his dreamworld but reality troubles it: “Il me semblait que Valérie ne vivait que pour moi; […] Valérie, transportée de cette musique, et moi si près d’elle, si près que je touchais presque ses cheveux de mes lèvres” (95). Absorbed in the music, Valérie is visibly sentient. She appears as not only his fantasy but also a subject living for herself. Unlike a distant observer leering at a beautiful woman, an admirer engaged in shared activities such as dancing, walking, or watching an opera in a theater box cannot easily suppress the woman’s active body to idolize her as a commodity. The body, as Jean-Luc Nancy theorizes it, is simultaneously the site of its coming into existence, its material space, and the images that it offers to others. When Gustave thinks about Valérie, she is only a corpus of images. Sitting beside him, she is suddenly a spatial body creating her existence in the same way that he is a situated, material body. The fleshy realness of her body causes anxiety for the young man who wishes only to see the image of his feminine ideal.

The second occurrence of the waltz in Valérie explicitly reveals its noxious consequences for both men and women. At a ball celebrating the saint’s day of Valérie,  

\(^1\) Kristeva defines the abject as that which concurrently worries and fascinates the subject because it does not respect known limits, systems, or identities.
Gustave eulogizes her while she believes he is describing another woman. After this effusion of emotions, he forces her to waltz with him: “Comme on jouait dans cet instant une valse très animée, je la pria, avec la vivacité qu’inspirait la musique, de danser avec moi, et, sans lui laisser le temps de réfléchir, je l’entraînai” (111). The abundance of commas in this sentence creates an out-of-breath rhythm accentuating Gustave’s excitement and brusque gestures. The spinning pattern of the waltz coupled with the close contact between the partners hypnotizes him: “Je dansais avec une espèce de délires, oubliant le monde entier, sentant avec ivresse Valérie presque dans mes bras, et détestant pourtant ma frénésie. J’avais absolument perdu la tête, et la voix seule de ce que j’aimais pouvait me rappeler à moi” (111, my emphasis). The repeated use of present participles brings attention to the nowness of his emotions. Romantic expressions of what Fabienne Bercegol calls “des états les plus extrêmes du Moi” present the outside world through his inner torments and exaltations (“Un roman” 12). He succumbs to the effects of the waltz and recognizes it as the cause of his delirium.

The voice of Valérie, a character associated with maternal figures, brings him back to the material world. The maternal voice enfolds a mother and child in what psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu calls a sonorous envelop creating a harmonious fusion between the child and the mother’s body. This envelop prepares the child to construct a spatially situated concept of herself as a body covered in skin. Turning, Gustave loses awareness of the material world. Consequently, the fleshiness of Valérie disappears in his arms despite the closed-embrace. He hears her voice as a maternal voice calling him to recognize his own corporeality, but not hers. As Claude Moussy’s etymological study of
*gratia* demonstrates, grace describes a situation of recognition of another person and her actions. Like the three Graces dancing, graceful movements involve “giving, accepting, and returning” (Wind 38). Ignoring the embodied experiences and movements of the other prevents the sensation of grace from emerging.

Preceding the loss of Valérie’s newborn as well as Gustave’s fatal fits of mania and melancholy, this waltz initiates the turmoil that will torture both characters for the rest of the narrative. Without consenting to waltz, Valérie suffers from the vigorous turning. Pregnant, she is not in a state to engage in such an energetic activity: “Elle souffrait de la rapidité de la valse, et me le reprochait. Je la posai sur un fauteuil; je la conjurai de me pardonner. Elle était pâle; je tremblais d’effroi” (111). Krüdener slows down the rhythm of the text signaling the end of the waltz. Suddenly, Valérie is the subject of a sentence existing outside of Gustave’s fantasies, yet she remains the object of his actions and the victim of his caprice. The novel echoes medical and religious condemnations of the waltz as dangerous for women’s health. In contrast to most anti-waltz treatises, *Valérie* identifies the male dancer as the culprit, forcing his partner to partake in a potentially perilous activity.

According to certain eighteenth-century medical and moral beliefs, pregnant women’s immoral conduct caused illnesses and complications during pregnancy. The 1814 *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* identifies dancing as beneficial to women depending on their age and physical state. Recommending that women abstain from dance during menstruation, lactation, and gestation, the authors of the article on dance noted that many women manage to dance throughout their pregnancy without any
consequences.¹ *Adèle et Théodore* (1782), Genlis’s education manual in the form of an epistolary novel, attributes the miscarriage of Madame de Valcé, a character who dances often, to her attendance at the *bal de l’Opéra*, “une nuit où la foule était excessive” (428).² Disapproval of dancing during pregnancy also appeared outside of fiction and medical texts. For example, journalists obsessed over the fact that the Queen Hortense and Emma Hamilton danced while noticeably pregnant.³ Although concepts of active maternity began to emerge in the eighteenth century as Rousseau advocated for breastfeeding and Genlis called for more hands-on mothering, an active woman on display did not correspond to maternal norms.

According to certain doctors, the dreamlike states produced by the twirling, not the physical movements, put pregnant women at risk of miscarriage. The doctor F.-Victor Boussac, in his *Essai sur le vertige* (1818), designated the imagination as a culprit of malformations of the fetus and miscarriages. Elizabeth Claire shows how the dizzying effects of turning and the imagination sparked by close contact with a partner function together in discourses surrounding the waltz and miscarriage. For Claire, the rarity of medical descriptions of masculine vertigo brought on by the waltz reveals a fear of female folly underlying these hypotheses. Pregnant women in enraptured states

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¹ The article states, “malgré toute espèce de raisonnement, il est des femmes qui dansent jusqu’aux derniers moments de leurs grossesses, et qui ne sont nullement incommodées” (5).
² Alfred de Vigny’s poem “Le Bal” urges young girls to waltz during their youth before motherhood prevents them from enjoying parties and dancing.
³ In her memoirs, Hortense wrote, “On donna un bal à la Malmaison à l’occasion de je ne sais quelle fête. Je dansai une seule fois, et, le lendemain, je vis dans un journal des vers où l’on parlait de ma grossesse avancée et de ma danse” (132).
threatened the idealized symbol of Republican motherhood as well as the obfuscated status of aristocratic motherhood.

Krüdener’s bestseller questions the risks of pregnant women dancing or doing any sort of exercise. After learning, much to his dismay, that Valérie is pregnant (but before the second waltz), Gustave happens on her looking flushed before a mirror. She laughs at his concern and explains that she has taken a dance lesson. This response shocks Gustave who harangues her about the dangers of such physical exertion. Valérie expresses a disgust at the belief that pregnant women should cease all physical activities:

— ‘Oui: me dit-elle encore en riant; me trouvez-vous trop vieille pour danser? Au moins vous ne me défendez pas l’exercice.’ Et elle riait toujours; elle a levé les bras un moment après pour descendre un rideau, et tout-à-coup elle a jeté un cri, en mettant sa main sur le côté. ‘Valérie, me suis-je écrié, vous me ferez mourir; vous nous ferez tous mourir, ai-je ajouté, avec votre légèreté. Pouvez-vous vous exposer ainsi: vous vous ferez mal. Elle m’a regardé avec étonnement; elle a rougi. […] ‘N’oserai-je donc plus sauter, lever les bras!’ —‘Oui, ai-je dit timidement, mais actuellement…’ Elle m’a compris; elle a rougi encore, et est sortie. (91)

After each time Valérie dances during her pregnancy, she is described as exhausted, flushed, or out of breath. After her shawl dance at the Spanish ambassador’s ball, Valérie flees the ballroom, “épuisée de fatigue,” to sit down (103). In the same letter in which she confesses to having taken a dance lesson, Gustave reveals that she does not heed to his advice. Two days later, she carelessly jumps out of a carriage, falls, and becomes ill with
a fever. Valérie’s refusal to remain sedentary suggests that she is not prepared to adopt the submissive position of a mother whose body is a recipient and not an active agent. Taking a dance lesson, Valérie chooses to engage in physical activities that procure her pleasure. Later, Gustave seemingly forgets having forbidden her from dancing when he compels her to waltz. After her saint’s day party, her delicacy provokes concern about the risk of miscarriage. She carries her pregnancy to term, but the newborn dies a few minutes after birth. Though a correlation between her accident or dancing and the newborn’s death is never made explicit, Gustave appears partially complicit in the baby’s death by making Valérie waltz without her consent. The contrast between the grace of Valérie’s solo shawl dance and the delirium of the waltzes indicate a clear distinction between expressive, subjective grace and coerced social performances upholding patriarchal values.

**Duras’s Unpublished Waltz**

In Claire de Duras’s unfinished novel *Mémoires de Sophie*, written in 1823, a vain woman obsesses over the waltz and dances it with the object of the eponymous heroine’s affection. Set during the Terror (1793-1794), when thousands of French nobles were driven out of the country by the threat of death, this *roman d’émigration*, a subgenre of the sentimental novel, consists in three notebooks, the last of which exists only as a draft. Sophie emigrates to England with her family and becomes enamored with Mr. de Grancey, who is engaged and marries his fiancée. He offers to divorce in order to marry Sophie, but she meets his wife and refuses to continue seeing him. The dance scene in
Mémoires de Sophie, like those in Ourika and Edouard, functions as a major turning point in the narrative.

Waltzing can constitute an act of seduction and therefore appear traitorous to a non-waltzing admirer. Sophie suspects an attraction between Grancey and Madame de Fosseuse when the latter claims to have spent an entire morning with him discussing waltzes. His preference for the German waltz and Madame de Fosseuse’s predilection for the faster-paced valse russe shines light on his equanimity in opposition to her love of heady pleasures. Furthermore, the valse russe allows dancers to change partners during the waltz, thereby reducing the force of the couple as a single entity since “la danseuse appartient à tous les danseurs” (“La valse russe” 550). After this conversation about the waltz, Sophie agonizes over the possibility that Grancey and Madame de Fosseuse dance together: “je me demandais si j’irais à ce bal, si j’irais voir M. de Grancey danser avec madame de Fosseuse, valser avec elle! il la tiendrai dans ses bras! à cette pensée mon sens se portait à mon cœur avec une telle violence” (MS 96). For the conservative observer, waltzing is a public prelude to a sexual relationship.

Dance is often a matter of pleasing others. Duras created a parallel between the waltz and coquetry by limiting Madame de Fosseuse’s role in the novel to discussing the waltz, waltzing, and being ostentatiously flirtatious. Yet, dancing is also an opportunity

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1 An 1896 edition of the magazine La Vie Parisienne describes the Russian waltz: “Elle ne s’exécute pas seule à seul, entre danseuse et cavalier. Les danseuses passent, dans le cours d’une même valse, de danseur à danseur, sans pouvoir faire plus de deux ou trois tours avec chacun. Cette mode peut se comparer au jeu du volant, où le cavalier joue le rôle de la raquette. Avec la valse russe, plus de longue conversation entre les couples, mais plus de refus à personne; plus de favorisés, mais plus de délaissés” (550). Given that this article appeared much later than Duras’s novel, it is possible that the valse russe was different in 1823. Nonetheless, the dancers seem to change cavaliers during the waltz scene.
for the virtuous heroine to satisfy her vanity. When her beloved brother Charles lauds his sister-in-law’s dancing, Sophie strives to become the best dancer possible: “il loua une fois la danse de ma belle-sœur, et je m’appliquai tellement à la danse qu’en peu de mois je parvins à être la meilleure danseuse de ce temps-là” (32). The novel presents this desire for praise as a testament of Sophie’s love for her brother bringing into question the fine line between vanity and a generous desire to please others. Before the ball, she considers employing her rival’s methods to recapture Grancey’s attention yet finally decides to rely on her natural beauty and grace.

J’avais d’abord pensé à effacer ma rivale par ma parure. Comme mon amour-propre me disait bien que je la surpassais en beauté, mais bientôt ce projet me sembla peu digne de moi, j’aurais l’air de vouloir éclipser toutes ces jeunes personnes privées de fortune par l’émigration et obligées de dépenser le moins possible à leur toilette, je résolus d’imiter leur simplicité. (96)

Sophie’s resolution to avoid excessively ornate dress and wear a simple white gown shows that she remains devoted to a love for humanity stronger than her desire to satisfy her own impulses. Her white dress, like the refusal to waltz, creates a public image of chastity and temperance. The novel’s emphasis on dress and artifice nuances Sénac de Meilhan’s comparison between the post-Revolution period and a masked ball, “où des princes paraissent sous des habits de paysans et des valets sont habillés en empereurs” (219).

French émigrés in London plunged into a whirlwind of extravagant parties to forget their lost position in their homeland. Sophie however refuses to imitate her
compatriots. Melancholic because of what she perceives as a liaison between Grancey and Madame de Fosseuse, Sophie avoids merrymaking at the ball. Madame de Maillanes pesters her to dance instead of dwelling on her sorrow and equates a refusal to waltz to a denial of pleasure: “vous vous privez là d’un grand plaisir, je voudrais que la vie ressemblât à une valse et valser toujours” (MS 97). She exemplifies the resolve with which certain émigrés continued to enjoy a lavish lifestyle despite their complicated situation following the Revolution. Privileging Christian morals over temporary pleasures, Sophie dissociates herself from these waltzers ignoring their precarious positions.

The whirlwind of waltzing at the ball coincides with the chaos occurring at this moment of social and political change. Although the novel contrasts the German and the Russian waltz, the waltz described includes entrées like a French waltz, also known as la valse mondaine, in which “les personnes qui allaient danser formaient une espèce de marche au son de la musique et faisaient le tour de la chambre avant de commencer à valser” (MS 97). This medley of different types of waltzes reveals that the novel is set during the height of waltzomania. Opposing the pandemonium of turning, Grancey’s calm march emphasizes the collective force of the dance as all the participants move together: “[Grancey] continua tranquillement de marcher en suivant les autres danseurs” (97). After the twirling begins, Madame de Maillanes joins the waltz that matches her personality: “emportée dans ce tourbillon qui était l’image de son caractère, de ses goûts et de sa vie. Est-elle donc heureuse?” (97). Replicating aristocratic excess, the dance scene highlights the loss of moral principles among émigrés ignoring their uncertain
future. Facades of happiness and calm emerge in the storm of change as if they could ignore their expulsion.

The collective enthusiasm for the waltz transforms the dance’s seductive embrace into a seemingly acceptable declaration of love. Sitting near the dance floor, Sophie watches Grancey hold Madame de Fosseuse: “le maintien du bal donnait à cette attitude familière une sorte de décence mais aux yeux de la jalousie elle paraissait tout ce qu’elle est réellement, tout ce que l’amour devait la faire paraître à M. de Grancey lui-même” (97). This position suggests a familiarity exceeding banal social gestures. Sophie’s jealousy reveals how dancing demonstrates disloyalty to those not chosen as a partner. As a spectator, Sophie is excluded from the sexual advances simulated on the dance floor. Not being touched provokes a displeasure equivalent to the pleasure of being embraced.

The dance becomes violent through both its movement and its effect on the heroine. As the frenzy mounts and takes over the ballroom, it is as if Sophie were under attack: “les danseurs en valsant s’approchaient tellement de nous que la robe de madame de Fosseuse venait voltiger jusqu’à la mienne” (97). Terms like tourbillon and voltiger, commonly employed to describe the waltz, accentuate how the movements create the impression that the dancers fight against the force of gravity. The repeating turns combat stillness as the multitude of dancers follow the same steps creating a belligerent fury. Such a dancing flurry, as Søren Kierkegaard suggested in The Seducer’s Diary (1843), is hardly propitious for romantic encounters since a blurred vision of the dancing ensemble, instead of a single person, creates the charm.
Dances, however, create images not necessarily based on reality. A couple, exhausted from waltzing, sits beside Sophie and comments on Madame de Fosseuse’s desire to seduce Grancey. The woman predicts that Grancey will not succumb to Madame de Fosseuse’s coquetry because “pendant la valse il oubliait toujours que c’était son tour de valser” (MS 98). Similar to Edmond’s forgetfulness executing contradances in Malvina, Grancey’s negligence, presumably during the valse russe in which the ladies change partners, suggests a lack of desire for his partner. This hypothesis proves to be true. Once the waltz ends, Grancey sits next to Sophie. Madame de Fosseuse approaches them and asks if the Russian waltz prevails over the German waltz, to which he responds, “Comme la coquetterie sur le sentiment” (98). Her seductive endeavors fail, and Sophie then dances with him twice. Duras neither named nor described these dances. The following day, Grancey declares his love for Sophie, whose sentimentality and simplicity triumph over Madame de Fosseuse’s pretentious flirtation. The novel depicts women who love waltzing as vain flirts or simpletons. Nonetheless, Madame de Fosseuse refuses to be passive, possesses “some kind of independence of mind,” and actively pursues the man she wishes to seduce (Wollstonecraft 99). She acts according to her own volition instead of quelling her desires. Though the novel portrays her as unfit for marital love, it also depicts marriage as a corrupted institution. Like Cottin, Duras contrasts a graceful young woman with a coquette but suggests that both will be unhappy in matters of love.

**Waltzing in Sand’s Novels**

Sand’s references to the waltz in her fiction engage with debates on the trans-European expansion of German culture, frivolity, debauchery, and science. In some
respects, her waltz scenes share similarities with those of her predecessors, especially regarding bourgeois or upper-class vanity. In other respects, Sand describes the waltz in new ways to launch social and political critiques as well as to examine metaphysical challenges to perception. Sand’s 1835 novel *Leone Leoni* depicts the waltz as an intoxicating activity dangerous for mothers and young girls. In two of her works set in Venice, “L’Orco” (1838) and *La Dernière Aldini* (1838), she briefly alludes to the waltz to denounce Austrian rule of the Floating City. At the beginning of her long novel set in Italy, *La Daniella* (1857), sailors enjoy a drunken revelry including a waltz and a polka. The scandalous waltzes at aristocratic parties in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840) create a striking contrast with the Sunday contradances. Finally, in *Laura, voyage dans le cristal* (1865), the waltz becomes a site of intellectual activity as the heroine contemplates the metaphysical world and protests kinship systems based on the exchange of women.

The waltz in *Leone Leoni*, a novel in which the majority of the plot takes place at night, joins a gamut of nefarious activities. 1 Juliette, a Brusselian bourgeois and reader of novels written by women, namely “*Valérie, Eugène de Rothelin, Mademoiselle de Clermont, Delphine,*” falls in love with Leone Leoni, a Venetian nobleman addicted to gambling (307). They attend a ball at which a man named Henryet searches for Leone to settle a debt. Unable to pay, Leone tells Juliette that they must flee. Flustered while trying

1 Unable to complete her novel *André*, Sand wrote *Leone Leoni* in fourteen days during her stay in Venice with Alfred de Musset. The novel is loosely modeled on *Manon Lescaut* (1731) by Abbé Prévost and the *Mémoires* (1822) of Casanova.
to hide her imminent escape, she throws herself into dancing. After leading her across Europe to Venice, Leone’s penchant for luxury and gambling surpasses his affection for her. He abandons her for an older, wealthy woman who dies after naming him her only heir. Despite the treacherous acts he commits against Juliette, she continuously returns to him.

As we saw in Valérie, motherhood and waltzing conjure up antipodal ideas about female bodies. Scorning bourgeois arrivistes, the first chapters of Leone Leoni emphasize the vanity of Juliette and her mother as they parade their fashionable jewelry (acquired from Juliette’s father who is a jeweler) through the city. Depicted as frivolous, the mother neglects her maternal duties. After Juliette dances to obscure her fears about Henryet and her clandestine departure, her mother waltzes:

Je dansai, et je ne sais comment je ne tombais pas morte à la fin de la contredanse, tant j’avais fait d’efforts sur moi-même. Quand je revins à ma place, ma mère était déjà partie pour la valse. Elle m’avait vue danser, elle était tranquille; elle recommençait à s’amuser pour son compte. […] Je regardai ma mère, qui, légère et joyeuse, semblait voler au travers du cercle des valseurs. (315-16)

Instead of guiding her daughter’s moral development, the mother concerns herself only with Juliette’s and her own amusement. While the mother waltzes, Juliette’s aunt Agathe, the only member of the family against her engagement to Leone, scolds her. The opposition between the aunt and the mother underscores the former’s sensible care and the latter’s imprudent negligence suggesting that good mothers do not waltz.
Maternal characters rarely dance in nineteenth-century literature. Since dancing demonstrates one’s potential as a sexual partner, social norms often excluded mothers from the dance floor. In Sophie Cottin’s *Claire d’Albe* (1798), the male protagonist differentiates the heroine Claire, a married mother, and Adèle, a young single woman who loves to dance, by their roles at a ball: “il faut que chacun prenne la place qui lui convient: celle de Madame d’Albe est d’être adorée en remplissant tous ses devoirs; la vôtre est d’éblouir, et le bal doit être votre triomphe” (71). Delphine de Girardin, in *La Canne de M. de Balzac* (1836), described the immobility of mothers acting as spectators and commentators at balls. In Sand’s *Malgrétout* (1870), the refusal to attend balls serves as proof that the heroine Sarah acts as a good mother to the children of her party-loving sister Adda. Whereas in some social circles waltzing was only appropriate for married women, waltzing mothers were particularly controversial. In Charles-Hubert Millevoye’s 1802 poem lamenting modern literature and cultural values, *Satire des romans du jour*, the waltzing mother epitomizes the destruction of the traditional family:

Ce jeune enfant… il souffre, on ne plaint point son mal;  
Il appelle sa mère… et sa mère est au bal:  
Mère! elle ne l’est plus. Voluptueuse, ardente,  
Voyez-la tout entière à la walse enivrante,  
Sous les yeux d’un époux, qui feint de ne rien voir. (7)

Unlike the Rousseauian image of a doting mother close to her children, the waltzing mother leaves the familial sphere, places her body in the embrace of men who are not her
husband, and tastes this voluptuous dance that sends her head spinning. In short, waltzing mothers were perceived as prioritizing their desires over maternal and conjugal duties.

The waltz in Leone Leoni marks the end of Juliette’s carefree childhood and initiates the series of frightening encounters punctuating this nocturnal novel. Because her education has only prepared her to follow instructions, she lacks the courage and knowledge necessary to extricate herself from perilous situations. As Mariette Delmaire notes in the introduction to the 2011 Champion edition, the novel insists on the inadequacies of girls’ education based on appearance and proscriptions.1 When the aunt, concerned by Juliette’s behavior at the ball, threatens to solicit the mother, Juliette avoids this by accepting an invitation to dance. Unknowingly, she engages in a waltz: “Quand je fus au milieu des danseurs, je m’aperçus que j’avais accepté une valse. Comme presque toutes les jeunes personnes, je ne valsais jamais” (316). Juliette waltzes with Henriet, who, looking for Leone, appears to be her enemy but later in the novel tries to save her (Leone prevents this by murdering him). The waltz scene parallels the cyclical narrative structure in which Juliette repeatedly finds herself at the mercy of a man, panics, and then flees.

Descriptions of the waltz bear certain similarities to attempts at explaining nightmares. Both the nightmare and the waltz were associated with hallucinations in

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1 The education Juliette received was that of most young girls during George Sand’s lifetime, “un enseignement tout entier tourné vers le paraître futile, la vanité, sans études sérieuses, (même dans l’apprentissage de la musique, de la danse, du dessin); l’éducation morale se borne à l’observation des convenances comme l’interdiction de la valse” (Delmaire 275).
which the subject experiences a jouissance that is simultaneously enthralling and unbearable. In *Leone Leoni*, the waltz makes Juliette unsure if she is dreaming or awake. 

[…] en reconnaissant, dans celui qui déjà me tenait dans ses bras, la sinistre figure de Henryet, la frayeur m’empêcha de refuser. Il m’entraîna, et ce mouvement rapide acheva de troubler mon cerveau. Je me demandais si tout ce qui se passait autours de moi n’était pas une vision, si je n’étais pas plutôt couchée dans un lit, avec la fièvre, que lancée comme une folle au milieu d’une valse avec un être qui me faisait horreur. (316)

As reality spins around the dancer, it no longer appears real. Distorted perceptions of reality fueled waltzomania during a period when the imaginative possibilities of the nightmare fascinated alienists like Philippe Pinel (1745-1826) and writers such as Charles Nodier, Gérard de Nerval, and Théophile Gautier. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art, most notably Henry Fuseli’s 1781 painting *The Nightmare*, often represents the nightmare as a demon crushing the sleeping dreamer. Medical texts written by François Boissier de Sauvages (1706-1777) identify the primary symptom of nightmares as irregular breathing or the sensation of suffocating. Similarly, nineteenth-century medical, literary, and anecdotal texts often describe waltzers gasping for breath. Because of this troubled respiration and a sensation of losing control over one’s body, both the waltz and the nightmare carry sexual connotations. Nineteenth-century discourses on the nightmare, like those on the waltz, express “cultural anxieties about threats to the (implicitly male) subject’s socially mandated negotiation between the ideal of reason” and “errant forces of sexual desire” (Downing 333).
Depictions of nightmares and waltzing also hint at sexual violence as someone or something alters a woman’s mental awareness and crushes or grasps her body. The waltz scene in Leone Leoni bolsters Sand’s critique of an education training girls to be obedient instead of assertive and deliberative. Acting as a metaphor for masculine domination, the waltz prefigures the actual violence and humiliation that Juliette confronts.

In addition to provoking controversy about sexual mores, the waltz stirred debate about the spread of German culture.¹ Two of Sand’s works set in Venice, ruled by Austria from 1797 until 1866, accentuate the waltz’s Germanic origin to critique Austrian imperialism.² Sand’s short story “L’Orco” explicitly criticizes the Austrian annexation of the Floating City. A dogaressa arrives at a ball and urges the citizens of Venice to sing and dance. Exclaiming that there are no more Venetians in Venice, she decrees the presence of German dancing: “des pieds tudesques valsent dans le palais des doges!” (389).³ Whereas “L’Orco” presents the waltz’s spread in a negative light, the frame-tale of La Dernière Aldini applauds this cultural import while admonishing Austrian tyranny as the novel’s hero cries out: “Per Dio! Faisons la guerre au despotisme autrichien, mais respectons la valse allemande! la valse de Weber, ô mes amis! la valse de Beethoven et

¹ During London’s 1812 “Year of the Waltz,” club-footed Lord Byron’s poem “Waltz: an apostrophic hymn,” published under the pseudonym Horace Hornem, ridiculed the waltz as one of the many German imports posed to replace British arts and corrupt English manners. The poem also mocks the extravagant waltz-loving Prince Regent George IV.
² Venice became part of Bonaparte’s Kingdom of Italy in 1805 and then returned to Austrian rule following his 1814 defeat.
³ The reader then learns that this beautiful woman leads Austrian men to their death. When the dogaressa falls in love with an Austrian count, she must die as a traitor to her homeland. Regarding Sand’s critical writing on Italy, Annarosa Poli concludes, “Sa profonde affection pour le peuple italien ne l’empêche pas de déplorer la résignation trop grande et trop prolongée qu’il a montré—selon elle—au cours des temps avant de se décider à secouer le joug étranger” (385).
de Schubert!” (5). Although this novel does not include a description of dancing, it distinguishes a love of Germanic music from an abhorrence of foreign occupation.

*Le Compagnon du Tour de France* contrasts innocent contradances with dissolute waltzes. The Marquise Joséphine des Frenays waltzes after spending the night in a carriage with the craftsman Amaury. This sexual encounter divides the novel into two periods of dancing: outdoor contradances and waltzes inside with drunk aristocrats. Honesty and decency characterize the formerly forbidden village assemblies whereas the indoor parties, hidden from the surveillance of authorities, degenerate into chaos. Peering into the window of the manor, Pierre perceives Joséphine waltzing:

Pierre pouvait voir passer la valse et voltiger la marquise, entourée d’adorateurs, parmi lesquels se trouvaient des jeunes gens de bonne maison dont les façons galantes étaient mêlées de cette légère dose d’impertinence qui plaît aux femmelettes. Joséphine était enivrée de son succès; il y avait longtemps qu’elle n’avait eu l’occasion d’être belle et qu’elle ne s’était vue admirer ainsi. Elle était comme un phalène qui tourne et folâtre autour de la lumière. (*LC* 322)

The simile likening the Marquise to a moth emphasizes her single-mindedness as she succumbs to her thirst for admiration. It also brings to mind Sand’s 1834 novel *Le Secrétaire intime* in which the Italian princess Quintilia organizes an entomology-themed ball. Dressed as a “blanc phalène de la nuit,” Quintilia disappoints her lovestruck

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1 As Olga Kafanova shows, *La Dernière Aldini* is divided into three parts mimicking a waltz rhythm. Moreover, the love affair between the proletarian protagonist Nello and an aristocratic older woman is simultaneously forbidden and enticing like the waltz.
secretary as she waltzes and enjoys being admired (*Le Secrétaire* 96). In a manner similar to Duras’s description of Madame de Fosseuse, Sand associates the waltz with vanity as both turning and success intoxicate the dancers.

In *Mémoires de Sophie* and *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, when one’s beloved waltzes with another person, the dance becomes an act of betrayal. Outside seeing the ball from a distance, Amaury lambasts Joséphine for entering the embrace of young men of her social class. He censures the erotic nature of the dance as well as her exposed body as if he had caught her in a sexual act:

Elle va danser toute la nuit, et avec tous ces hommes. Quel horrible abandon de soi-même! La danse est ce que je connais de plus impudique au monde *chez ces gens-là*. […] Ses bras sont nus, ses épaules sont nues, son sein est presque nu! Sa jupe est si courte qu’elle laisse voir à demi ses jambes, et si transparente qu’on distingue toutes ses formes. Une femme de peuple rougirait de se montrer ainsi en public; elle craindrait d’être confondue avec les prostituées! Et maintenant la voilà qui passe toute haletante des bras d’un hommes aux bras d’un autre homme qui la presse, qui la soulève, qui respire son haleine, qui frosse encore sa ceinture déjà flétrie, et qui boit la volupté dans ses regards. (323, my emphasis)

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1 “Quintilia, entourée d’hommes et de vœux, se livrait au plaisir d’être admirée avec tant de jeunesse et d’enivrement que Saint-Julien crut ne plus pouvoir douter de l’erreur où six mois de retraite et de bonheur calme l’avaient plongé. […] Dans le mouvement d’une valse, la coiffure de la princesse s’étant un peu dérangée, elle s’esquiva et entra dans ses appartements pour la réparer” (96-97). Like Gustave and Edouard, Saint-Julien remains hidden while he watches the dancing heroine: “Il eut soin de ne pas se montrer devant la princesse, et se contenta de rôder autour de la salle où elle se tenait, tantôt la regardant valser au travers des guirlandes enlacées aux colonnades, tantôt s’enfonçant sous les galeries où les lumières commençaient à s’éteindre” (109).
Cataloguing her uncovered body parts as in a literary blazon and then comparing her to a prostitute, Amaury’s tirade reduces Joséphine to a defiled carnal object offered to satisfy men’s sexual cravings. Reflecting Sand’s dislike of urban dances invading provincial France, this passage makes it clear that the orgiastic waltz belongs to the upper classes. As his outrage increases, Amaury threatens to enter the ball and wreak havoc in an effort to end this attack on provincial propriety. Although Sand mocks the inanity of public bans on Sunday dances, she deplores the overtly sexual connotations of the waltz. The novel clearly distinguishes innocuous village dances and bawdy aristocratic parties at which dancing descends into mayhem. In Sand’s brazen social critique, only the dances of the proletariat, the alienated working class, are subjected to institutional criticism.

Despite its scathing assessment of the waltz, the novel is rather sympathetic to Joséphine whose pretension fades a little under the oak tree and bursts forth when she is immersed in a corrupt society. Demonstrating Sand’s alliance with Rousseauian thought, the characters are innately good but vulnerable to their environment. When Josephine waltzes at another ball, the dance is described from inside the ballroom instead of through the disgust of distant observers. The narrator reveals that the Marquise’s fatuity is only a façade: “Joséphine n’était folle qu’à la superficie” (331). In a drunk bedlam, she waltzes against her will while longing for Amaury: “Joséphine restait comme seule avec cinq ou six jeunes gens plus ou moins avinés, qui eussent voulu se chasser l’un l’autre, et qui s’obstinaient à la faire valser presque malgré elle” (331). Unlike Kitty in *Malvina* and Madame de Fosseuse in *Les Mémoires de Sophie*, Joséphine does not chase down a cavalier. As in *Valérie*, men force the female character to waltz without her consent.
In her correspondences and writing on Berry, Sand complained about boring, frivolous, and downright stupid balls in *le grand monde*. Her fictional works take this criticism a step further by presenting macabre renditions of fashionable dances. The waltz joins other fast-paced dances in *La Daniella* (1857), which tells the story of Jean Valreg who falls in love with an Italian ironing woman. When Valreg’s ship arrives in Italy, a carouse among the sailors erupts. Dressed in their Sunday suits, they polka to manic tarantella music and then waltz with girls in frilly dresses as the waves threaten to sink the ship and the “orgie” onboard (*LD* 107). Sand transforms these dances into a *danse macabre* as the music mixes with the sound of “des affres de la mort” and “le râle de l’agonie” (107).¹ This chilling celebration contrasts with Valreg’s quite evening lost in his thoughts. As Sand shows, the waltz is not the only cosmopolitan dance taking part in the myth of devilish dances.

In *Laura, voyage dans le cristal*, a graceful woman willingly waltzes. The dance scene in this fantasy novel constitutes an outlier in Sand’s corpus of waltz scenes. The sexual undertones of the dance fail to shock as the whirlwind accentuates the fragile human situation in a world dictated by physical and chemical laws. Blurring reality, the dance takes part in creating a “monde fantastique” that, for Sand, is present not in a single site but everywhere.² *Laura* seeks to prove that “le microcosme contient le macrocosme” (Levet 48). Alexis, the novel’s narrator, desires to marry his intellectual cousin Laura but

¹ This mixture of stormy weather and waltzing likewise appears in *The Sufferings of Young Werther*.
² In “Essai sur le drame fantastique” (1839), Sand wrote, “Le monde fantastique n’est pas en dehors, ni au-dessous; il est au fond de tout, il meut tout, il est l’âme de toute réalité, il habite dans tous les faits” (98).
must demonstrate that he loves her as she is, instead of loving the image of her that he perceives inside a geode. Dedicated to studying the natural sciences, Laura and Alexis investigate the world as a phenomenon to be understood.

Instead of creating a nightmare, the waltz reorients Laura as she observes her environment. After her uncle decides to marry her to his assistant, she waltzes with Alexis during the celebration of this unwanted engagement. Like the crystal, the dance transforms Laura as the fast turning increases her beauty and vigor: “Tout d’un coup il me sembla que sa figure s’animait d’une beauté singulière et qu’elle me parlait avec feu dans le tourbillon rapide de la valse” (Laura 97). The twirling allows her to see the world intelligently through a different perspective. As she spins, she understands the path to enter the mysterious dreamworld inside the geode within “l’image de l’infini” perceived in the reflection of candles in the ballroom mirrors (97). Incessant twirling, like flames in a series of mirrors, allows the dancers to experience a sensation of infinitude.

Manipulating body parts, dancers expose their humanness belonging to the natural world. After lamenting the arranged marriage in which Laura’s “moi humain ne saurait accepter l’esclavage d’un hymen,” she dances as a form of dissent, “avec une sorte de frénésie, comme si sa légèreté de caractère eût voulu protester contre les révélations de son être idéal” (100-01). Neither hallucinations nor drunkenness incite her fury, rather her subjective refusal to be treated as a non-reasoning object provokes her dancing frenzy. Because her uncle treats her like a banal exchange object in a marriage agreement and the enchanting image that she becomes in the crystal seduces Alexis, no one recognizes her as a sensate subject. Contesting the reification of her existence, her frivolous dance
affirms her fleshy, subjective being. In a novel that creates a world in which imagination and scientific knowledge come together, the heroine dances, therefore she is.

Sand’s various descriptions of the waltz highlight its continuous ubiquity throughout Europe from the July Monarchy to the Second Empire. The waltz allowed Sand to address toxic masculinity, aristocratic mores, girls’ inadequate education, and German imperialism. In her waltz scenes, the dissolute context makes the dance scandalous. When an intelligent dancer like Laura twirls, she uses the uncanny experience to consider the possibilities beyond the limits of her current knowledge. Nonconsensual waltzing alludes to the sexual violence enacted by kinships systems in which women’s voices are muted or ignored. Willful waltzing contests the reification of the feminine body and allows for graceful inclinations revealing the dancer’s agency.

**Nélida: The First Waltz**

Writing under the pseudonym Daniel Stern, Marie d’Agoult’s only novel, *Nélida* (1846), presents the first waltz as a prelude to losing one’s virginity. The heroine Nélida de Thieullay leaves her convent and enters society where her aunt hopes to find her a suitable husband. Nélida meets and waltzes with the nobleman Timoléon de Kervaëns, whom she marries. He leaves her for the Italian marquise Elisa Zepponi. Nélida falls in love with her childhood friend Guermann, a poor Saint-Simonian artist seeking fame. They run away to Switzerland and then to Italy. Absorbed in his artistic glory, Guermann neglects Nélida and likewise abandons her for Zepponi. Nélida returns to Guermann before he dies. Without revealing Nélida’s fate, the narrator suggests that she goes on to face hardships.
For several centuries, balls played a central part in French girls’ entrance into society and the sexual marketplace. The first ball represents a “passage de l’intériorité à l’extériorité, passage d’un espace de l’intimité à un espace de publicité,” a space in which a young woman offers her body to a potential spouse (Montandon 16). As soon as Nélida enters the carriage taking her away from the convent, her aunt, the Viscountess d’Hespel, begins planning the balls that they will attend claiming, “voici tes belles années qui commencent” (69). Reminiscent of Staël’s Delphine and Duras’s Sophie, Nélida avoids extravagance by dressing for balls with “une parfaite simplicité” (71). The tension between selfless Christian pretense and aristocratic excess shocks the heroine. Her first steps in the ballroom mark a separation from the utopian microcosm of the convent as she joins an indulgent society at odds with her religious education.

In Nélida, dance functions as a means for testing out future spouses. Walking in the Bois de Boulogne, Nélida and her aunt happen upon the Count Timoléon de Kervaëns. After the Viscountess invites him to a dance at her estate, the Count solicits Nélida to waltz with him.

— Mademoiselle voudra-t-elle me garder une valse? dit M. de Kervaëns, curieux d’entendre enfin le son de voix de cette belle jeune fille silencieuse.

— Je ne valse jamais, monsieur, répondit Nélida.

— Mon enfant, dit la vicomtesse, je n’ai pas voulu te contrarier jusqu’ici, mais demain, chez moi, tu ne peux te dispenser de valser; il faut que tu animes le bal. D’ailleurs (et la vicomtesse se pencha à l’oreille de sa nièce), je t’en prie, pas de rigorisme affecté.

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— Je valserai avec vous, monsieur, reprit Mlle de la Thieullay d’un ton de simplicité parfaite. (86)

Nélida’s refusal to waltz implicitly condemns the dance which her aunt transforms into a social obligation to galvanize her guests.¹ Silent and obedient, Nélida maintains her innocent simplicity fostered during her convent years yet, like a marionette, allows others to determine her movements. Her aunt, an enforcer of social codes, pulls the strings to ensure that Nélida follows the wishes of a potential mate.

*Nélida* and *Laura* augur the declining bad reputation surrounding the waltz throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The interpretation of a refusal to dance as affected rigour paints anti-waltz discourses as passé and hints at a social acceptance of the dance. Victoire Léodile Béra, writing under the pseudonym André Léo, indicated this change in her 1874 novel *Une Vieille Fille*. When his fiancée asks if he would be angry if she waltzed with another man, the protagonist claims that he would not be jealous. In Louise Colet’s 1860 novel *Lui*, the heroine turns down an invitation to waltz at a literary circle in the Arsenal. The host, whose daughter waltzes with the poet Albert, indicates that waltzing is permissible, yet we later learn that Albert incessantly

¹ Suggesting that the French were more hesitant than Germans to let their daughters waltz, d’Agoult’s memoirs describe her mother forbidding her from waltzing at balls in Frankfort because, in this respect, her German mother married to a Frenchman followed French rules of decency: “Au bal, sans me dire pourquoi, ma mère m’interdisait de valser. Elle suivait en cela les bienséances françaises, qui ne permettaient pas à cette époque la valse aux jeunes demoiselles” (*Souvenirs* 125). Complimenting the Count Walewski’s dancing, d’Agoult described the waltz as a non-French dance: “Il dansait à merveille. Il valsaît comme un étranger, comme un Slave, avec une grâce innée, une verve que n’acquèrent jamais nos Parisiens” (229).
seeks “le vertige et l’oubli” in alcohol and, perhaps also, in rapid twirling (101). Overall, prejudices against the waltz persisted into the second half of the century; nevertheless, as hinted at in Nélida, Une Vieille fille, and Lui, waltzing became less scorned.²

At the ball, Nélida, like Indiana, exudes the sensuality and modesty of a Romantic ballerina dressed in a white tutu, the emblem of the nineteenth-century feminine ideal.³ Nélida’s white gown accentuates the lightness of her movements and cloaks her in a fantasy: “Il était impossible d’imaginer rien de plus aérien, de plus chaste, de plus suave; on eût dit qu’elle était enveloppée d’une gaze diaphane qui la voilait à demi et la protégeait contre de trop avides regards” (88). Often draping the three Graces in paintings, diaphanous gowns or veils act like a varnish giving the body radiance but preventing excessive coruscation.⁴ The veiling created by lightweight fabrics hides a woman’s corporeality but alludes to the possibility of being unveiled. The heroine’s dress in conjunction with the waltz expose her sexual potential to all who watch: “elle n’avait jamais valsé et redoutait un peu ce premier essai devant tant de monde” (89). The waltz scene in Nélida transforms into an initiation evoking a first sexual experience.⁵ Whereas Juliette in Leone Leoni loses her childhood innocence after a surprise waltz, Nélida anticipates the end of her chastity.

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¹ Later in the novel, Albert describes a dream in which a prostitute dressed up as a Russian princess waltzes at a ball and is afterwards found decapitated and dismembered.
² Vituperations against the waltz are nonetheless visible at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, evident in texts such as Thomas A. Faulkner’s From the Ball-room to Hell (1892) and The Lure of Dance (1916).
³ See Judith Chazin-Bennahum’s The Lure of Perfection: Fashion and Ballet, 1780-1830.
⁴ See Claude Jamain’s La Douceur de vivre. D’une esthétique de la grâce au XVIIIe siècle.
⁵ Laura Colombo, in her dissertation La révolution souterraine, first identified this metaphor in Nélida.
Although the revolving choreography allows both partners to participate equally, one partner becomes dominate if the other is a neophyte. Nélida finds herself in the same situation as the heroine of *Madame Bovary* (1857): “Emma ne savait pas valser” (Flaubert 88). Timoléon exerts his superior experience by teaching her to waltz and coaching her to win admiration for their dancing. Before they begin to dance, she tells him, “C’est une première leçon que je vais prendre, et je crains…” (N 90). Further accentuating the sexual allusions, he designates his own pleasure as the purpose of the dance.\(^1\) To calm Nélida’s worries about appearing awkward, he assures her that his confidence and guidance will make up for any lacuna in her knowledge: “J’aurai de l’assurance pour deux, car je suis plein d’orgueil en ce moment. N’ayez crainte; fiez-vous à moi, laissez-vous conduire, et tout ira bien” (90). The first waltz allows the pompous cavalier to assert his advanced experience as he becomes the young girl’s “maître de danse” directing her movements (90). This initiation foreshadows their marriage in which Timoléon determines their actions and Nélida follows. Constantly interrupting her and ignoring her unwillingness to dance, he silences her and imposes his desires on her body. Similarly, in *Madame Bovary*, the Viscount invites Emma to waltz, “l’assurant qu’il la guiderait et qu’elle s’en tirerait bien” (88). After waltzing, Emma admires another woman who knows how to waltz and tires her partners. This unnamed woman waltzes with the knowledge of how to equal or dominate men. Nélida and Emma, however, succumb to the ascendancy of their cavaliers. As Hope Christiansen’s research concludes, nothing

\(^{1}\) “Ne craignez pas ce qui me comble de joie, interrompit Timoléon” (N 90).
indicates that Flaubert knew of or read *Nélida* when he wrote *Madame Bovary*.\(^1\) For Christiansen, the similarities between the dance scenes reveal how the waltz functions as a space of allusion. In my view, these waltz scenes differ stylistically but present similar representations of heterosexual relationships.

In reality, waltz partners must equally contribute to the push-and-pull to avoid spinning out of control or falling. Nélida, however, completely abandons her own initiatives and allows her partner to move her passive body. After encouraging her to relax and surrender to him, he transports her across the floor as if she were a doll: “il lui fit faire un tour pendant lequel elle se laissa enlever plutôt que conduire” (90). This waltzing lesson is hardly meant to benefit Nélida. Instructing her to dance well, Timoléon aims to procure pleasure for himself and appear dominant. He tells her, “ne craignez pas d’appuyer votre bras sur mon épaule; cela me donnera plus de confiance, plus de liberté pour vous diriger… et puis—ceci est pour la galerie qui nous observe—il ne faut pas autant baisser la tête; il faut vous résigner à me regarder quelquefois” (90). The waltz establishes the authority that Timoléon gains from being the first to know her carnally. Agoult stresses his vanity in contrast to Nélida’s modesty. However, the heroine follows directions and ignores her will thereby becoming his puppet.

As the twirling continues and the embrace tightens, the dance becomes noxious. Excited by the waltz, Timoléon succumbs to its hallucinatory effects. Instead of taking

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\(^1\) In his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, Flaubert defined the waltz in moralizing and gendered terms: “VALSE. S’indigner contre. Danse lascive et impure qui ne devrait être dansée que par les vieilles femmes” (135).
pleasure in this dream-like state, Nélida somaticizes the sinfulness of chaotic spinning. She enters a nightmare of excessive light, noise, and scents. Falling prey to the missteps of other couples, she pleads to leave the dance:

À mesure qu’ils rasaien le sol, d’une vitesse toujours redoublée, au son d’une musique dont le rythme impérieux arrachait Nélida à elle-même, l’étourdissait, lui donnait le vertige, la jeune fille émue, palpitante, poussée par une impulsion irrésistible dans un tourbillon de lumière et de bruit, sentait monter à son cerveau les perfides exhalaisons du jasmin et l’haleine embrasée, toujours plus proche, de Timoléon qui l’attirait. Il y eut un moment où, pour la garantir du choc d’un couple de valseurs sortis des rangs, il la saisit si fortement et la rapprocha de lui d’un mouvement si brusque, que leurs visages se touchèrent presque. Nélida sentit à son front pâle la chevelure humide et chaude du jeune homme; elle vit son œil ardent qui plongeait sur elle; un frisson courut dans tout son corps; elle défaillit sous cette étreinte et ce regard auxquels elle était livrée, et sa lèvre entrouverte et sa voix mourante laissèrent tomber ces mots que Timoléon but avec ivresse comme un aveu d’amour: ‘Soutenez-moi et emmenez-moi d’ici, je me trouve mal.’ (91)

Timoléon’s brusque movements, the heat produced by the dance, and Nélida’s trembling body heighten the sexual allusion.¹ The use of long compound sentences in addition to

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¹ A similar emphasis on the weakness and collapse of the dancer appears in the description of a waltz in Ludovic Halévy’s short story “Un tour de valse” (1886); however, Halévy’s heroine equates submission to love.
the excessive description of the dancers’ physical and psychological states produce a textual chaos mimicking the waltzing nightmare.

Whereas Nélida portrays the various sensations agitating the dancers, the narrator of Madame Bovary describes the discreet actions connecting the dancers. Flaubert’s text imitates the rhythm of the waltz with a continuous flow of short phrases culminating in an evasion of onlookers and Emma’s loss of equilibrium:

[…] leurs jambes entraient l’une dans l’autre; il baissait ses regards vers elle, elle levait les siens vers lui; une torpeur la prenait, elle s’arrêta. Ils repartirent; et, d’un mouvement plus rapide, le vicomte, l’entraînant, disparut avec elle jusqu’au bout de la galerie, où, haletante, elle faillit tomber, et un instant, s’appuya la tête sur sa poitrine. (88)

This movement away from descriptions of emotional experiences and toward cinematic descriptions of actions marks the decline of French Romanticism. Readers of the waltz scene in Madame Bovary are “meant to guess the intensity of excitement but to retain some distance from it,” whereas Nélida absorbs the reader in the whirlwind of the heroine’s confusion and anxiety (Goodwin 213). Esthetic movements evolve, yet masculine domination remains a constant in both novels. The women’s weakness at the end of the waltz signals that their cavaliers have conquered their bodies. After carrying Nélida to another room, Timoléon, in an apparent allusion to Werther’s philosophy of the waltz, tells her, “ne valsez jamais avec un autre que moi; je crois que j’en deviendrais fou” (N 91). Like a consummated marriage, the first waltz creates a relationship based on ownership.
The first waltz continues as a metaphor for sexual initiation in the heroines’ memories. When Nélida is torn between her love for Guermann and her admiration for Timoléon, she recalls this waltz as the end of her childhood and the beginning of her sexual relationships: “cette valse éperdue où le secret de sa jeunesse, échappé dans le trouble de ses sens, avait été recueilli par un homme qui allait devenir son époux” (115). Whereas Nélida regrets this first waltz, Emma rediscovers the seduction of her first waltz when she commits adultery with Rodolphe: “il lui sembla qu’elle tournait encore dans la valse” (Flaubert 214). In Sara Webster Goodwin’s reading of Madame Bovary, Emma seeks to occupy the position of the woman who knows how to waltz and dominate her partners. This nightmarish or oneiric initiation transforms a young woman taught not to waltz by making her see herself as either a dominated object or sensual being capable of enjoying transgressions.

The waltz was a revolutionary dance insofar as it broke from norms determining men and women’s public encounters. Writing about the waltz also became revolutionary as it allowed women writers to investigate feminine sexuality and power dynamics in heterosexual physical relationships. In Valérie, Leone Leoni, and Nélida, the heroines waltz against their will ashamed of betraying their moral education. These waltz scenes reproach male domination and nonconsensual dancing. Cottin and Duras describe desiring women who enjoy the pleasure of dancing close to another body. These characters strategically seduce instead of succumbing to the waltz and transforming into sirens, like the dancing grisettes in Gustave Flaubert’s 1857 novel L’Éducation
sentimentale.¹ The numerous descriptions of waltzes in Sand’s corpus highlight the complexity of this dance as a symbol, a social act, and a phenomenological experience. As the dancing heroine of Laura contemplates the feeling of infinite possibilities, her waltz demonstrates subjective, willful, unaffected grace suggesting that the waltz is not incompatible with grace. Unlike the allure of non-European or Mediterranean dances, the erotic connotations of the waltz appear debauched because the dance reminds observers of banal sexuality without the distance created by exoticized representations. If white Christian women’s sexual subjectivity, meaning their experience as sexual beings aware of their sexual desires, was unthinkable in the nineteenth century, then waltzing women could only appear as victims or femme fatale, but never graceful dancers.

¹ Flaubert’s description of the intoxicating effect of the waltz on the protagonist of L’Éducation sentimentale (1857) provoked legal action against the novelist. Frédéric, the novel’s hero, watches a group of grisettes lose themselves in this decadent dance: “Un Postillon de Longjumeau la saisit par la taille, une valse commençait. Alors, toutes les femmes, assises autour du salon sur les banquettes, se levèrent à la file, prestement; et leurs jupes, leurs écharpes, leurs coiffures se mirent à tourner. Elles tournaient si près de lui, que Frédéric distinguait les gouttelettes de leur front ; – et ce mouvement giratoire de plus en plus vif et régulier, vertigineux, communiquant à sa pensée une sorte d’ivresse, y faisait surgir d’autres images, tandis que toutes passaient dans le même éblouissement, et chacune avec une excitation particulière selon le genre de sa beauté” (209-10). These women transform into sexual objects devoid of humanity as their dancing provokes the observer’s desires. Whereas Krüdener, Sand, and d’Agoult use the waltz to address violent masculine domination, Flaubert describes the dance to depict dangerous women.
Chapter 3 The Shawl Dance, Quadrille, and Bolero: Veiled Bodies, Archetypes, and Origins

To dance is human, and humanity almost universally expresses itself in dance.

Judith Lynne Hanna, *To Dance is Human.*

Dancers transform their bodies into moving images that can be completely different from their lived situations. On nineteenth-century stages, ballerinas regularly portrayed sylphs, undines, and caricatures of various ethnic groups. In salons, women performed series of poses to appear as living artworks representing people from distant times or places. In this chapter, I examine presentational dances in three novels: Krüdener’s *Valérie* (1803), Claire de Duras’s *Ourika* (1823), and George Sand’s *La Filleule* (1853). In *Valérie*, the heroine performs a mysterious shawl dance that effaces her sexual body as she metamorphoses into iconic maternal figures. In *Ourika* and *La Filleule*, the characters dance as an expression of an ethnically or racially determined instinct. Exoticized and racialized characters in Romantic fiction allowed European writers to project their fears and desires on people considered to be inferior. At the same time, romanticized descriptions of dances from other cultures presented new possibilities of what dance could become. In these three novels, the origin of dance comes into
question. The dancers however are described as archetypes, that is to say ideologically charged icons representing individuals that imply “the creation of some greater class or classes to which the individual is seen to belong” and, in turn, replaces the individual with a “homogenous image” (Gilman 223). Through dance, Valérie becomes a maternal icon, Ourika becomes her blackness, and Morena discovers her Gypsy origin. In these dance scenes, either the dancer’s body disappears so that she can represent an image of (white) Christian purity, or the dancer becomes a caricature of her racialized body. These dance scenes demonstrate how novelists grappled with gendered and racialized concepts of graceful movement. Whereas Valérie draws on Hellenistic and Renaissance understandings of grace, Ourika and La Filleule attest to a shift in understanding codified social practices and urbanity as detrimental to the possibilities of graceful being.

Contradances and waltzes at social gatherings are participatory dances bringing people together to partake in a shared activity. Dancers join in participatory dances without rehearsing for the specific event. When non-dancing party guests watch those who dance, they participate in the event as potential dancers. Presentational dances, in contrast, are the products of planning and are meant to be viewed as performances in which the spectators will not participate as dancers.¹ Like theater and music, presentational dances took part in the culture of literary salons. Women such as Emma

¹ A bidirectional relationship existed between social dances and ballets throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as choreographers adopted social dances for ballets, professional dancers were regularly invited to perform at balls, and ballet steps entered certain social dances. According to Susan Leigh Foster, the convergence of salon and stage dance repertoires augmented audience’s general enthusiasm for dance.
Hamilton, Krüdener, and Ida Brun created dances or series of attitudes for small audiences composed of political figures, writers, and artists. As individuals sought new horizons in a nation struggling to consolidate its monarchical past and its present imbued in bourgeois values, nineteenth-century performances proposed modes of being different from their temporal or geographical context. Dancers transformed their bodies into expressive instruments, and spectatorship became an immersive “experience of profound emotion” (Foster, *Choreography* 34).

Expressive presentational dances are theatrical, but theatricality does not necessarily mean artificial and antithetical to grace. Rooted in the present, theatricality originates “from the spectator’s awareness of a theatrical intention” addressed to him or her (Féral, “Theatricality” 96). In theatrical performances, the body is conspicuously made into “a place of desire” as the performer loses her subjectivity to become “a source of production and displacement” (Féral, “Performance” 171, 174). Art historian Michael Fried contrasts theatricality and absorption in eighteenth-century French paintings to demonstrate Denis Diderot’s argument that art degenerates as it becomes increasingly theatrical. Like Heinrich von Kleist, Diderot lauded paintings representing states of absorption, or engrossment in an activity or sensation, and scorned theatrical paintings that perform for the beholder. Whereas theatrical paintings or plot-focused plays speak directly to the audience, a natural or naïve work of art, according to Diderot, reveals no awareness of observers so that viewers lose themselves in the work blurring the boundaries between art and life. A naïve, silent work of art provides the observer a blank canvas on which she can project her own desires. In the dance scenes studied in this
chapter, the observers perceive the dances as performances of natural instincts. Nevertheless, the interactions, or perceived interactions, between the spectators and dancer suggest that the dances are theatrical because the dancer knowingly dances for her admirers. Consequently, these novels show how graceful movements, perceived as naïve, artfully absorb spectators’ attention.

Theatrical dances offer opportunities for proposing different modes of being in the world. In the *Troisième entretien*, Diderot equated plotless figure dances showing off a dancer’s grace to mere exercises and advocated for imitative dances representing a defined subject.\(^1\) Admirative of Jean-Georges Noverre’s ballets and critical of those choreographed by Gaëtan Vestris (1729–1808), Diderot preferred that the meaning of dances be comprehensible to the beholder. Yet, dance forced to be understandable loses the *je ne sais quoi* that makes it graceful and absorbs its spectators. Recreating themselves through masquerade, dancers enjoy a certain freedom and creative license to perform expressively.\(^2\)

In “La poésie dramatique,” Diderot named imagination, the ability to remember or create images, an indispensable quality for any poet, philosopher, or intelligent being. Comparing a person who thinks only with words to an automaton, Diderot privileged gestures over speech in theater because spectators decipher movements and respond to

\(^1\) “Je voudrais bien qu’on me dise ce que signifient toutes ces danses” (*Œuvres complètes* 158).

\(^2\) In *Il Libro del cortegiano*, Baldassarre Castiglione identified masquerade as an opportunity for creative freedom, “una certa libertà e licienza” (106).
them more easily than to spoken discourse.¹ Yet, as we saw in chapter one, observers also respond to indecipherable sights that push them to think creatively. Since gestures and non-signifying movements constitute dance, it privileges images and, when performed well, sparks spectators’ imaginations as they become absorbed in the dancing experience as active participants. This state of absorption however can lead beholders to ignore the dancer’s humanity or to reify her as they project meaning onto her.

**The Shawl Dance**

Through the contrast between the waltzes and the shawl dance in *Valérie*, Krüdener scorned fashionable social dances and proposed an ideal form of dance conveying spiritual messages. At the age of twelve, Krüdener traveled to Paris where she took dance lessons from Vestris, also known as the *dieu de la danse*.² Her autobiographical *Journal de jeunesse* shines light on three aspects of dance recurrent in her writings: the vanity of performing, madness, and expressions of what escapes quotidian communication.³ Krüdener differentiated commonplace dances meant to show off acquired skills from dances originating in the soul, thereby distinguishing the *danse du schall*, the dance for which she was famous, from conventional displays of feminine

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¹ In the eighteenth century, rising bourgeois expectations for immediately apprehensible and didactic art bolstered the increased prominence given to gesture in dance, proscenium theater, and street theaters.
² According to Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, many young women took classes with Vestris: “toutes les jeunes femmes de la cour, avant leur présentation, prenaient-elles quelques leçons de lui pour faire les trois révénences” (*Souvenirs* 1:106).
³ “On me remit entre les mains de Vestris. Je prenais souvent mes leçons de danse en présence des hommes les plus distingués par leur naissance ou leur ‘situation’ dans le monde. On vantait ce que Vestris se plaisait à faire remarquer en moi. Je n’aimais pas la danse, elle ne me paraissait bonne qu’à me faire ‘briller’. […] Je regardais la danse comme une espèce de folie. Rien ne me paraissait admirable que ce qui partait d’une âme: je créai une espèce de danse qui, devenant un langage élevé et mystérieux, produisait un si grand effet qu’on me citait dans les journaux, et que toutes les femmes voulaient l’apprendre” (qtd. in Ley, *Madame de Krüdener et son temps* 15).
education. Valérie and Krüdener’s unpublished novella Algithe criticize social dances as frivolous means of attracting attention while exalting dances associated with Greek antiquity.¹ Krüdener’s shawl dance was a form of free movement liberated from choreographic codes linking body positions and gestures to fixed meaning. In the same way that Jacques Rancière compares Isadora Duncan’s dances inspired by figures in Greek art to “movement equal to rest,” I understand the gracefulness of the shawl dance to emerge out of the ambiguous images it creates (Aisthesis 10).

Shawl dances date back to antiquity.² At the dawn of the nineteenth century, divertissements with long scarves appeared in salons, at balls, and on stage.³ Although women from various national origins and epochs danced with shawls and veils, during the first decade of the nineteenth century, most admirers of this dance associated it with the legendary Emma Hamilton or Krüdener’s hit novel. At the end of the nineteenth century, American modern dancer Loïe Fuller amazed European audiences by dancing with huge veils. Separated by almost a century, these performances attracted admiration for the dancers’ ability to transform their everyday bodies into art.

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¹ In Algithe, written around the same time as Valérie, the title character’s father encourages her success on the dance floor. When the family leaves Poland for the solitude of Bohemia, her mother convinces Algithe to abandon her talents hoping to subdue her growing vanity, “la passion la plus dangereuse et la plus facile à donner aux femmes” (AV 263). Instead of blaming dancing itself or Algithe’s desire to dance as the source of her vanity, the novel pinpoints the problem in the tendency to compare women as if they were commodities. The story also describes a choreography inspired by Greek mythology performed outdoors by a group of young girls as virtuous and thoughtful.

² In the second century CE, the Roman grammarian Cornelius Fronto compared orators who repeat the same idea in different manners to actors dancing with shawls: “As actors, when they dance clad in mantles, with one and the same mantle represent a swan’s tail, the tresses of Venus, a Fury’s scourge, so these writers make up the same thought in a thousand ways” (105).

³ During the First Empire, dancers from the Opéra regularly entertained guests at balls and private parties by performing divertissements, short ballets without a central subject connecting them.
Since the Italian Renaissance, antiquity represented an artistic ideal that greatly influenced theories of grace as an esthetic and moral quality.¹ In Krüdener’s *Valérie* and Staël’s *Corinne*, comparisons between the dancers and ancient figures place their performances within the realm of art in the same way that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers turned to Greek tragedy to create an ideal form of literature. Although motion is a key element of most definitions of grace, held postures evoking movement in stillness can also reveal grace. Edmund Burke, in *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, associated gracefulness with postures devoid of any “appearance of difficulty” and composed so that no body part appears “divided by sharp and sudden angles” (156). For roundness, “this delicacy of attitude and motion,” creates what he considered to be the “magic of grace” evident in statutes such as the Venus de Medici (156). The smooth curves creating motion in Greek statues and drawings have influenced dancers and choreographers throughout the history of European and American dance.

Attitudes stage discrete images produced through bodily movement. The term *attitude*, derived from the Latin *actito* meaning to plead repeatedly or act in tragedy, refers to body positions and the moral or psychological disposition of an individual. Attitudes also connote a readiness to act. As Erin Manning puts it, a still posture constitutes “the threshold, the incipient grace, the texture that contributes to having known what it felt like to move” (*Relationscapes* 46). American philosopher and social

¹ Ita MacCarthy demonstrates how Renaissance writers and artists drew from ancient texts to employ grace as a persuasive instrument. Although the fifteenth century is closely associated with a revival of classical imagery, the ninth and twelfth century, according to Erwin Panofsky, likewise experienced a resuscitation of classical paragons and motifs.
behaviorist George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) understood an attitude as “the adjustment of the organism involved in an impulse ready for expression” (362). Series of poses create an aesthetic through fantasmata, one of the six elements of dance enumerated by the fifteenth-century dance theorist Domenico da Piacenza. Fantasmata is bodily readiness, “una presteza corporalle,” creating rest, “requia,” in each movement (Piacenza 12). Stemming from the interplay between movements and poses, fantasmata “designates the pose as the transition from statue to animation” and “defines dancing as a compromise between movement and the pose, a transitional act in which each seems about to become the other” (Franko, “The Notion” 79). Anotonio Cornazano, in his Libro dell’arte del danzare (1456), described dancing per fantasmata as occasionally silencing time. The tension created by fantasmata, stillness on the verge of movement, alters perceptions of time and space to create images making and unmaking knowledge.

In the eighteenth century, attitudes constituted a mimetic art recreating the poses of iconic images.¹ Contemplated in advance, attitudes conflict with Kleist’s and Schiller’s understandings of grace. Unlike pantomime which relies on gestures to create a non-voiced speech, attitudes propose bodily ways of being. In both Corinne and Valérie, the heroines perform attitudes or tableaux in the style of Emma Hamilton.²

¹ Series of poses mimicking ancient art appeared in ballets such as Noverre’s Apelles et Campaspe (1776), in which the artist Apelles paints the mistress of Alexander the Great as various Greek divinities. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, choreographer Pierre Gardel and painter Jacques-Louis David staged tableaux vivants depicting scenes of antiquity for Revolutionary celebrations.

² To avoid the confusion of her various names, I will refer to Emma Hamilton as Emma.
Krüdener may have seen Emma perform in November 1786 while visiting the English ambassador’s home in Naples.¹ In any event, the novelist explicitly recognized Emma’s performances and celebrity in the description of Valérie’s shawl dance. Krüdener and other upper-class women likewise staged attitudes or dances with shawls to entertain guests. By making the shawl dance in Valérie one of its best-known passages, Krüdener added to a widespread fascination with illusions created by fabrics dancing around women.² Although Valérie’s dance shares certain similarities with Emma’s attitudes, Krüdener took careful measures to differentiate her heroine from this social luminary known for her scandalous behavior.

Emy Lyon (1765–1815), rebaptized Emma Hart by her lover Charles Greville, grew up in poverty. In 1782, the artist George Romney began painting portraits in which she posed as mythological figures. When Greville could no longer support her financially, he asked his uncle Sir William Hamilton (1730–1803), the English Ambassador and Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Naples, to take over the responsibility of Emma and her mother. At the age of 21, Emma arrived in Naples to become the hostess at the British Embassy and lover to Sir William, an avid collector of antiquities. Shortly after her move to Italy, she began performing series of attitudes modeled after Greek art and occasionally biblical figures. In 1791, the coupled married in

¹ In his travel journal, Krüdener’s husband described a visit of Sir Hamilton’s property on 11 November 1786 (Krüdener, Voyage 150). He did not mention Emma.
² Fashion historian Alice Mackrell names the nineteenth century “the Age of the Shawl” (48).
London, sparking Horace Walpole to remark, “Sir William has actually married his
gallery of statues!” (qtd. in Faxon 270).

Emma arranged her attitudes like an artist; however, her spectators often
minimized her creative efforts by describing her as a muse or passive creation. Johann
Wolfgang von Goethe wrote the first known account of her performances on 16 March
1787. Relating his stay in Caserta, the Neapolitan King’s residence, Goethe depicted
Emma’s attitudes as an artwork concocted for Sir William:

She lets down her hair and, with a few shawls, gives so much variety to her poses,
gestures, expressions, etc., that the spectator can hardly believe his eyes. He sees
what thousands of artists would have liked to express realized before him in
movements and surprising transformations—standing, kneeling, sitting, reclining,
serious, sad, playful, ecstatic, contrite, alluring, threatening, anxious, one pose
follows another without a break. She knows how to arrange the folds of her veil to
match each mood, and has a hundred ways of turning it into a headdress. The old
knight idolizes her and is enthusiastic about everything she does [Der alte Ritter
hält das Licht dazu und hat mit ganzer Seele sich diesem Gegenstand ergeben]. In
her, he has found all the antiquities, all the profiles of Sicilian coins, even the
Apollo Belvedere. (Italian Journey 200; Italiensche Reise 157, my emphasis)

Goethe reduced her accomplishments to “her natural beauty, when in fact she created a
new space for creativity and publicity for herself” (Maierhofer 237). By calling her
attitudes a “Gegenstand” (an object), Goethe limited her to a culture of sensibility that
encouraged women to make themselves passive “objects of observation”
(Maierhofer 237). He saw the attitudes as art but did not view Emma as an artist. Johann Gottfried von Herder, after seeing her attitudes in 1789, found Emma’s attempts at becoming a living statue contradictory to theories on sculpture. He referred to her poses as “monkey art” (“Affenkunst”), possibly in reference to associations between Bacchantes and apes (qtd. in Rauser 478). Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun perceived Emma’s talent as a result of studying and training. Lauding Emma’s faculty for expressing joy and pain, Vigée-Lebrun wrote, “Elle étudiait les gestes, les inflexions de voix des acteurs, et les rendait avec une facilité prodigieuse […] elle perfectionna ce talent d’un nouveau genre, qui l’a rendue célèbre” (Souvenirs 1:200-01). Although some spectators contested Emma’s artistic agency, her fame among European elites is undeniable.

The success of Emma’s performances depended on her ability to obfuscate her everyday self. Her hair interacted with shawls as her dramatic facial expressions created vivid depictions of ancient figures while she moved in and out of diverse poses. The fusion between the shawl and a woman’s hair suggests that the accessory and the body come together to form a whole.¹ Emma’s attitudes produced a grace in line with Henry Home’s concept of grace as what arises from “the expressions of the countenance” indicating “mental qualities” (363). British politician John Bacon Sawrey Morritt praised Emma’s facial expressions alluding to different iconic figures: “her wonderful

¹ Similarly, in the description of the coronation at the beginning of Corinne, the heroine wears “un schall des Indes tourné autour de sa tête, et ses cheveux du plus beau noir entremêlés avec ce schall” (25). Stacie Allan points out that this description of Corinne bears significant similarities to Marie-Guillaume Benoist’s Portrait d’une négresse, first exhibited at the Salon of 1800. For Laurent Darbellay, the comparisons between Corinne and figures in the paintings of Domenichino suggest that she draps herself with shawls like Emma. Darbellay shows how the descriptions of Corinne’s attitudes emphasize the plasticity of the body.
countenance is at one instant a Sibyl, then a Fury, a Niobe, a Sophonisba drinking poison, a Bacchante” (383). According to Morritt, the variety of her rapidly changing attitudes created a pleasing elegance as Emma sometimes executed more than two hundred attitudes, rarely doing the same pose twice. Characterizing her ordinary appearance as banal, Morritt compared the images created in her attitudes to Raphael’s paintings and Greek statues.

Vigée-Lebrun credited herself for influencing Emma’s sartorial choices. According to her memoirs, the painter first saw the attitudes in 1790. Finding them disappointing because Emma was dressed like everyone else, Vigée-Lebrun draped her with ample fabrics so that she looked like the models in her paintings as well as the artist herself: “Je lui fis faire des robes comme celle que je portais, pour peindre à mon aise, et qu’on appelle des blouses; elle y ajouta des châles pour se draper, ce qu’elle entendait très bien” (1:201). The danse du schall and performances of attitudes impressed audiences with their power to transform an ordinary body into an extraordinary work of art through illusions created by flowing fabrics and serpentine lines, whose undulating motions create what British artist and art theorist William Hogarth (1697-1764) called “the line of grace” (52).

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1 Emma’s shawl dances likewise influenced sartorial trends by giving value to “the garment’s protean qualities” (Mackrell 9). A century later, Helen Moller, American dancer and director of the Temple School of Natural Dancing, lauded draperies as “more modest than any clothes,” because draperies add to the body’s grace and beauty without restricting movement (43).

2 Dancing master Thomas Wilson likewise considered “gently flowing Serpentine and Curved Lines” to “form the acme of grace” (The Address 20). Straight lines, in contrast “are useful, but not elegant; and, when applied to the Human Figure, are productive of an extremely ungraceful effect” (13).
As Emma gained notoriety, her raffish conduct in real life added to the mesmerizing effect of her attitudes. Her nonconformity especially jumps out in women’s writings. In 1800, she performed her attitudes on several occasions for Frances Trench, wife of Anglican Archbishop Richard Chenevix Trench. Neither Emma’s physical beauty nor her behavior pleased Frances Trench, who considered Emma “exceedingly embonpoint” and found her “movements in common life ungraceful” (105). For Trench, the arrangement of Emma’s costumes and props involved more trickery than expressivity.¹ Yet, playing with artifice and decorations, the performer gains access to a form of grace missing in her quotidian being. Echoing Morritt, Trench concluded, “It is remarkable that, though coarse and ungraceful in common life, she becomes highly graceful, and even beautiful, during this performance” (108). This divergence between the dancer and the woman (also seen in late-nineteenth-century texts on Loie Fuller) attests to her capacity to transform her corporeal movements into a representation of something vastly different from her non-dancing being. Manipulating fabrics Emma demonstrated the goal of many sartorial fashions: to hide the banality of the body.

In Valérie’s shawl dance and Delphine’s polonaise as well as in accounts of Emma’s performances, the writers emphasized the variety of emotions portrayed. Vigée-

¹ Critical of the performer, Trench’s diary provides a detailed explanation of the performance: “Several Indian shawls, a chair, some antique vases, a wreath of roses, a tambourine, and a few children are her whole apparatus. She stands at one end of the room with a strong light to her left, and every other window closed. Her hair (which by-the-by is never clean) is short, dressed like an antique, and her gown a simple calico chemise, very easy, with loose sleeves to the wrist. She disposes the shawls so as to form Grecian, Turkish, and other drapery, as well as a variety of turbans. Her arrangement of the turbans is absolute sleight-of-hand, she does it so quickly, so easily, and so well. It is a beautiful performance, amusing to the most ignorant, and highly interesting to the lovers of art” (Trench 107-8).
Lebrun recalled Hamilton’s attitudes as compositions of various concepts easily transitioning from sadness to joy, from sensualism to piety.¹ Not quite dance nor pantomime, attitudes are series of expressive poses. Their capacity to communicate a variety of sentiments makes them a performing art. According to Abbé Dubos’s *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), the principal objective of art is to arouse emotions. Dances of antiquity, Dubos explained, fall into one of two categories: dances imitating Bacchantes or series of expressive attitudes and gestures.² Attitudes imitate human emotions while also making the dancer appear less like an imperfect human body and more like a graceful sculpture or painting.

In *Valérie*, Krüdener recognized Emma as the originator of the *danse du schall* but distinguished it from the dance in the novel. In Gustave’s letter describing the dance, he credits Emma for inventing this genre of dance: “Milady Hamilton, douée de ces avantages précieux, donna la première une idée de ce genre de danse vraiment dramatique” (*AV* 102). To avoid congratulating Emma for her ingenuity in conceiving this idea, Krüdener justified the logic of dancing with a shawl: “Le châle, qui est en même-temps si antique, si propre à être dessiné de tant de manières différentes, drape, voile, cache tour à tour la figure, et se prête aux plus séduisantes expressions” (102).

¹ “Rien n’était plus curieux en effet que la faculté qu’avait acquise Lady Hamilton de donner subitement à tous ses traits l’expression de la douleur ou de la joie, et de se poser merveilleusement pour représenter des personnages divers. L’œil animé, les cheveux épars, elle vous montrait une bacchante délicieuse, puis tout à coup son visage exprimait la douleur, et l’on voyait une Madeleine reprenant admirable” (Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs* 2:91).
² Dubos described this second form of dance as “une imitation des démarches, des attitudes du corps, des gestes, en un mot de toutes les démonstrations dont les hommes accompagnent ordinairement leurs discours, ou dont il se servent quelquefois pour donner leurs sentiments à comprendre sans parler” (426).
shawl creates a seductive effect by hiding the body, only to reveal it little by little in same manner that striptease, according to Roland Barthes, desexualizes women as clothing and accessories fascinate spectators. The movement of the fabric alludes to the act of undressing, but the observer focuses on the material instead of the body. Though the shawl is an instrument of seduction, Gustave describes Valérie’s dance as an expression of Christian virtues and naïve grace:

Mais c’est Valérie qu’il faut voir […] c’est elle qui possède cette grâce charmante qui ne peut s’apprendre, mais que la nature a révélée en secret à quelques êtres supérieurs. […] Ceux qui n’ont vu que ce mécanisme difficile et étonnant à la vérité, cette grâce de convenance, qui appartient plus ou moins à un peuple ou à une nation, ceux-là, dis-je, n’ont pas l’idée de la danse de Valérie. (102)

Proposing dance as revelatory of Christian goodness, Krüdener differentiates grace from seductive artifice seeking applause instead of drawing the beholder into a state of absorption.
Valérie’s dance was most likely modeled on the shawl dance that Krüdener regularly performed. As Kirsten Holmström argues, the heroine’s dance-like movements, accompanied by music, differ from Emma’s successive poses typically performed without musical accompaniment. It is possible that, like Emma, Krüdener found inspiration for her dance in antiquity.¹ Sarah Davies Cordova suggests that the Parisian performances of the Indian temple dancer Bebaïourn may have inspired Valérie’s dance, but Cordova offers no evidence that Krüdener had knowledge of the bayadère or her choreography. Significantly different from European dances, the danse du schall alludes to distant times and places thereby becoming a mysterious, perhaps even mystical, art.

Krüdener’s dance performances entertained numerous literary luminaries. Visiting Coppet in 1801, she danced with a shawl before an impressed audience including

¹ In her Journal d’enfance et de jeunesse, Krüdener wrote, “la Grèce était pour moi une patrie où mon imagination me promenait parmi d’antiques amis” (qtd. in Mercier 176).
Germaine de Staël, Jacques Necker, Benjamin Constant, and Juliette Récamier. Krüdener’s daughter Juliette likewise performed this imaginative dance for her mother’s friends and acquaintances. During the Directory (1795–1799), fashionable women used dance to “regain the positions they had enjoyed in pre-revolutionary salons” by once again becoming the center of social gatherings (Cordova 17). As shawls and scarfs became increasingly fashionable accessories, young women performed shawl dances in salons and in literature around the world.

It is likely that Krüdener’s 1801 performance inspired Staël’s inclusion of a shawl in Delphine’s polonaise. In a letter to Krüdener dated 1 February 1803, Staël credited Krüdener and her daughter’s dance as the inspiration for Delphine’s polonaise: “Il est très vrai que c’est votre danse et celle de Juliette qui m’a donné l’idée de celle de Delphine” (qtd. in Ley, “Madame” 101). Nevertheless, in Delphine’s dance, “the attitude element is completely absent; all that links it with Valérie’s is its expressiveness and the use of the shawl” (Homström 142). In her correspondences, Krüdener compared the polonaise in Delphine to her own performances and the dance of Sidonie, the heroine of her

1 During their 1803 stay in Paris, Juliette wrote in her diary, “Nous avons dîné chez Madame de Staël; j’ai dansé le châle” (qtd. in Ley, “Madame de Krüdener à Paris” 100).
2 Later, after the fall of the First Empire, the concept of la vie élégante, meaning the display of good manners and perfected comportment, distinguished members of the new elite. See Anne Martin-Fugier’s La vie élégante ou la formation du Tout-Paris.
3 Charles Dickens (1812-1870) described a “grand Sicilian shawl-dance” in the short story “Characters”: “As to the shawl-dance, it was the most exciting thing that ever was beheld; there was such a whisking, and rustling, and fanning” (204). American writer Susan Anne Ridley Sedgwick’s short story “The Shawl Dance” published in The Morals of Pleasure (1829) indicates that the dance made its way across the Atlantic.
4 “[...] elle s’entourait d’un châle indien, qui, dessinant sa taille, et retombant avec ses longs cheveux, faisait de toute sa personne un tableau ravissant” (D 107).
unpublished novel *La Cabane des Lataniers*. In a letter to Dr. Gay, Krüdener praised the grace and talents of Sidonie before concluding that her dance appears in *Delphine*. The novelist worried that readers would consider Staël the creator of this literary dance. It is unclear if Staël had read Krüdener’s drafts depicting this character and her dance; however, it is likely that Krüdener modeled Sidonie’s dance after her own *danse du schall* which Staël had seen.

In addition to Emma, other celebrities known for their attitudes performed in literary circles frequented by Staël and Krüdener. Ida Brun (1792–1857), daughter of the Danish poet Frederikke Brun, performed for Staël at Coppet and may have influenced the novelist’s description of “tableaux enchanteurs” in *Corinne* (130). In an 1807 letter to Frederikke Brun, Staël credited her for being “le genie d’Ida” insinuating that the mother created the artist (*Correspondance* 6:293). In *De l’Allemagne*, Staël expanded on the maternal origin in Ida’s dance that corrects the failings of sculpture:

[...] la sculpture en général perdait à ce que la danse fût entièrement négligée; le seul phénomène qu’il y ait dans cet art en Allemagne, c’est Ida Brunn [sic], une

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1 Regarding representations of rivalries between women writers, see Eve-Marie Lampron’s 2012 dissertation *Entre cohésions et divisions: les relations entre femmes auteurs en France et en Italie (1770-1840).*

2 *Valérie* inspired other literary references to the shawl dance. In Gerard de Nerval’s novella *Pandora* (1841), the title character, who releases the world’s suffering, performs a shawl dance “avec une négligence adorale” (126). Pandora’s heedlessness with the shawl allures and then horrifies the narrator.

3 Henriette Hendel-Schütz also performed dramatic attitudes, although her performances were considered more erotic than those of Emma, Krüdener, and Ida. Staël once met Hendel-Schütz on a ship going to Sweden many years after the publication of her two novels. According to the Duchess d’Abrantès’s *Histoire des Salons de Paris*, the Queen Hortense, whom Krüdener frequented, performed the shawl dance in addition to a myriad of other fashionable and exotic choreographies. At a Russian ball, the princess Dashkova (1743–1810) performed a shawl dance in a series of dances alluding to different nationalities, “la danse du châle, la Gipsy, la cosaque, la danse du tambourin” (*Mémoire de la princesse Daschkoff* 26).

4 Ida saw Emma’s attitudes in 1796.
une fille que son existence sociale exclut de la vie d’artiste; elle a reçu de la nature et de sa mère un talent inconcevable pour représenter par de simples attitudes les tableaux les plus touchants, ou les plus belles statues, sa danse n’est qu’une suite de chefs-d’œuvre passagers, dont on voudrait fixer chacun pour toujours: il est vrai que la mère d’Ida a conçu, dans son imagination, tout ce que sa fille sait peindre aux regards. […] elle [Ida] exprimait, sans paroles, la douleur, les combats et la terrible résolution d’une mère; ses regards animés servaient sans doute à faire comprendre ce qui se passait dans son cœur; mais l’art de varier ses gestes et de draper en artiste le manteau de pourpre dont elle est revêtue produisait au moins autant d’effet que sa physionomie même; souvent elle s’arrêtait longtemps dans la même attitude, et chaque fois un peintre n’aurait pu rien inventer de mieux que le tableau qu’elle improvisait. (550-52, my emphasis)

Ida’s movements surpassed the grace of paintings and sculptures thanks to her facial and corporeal expressivity. In an ideal form of embodied art, the beauty of the body remains present as it depicts awe-inspiring images of human passions. Frederikke Brun, influenced by Friedrich Schiller’s On Grace and Dignity, kept Ida away from the theater and forbid her from participating in theatrical productions to avoid unlearning the natural grace integral to her attitudes. After seeing an opera including a ballet, Ida supposedly “imitated so exactly the good and bad posturings of the prima ballerina” that her mother feared she would “be perverted into a dancer” (Brun 199). Unlike ballet, attitudes were free from institutional ideologies and codification. For Frederikke Brun, her daughter’s attitudes were natural and naïve.
Salonnière and model, Juliette Récamier, like Krüdener, took dance lessons with Vestris and received abundant praise for her performances of the shawl dance.1 In *La Fille du marquis* (1872), Alexander Dumas recounted fictional soirées hosted by Récamier, Staël, and Krüdener where Récamier would dance “cette fameuse danse du châle qui a été transportée sur le théâtre et qui y a fait fureur” (254). Journalist Octave Uzanne (1851-1931) identified Récamier as the inventor of the shawl dance: “on pouvait admirer cette délicieuse jeune femme, semblable aux heures d’Herculanum, dansant un pas avec tambour de basque ou scandant la *danse du schall*, qu’elle avait inventée” (43).2 This comparison to the dancers of Herculaneum and the tambourine, explicitly expressed in the tarantella scene in *Corinne*, transform Récamier into the novelist’s muse. Amélie Lenorman (née Cyvoct), Récamier’s niece, claimed that her aunt learned the shawl dance from an unknown source: “Je ne sais de qui elle avait appris *cette danse du châle*, qui fournit à Mme de Staël le modèle de la danse qu’elle prête à *Corinne*. C’était une pantomime et des attitudes plutôt que de la danse” (18).3 The shawl dance most likely came about through various individuals’ experimentations with this accessory as they performed for small groups of friends or on proscenium stages. *Valérie, Delphine*, and *Corinne* further contributed to the nineteenth-century cultural obsession with dancing

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1 See Catherine Decours’s biography *Juliette Récamier*.
2 According to Uzanne, the dance showed off Récamier’s exquisite physical beauty, notably “la splendeur de sa poitrine et de ses bras nus, la merveilleuse proportion de son corps enveloppé d’une tunique à la prêtresse” (42).
3 Lenorman also described Récamier’s dance as graceful and artistic: “elle voulut me donner une idée de la danse du châle: une longue écharpe à la main, elle exécuta en effet toutes les attitudes dans lesquelles ce tissu léger devenait tour à tour une ceinture, un voile, une draperie. Rien n’était plus gracieux, plus décent et plus pittoresque que cette succession de mouvements cadencés dont on eût désiré fixer par le crayon toutes les attitudes” (18-19).
fabrics and living statues. Nonetheless, Krüdener was intent on being recognized as the author of the shawl dance.

In the unpublished short story “L’auteur de Valérie et la société parisienne,” Krüdener claimed to have invented the shawl dance but also called it a traditional dance from her native country. After hearing praise for the novel, a young man, who has not yet read Valérie, witnesses its author dancing at a party before Récamier: “C’était un langage de mélancolie, de décence, de noblesse, c’était un charme que l’âme seule peut donner et qui se communiquait à des formes pures et ravissantes” (AV 235). The text underscores the performance’s expressive and communicative nature. Although Krüdener never published this story, it reveals the extent to which her claim to the shawl dance contributed to her self-exoticization.¹

“L’auteur de Valérie et la société parisienne” classifies the shawl dance as a religious experience. A composer interprets the dance as possessing a celestial quality, “C’est la danse des anges. Quelle grâce touchante, quel accord dans ces bras, quelle suavité dans ces formes!” (243). His praise stirs the young man to remark the dancer’s extreme beauty, “les plus beaux bras, la plus belle taille et le pied le plus charmant” (243). The repeated use of superlatives and the comparison to an angelic ballet gives the shawl dance a superiority that distinguishes it from commonplace or lascivious

¹ In addition to disputing that Récamier first created the shawl dance, “L’auteur de Valérie et la société parisienne” identifies Valérie’s author as the model for Delphine’s dance: “cette dame étrangère était la même, qui avait donné lieu à cette description si aimable de la danse de D. [Delphine], que l’auteur de ce roman si connu avait vu danser une fois cette étrangère, et en avait été si ravi qu’il l’avait dépeint dans son ouvrage” (235).
terpsichorean displays and from everyday women’s bodies. Further elevating the shawl dance to a performance of perfection, another character declares that the capital needs such soulful dancing to make up for the marionettes seen on stage: “faites venir en attendant des âmes pour danser, car ce n’est pas des jambes et des bras seuls qu’il faut pour cela” (234). For Krüdener, the dancer acts on her onlookers’ souls through her spiritual grace, not her terrestrial body.

Choreographers indeed exploited the mysterious and fascinating interplay between fabric, light, and movement in ballets drawing on exotic motifs. In a January 1805 production of La Belle Laitière, ou Blanche, Reine de Castile, the dancer Mademoiselle Parisot performed a shawl dance “received with enthusiastic applause” (Burgh 354). The press cited Valérie as the inspiration for the shawl dance in Pierre Gardel’s 1804 Orientalist ballet Une Demi-heure de caprice, ou Melzi et Zénor.¹ Melzi creates various forms with a shawl that her lover Zénor left on a chair while dancing with “cette coquetterie de danses voluptueuses” (Gardel 7). Musicologist François-Joseph-Marie Fayolle credited the dramatic effect of Valérie’s shawl dance for inspiring Melzi’s dance.² Reflecting an “exotic component of the Romantic imagination,” dances with shawls continued to appear in mid-nineteenth-century ballets, such as Le Dieu et la bayadère (1830), Flore et Zéphyre (1830), La Sylphide (1832), La Péri (1843), La

¹ Gardel’s 1800 ballet La Dansomanie and Filippo Taglioni’s La Vestale (1818) also include a pas de schaal.
² “M. Gardel n’a fait ce divertissement que pour offrir sur la scène la danse mélancolique du schall, si bien décrite par Mme de Krüdener dans le roman de Valérie” (285).
Esmeralda (1844), Lalla Rookh (1846), and Le Papillon (1860) (Sowell 12). Cloaking European women in Orientalist, Christian, and Antique symbols, dances with imported fabrics hide the female body to evoke iconic or exotic images.

Figure 7 Frederick Glasier, Portrait of Loie Fuller, 1902. (Wikimedia Commons)

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1 At the Théâtre de la Monnaie in 1817, the Italian dancer Thérèse Genetti performed a pas du schall as part of a divertissement titled La Fête indienne. Two years later, she danced a pas du schall at the Grand Théâtre de Gand in Michel-Jean Sedaine’s opera-ballet Aline, reine de Golconde. The dance likewise appeared in theatrical productions. For example, in 1808, Emilie Leverd danced a pas du schall while interpreting the role of Roxelane in Charles-Simon Favart’s play Les Trois Sultanes. One of Cinderella’s step-sisters executed a pas du schall in the 1810 comedy La Nouvelle Cendrillon.

2 Debra Sowell divides the use of shawls in Romantic ballets into three categories: “(1) the use of the shawl as talisman, (2) the shawl as choreographic tool or visual structuring device, and (3) the shawl as a cultural marker with distinct antique or orientalist implications” (13).
Figure 8 John Van Lund, *Ruth St. Denis in “Dance with Scarf,”* 1957. (Jacob’s Pillow Archives)

Figure 9 Angelica Kauffman, *Portrait of a Woman,* 1795. (Wikimedia Commons)
Valérie as a Work of Art

In between Valérie’s two waltzes, the title character performs la danse du schall, a spiritual solo appearing to Gustave as an artistic masterpiece. Whereas the waltz throws the narrator into state of anxiety in proximity to Valérie’s body, the shawl dance sparks his love of virtue as he perceives her as a Madonna-like figure. The dance is theatrical in the sense that Gustave is aware that he is observing a performance, yet he becomes immersed in a fantasy and fails to perceive the dancer as a human body. Krüdener’s representation of the experience of the observer presents dance as what twentieth-century philosopher Susanne Langer calls a “virtual entity” because the dancer creates “an apparition of active powers, a dynamic image,” yet the dance reaches perfection as the physical realities of the dancing moment, in particular the dancer’s living body, disappear ("The Dynamic Image" 79).
As in many of the novels studied thus far, the heroine dances out of obligation, and the dance scene is narrated from a masculine perspective. During Gustave’s stay in Venice with the Count and Valérie, they attend a ball given by the Spanish ambassador. When the guests beg her to dance, she declines. This refusal pleases Gustave who, watching her through a window, wishes to be the only admirer of her dance: “ne leur montrez pas cette danse charmante; qu’elle ne soit que pour ceux qui n’y verront que votre âme; ou plutôt qu’elle ne soit jamais vue que par moi” (100). When Valérie concedes to dance, he becomes jealous yet still enjoys the performance as if it were intended for him alone. To assert exclusive possession of her, if only in his imagination, he makes her body the object of his gaze and not the situation she inhabits.

*Valérie* presents the dancing soloist not as a Salomé but rather as the Holy Mother displaying her goodness. The shawl dance held an ambiguous position with regards to its sensuality and mystical nature. Pastor and reference-book writer Ebenezer Cobham Brewer (1810–1897), in his history of France, declared the “abominable Shawl-dance” a performance that “no modest woman could take part in” (431). Swedish novelist Fredrika Bremer (1801-1865) wrote, “heaven itself dances the Shawl Dance, and rapidly, now in one way, and now in another, drapes itself with clouds” (195).¹ Gustave sees it as an illustration of the dancer’s virtue (431). As a solo, this dance does not imitate heterosexual relationships. Valerie is not a moved object but an actively creating subject. The novel accentuates the dangers of dancing when men dictate women’s movements and

¹ In the original Swedish, “äfven himlen har sin shawl-dans i det den sveper omkring sig, löser och sammandrar molnens slöjor” (295).
suggests that women dancing alone or with other women, like the waltzing village girls discussed in chapter two, can be a silly divertissement at worst and, at best, a spiritually inspired work of art.\(^1\) If a solo is, as Jean-Luc Nancy defines it, “l’engendrement de l’espace-temps par un sujet,” solo dancers become godlike creators of the danced moment (*Allitérations* 98).

Shawls, frequent in nineteenth-century European paintings alluding to antiquity, biblical figures, or the Orient, served to style women as characters different from their everyday selves. Whereas the shawl suddenly appears during Delphine’s dance and complements her beauty, the accessory plays a central role in the preparation for Valérie’s dance:

Valérie demanda son schall, d’une mousseline bleu-foncé; elle écarta ses cheveux de dessus son front elle mit son schall sur sa tête; […] son schall tomba mollement sur ses bras croisés sur sa poitrine; et ce vêtement bleu, cette figure douce et pure, semblaient avoir été dessinées par le Corrège, pour exprimer la tranquille résignation. (101-2)

Instead of covering herself with extravagant garments, the simple shawl made of imported fabric transforms her into Correggio’s depictions of the Virgin draped in a blue veil. Like a nun’s habit or a chapel veil, the shawl symbolizes modesty and submissive resignation as it veils the body and evokes Marian imagery.

\(^1\) The abbot Jean-Joseph Nyssen pointed out in his 1876 pamphlet warning parents about the dangers of dancing that, in the Bible, only dances performed by individuals or among a single sex possess a sacred character.
The novel repeatedly discusses cosmetics and clothing recommending moderation in, but not abstention from, an excessive devotion to physical beauty. The emphasis on the wrapping of the body before the dance mirrors Valérie’s preparation for the ball. The novel highlights women’s inevitable obligation to doll themselves up to be accepted by society. Before the party, Valérie asks Gustave what he thinks of her appearance adding, “je sais que je ne suis pas jolie, je voudrais seulement ne pas être trop mal, il y aura tant de femmes agréables” (100).¹ Gustave compares her to a marquise who is a perfect model of beauty but does not provoke strong or lasting feelings among her admirers. Here, Krüdener defines grace as beauty that teaches the observer lasting lessons:

¹ Elsewhere in the novel, Gustave describes Valérie as not beautiful. In the first letters, he paints her as childlike, vivacious, and extremely good but homely.
la beauté n’est vraiment irrésistible qu’en nous expliquant quelque chose de moins passager qu’elle, qu’en nous faisant rêver à ce qui fait le charme de la vie au-delà du moment fugitif où nous sommes séduits par elle; il faut que l’âme la retrouve quand les sens l’ont assez aperçue. L’âme ne se lasse jamais: plus elle admire, et plus elle s’exalte; et c’est quand on sait l’émouvoir fortement, qu’il ne faut que de la grâce, surtout, cette magie par excellence, renouvelle tous les enchantements. (110-11)

Grace trains the beholder to love morality through a love a beauty. It functions like a moralizer and a savior. When the eyes see someone graceful, “the whole body wants to reproduce the person” (Scarry 4). This passage only speaks of the soul, yet Gustave’s somatic reactions to the shawl dance suggest that grace acts on the observer’s whole person. Taking part in human perfectibility, graceful performances awaken a desire to act gracefully.

Grace exteriorizes moral beauty through simple actions inciting admirers to perceive the possibility of a better existence. Gustave contrasts Valérie’s naïve grace with the grâce de convenance that determines most people’s actions: “cette grâce charmante qui ne peut s’apprendre, mais que la nature a révélée en secret à quelques êtres supérieurs. Elle n’est pas le résultat des leçons de l’art; elle a été apportée du ciel avec les vertus” (AV 104). The naïve charm in her movements reflects her instincts and moral attributes, whereas a graceless dancer replicates movement for the sake of recreating an image formed by social codes.
By describing Valérie as virtuous but not beautiful, the novel departs from portraits of virtuous heroines in most eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century novels.\footnote{Beauty and virtue come together in Staël’s \textit{Delphine}, Cottin’s \textit{Malvina}, Rousseau’s \textit{Julie}, Isabelle de Montolieu’s \textit{Caroline de Lichtfield}, and Adélaïde de Souza’s \textit{Adèle de Sénage}. In Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni’s 1764 novel \textit{Histoire de Miss Jenny} the title character’s mother is described as morally and physically beautiful exemplar of femininity: “Ladi Sara joignait aux grâces de la figure charmante qu’il offre à la vue, des sentiments nobles et généreux. Elle avait l’humeur égale, le cœur sensible, et le naturel tendre” (12).}

Having grown up far from corrupt civilizing institutions, Valérie remains wild and guileless: “elle était restée près de la nature” (115). Reflecting the virtue Gustave associates with his mother, Valérie is his feminine ideal as well as a sister- and mother-like figure.\footnote{Gustave’s references to Valérie as a sister bring to mind the excessive love in Chateaubriand’s \textit{René} between the hero and his younger sister Amélie.} Because of his filial love for the Count, Gustave initially perceives Valérie as genderless. It is only when Gustave witnesses her extreme agitation while worried about her husband that, for the first time, Gustave feels “quelque chose de délicieux” for her, yet he wishes to tell her that she is an angel, a sexless creature (78). Never feeling a conscious sexual desire for Valérie; he worships her as the embodiment of goodness.\footnote{In an apostrophe to Valérie, Gustave writes, “Comment peux-tu devenir meilleure; toi, qui ne respires que pour le bonheur des autres; qui, renfermée dans le cercle de tes devoirs, ne comptes tes plaisirs que par tes vertus” (122).}

In an inverted form of sexual sublimation, he transforms his moral energy into sexual energy.

The novel’s negative portrayal of sexuality and the body falls in line with moral positions held by Schiller and Immanuel Kant.\footnote{When Krüdener later began preaching throughout Europe, she advocated for celibacy.} From a Kantian perspective, using people as a mere means to an end is morally wrong; therefore, only sex for procreative purposes within marriage is morally acceptable since sex for pleasure objectifies sexual partners.
Lust, according to Kant, is the “complete abandonment of oneself to animal inclination” because the desiring individual forsakes human reason and morality (*Metaphysics* 178). In a similar vein, Schiller classified sexual passions as belonging to vulgar nature and not ideal nature. For him, artists must avoid realistically depicting sex or women, “the bearers of human sexuality,” and sublimate sex into idealized love (Moi, *Henrik* 78). In the thinking of Kant and Schiller, a woman must be idealized as a “pure woman” so that a man’s love for her is elevated above animal instincts (Moi 80).

The idealization of Valérie during the shawl dance affirms the Schillerian belief in human perfectibility acquired through an eradication of the human subject’s terrestrial needs and a realization of all her potentialities. According to the eleventh letter in Schiller’s *The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), the person (*Selbst*), a formless volume of time (*formlosen Inhalt der Zeit*) driven by appetite, endures because it is. A person’s situation (*Zustand*), however, changes as her sense faculties and determination allow her to create beauty. Dismissing mere shape and mere life, Schiller defines beauty as a play between material and formal, or spiritual, impulses producing a living shape (*lebende Gestalt*), simultaneously at rest and in movement. Through aesthetic contemplation, a person (*Mensch*) frees himself from the constraints of nature and tames nature by transforming it into an object of his judgement. Schiller proposes this process of sensuous and reasoned reflection as the path to freedom and human superiority over the material world. Esthetic beauty demonstrates that a person’s dependence on the physical limitations of the human body by no means undermines the individual’s moral freedom. However, it seems that women are excluded from Schiller’s understanding of *Mensch*. If
women are the bearers of nature, then they too must be transformed into esthetic objects so that men can assert their dignity and freedom in the face of Nature.

Valérie is an idea, a concept, a thought: she represents idealized femininity and grace belonging to art and dreams. ¹ Enabling the dancer to create different forms, a shawl or veil “displays the potential of a body by hiding it,” by inventing a body “in the midst of movement” (Rancière 96). The fabric creates a play between reality and imagination, “constantly resurveying the limbo between sign and signified through movement” (Brandstetter 105). In the same way that the modern dancer Loïe Fuller transformed her body into desexualized moving images, Valérie’s body disappears as an iconic body emerges.²

Antipodal to the waltz’s repeating steps, the shawl dance consists in a variety of movements and poses evoking a range of passions that efface the fleshy reality of the body. Swiftly moving from one attitude to another, Valérie creates tableaux communicating a multitude of ideas to her audience: “Ces attitudes différentes, qui peignent tantôt des situations terribles, et tantôt des situations attendrissantes, sont un langage éloquent puisé dans les mouvements de l’âme et des passions” (AV 102-3). Though participatory dances rarely express negative or horrific ideas, presentational dances can evoke feelings of sadness, anger, grief, and anxiety just as easily as they can allude to happiness, love, and hope. As esthetic philosopher Charles Batteux (1713-1780)

¹ Gustave writes, “Jusqu’à présent elle avait passé devant mes yeux comme une de ces figures gracieuses et pures, dont les Grecs nous dessinèrent les formes, et dont nous aimons à revêtir nos songes” (AV 76).
² Regarding the desexualization of Loïe Fuller, see Tirza True Latimer’s essay “Loïe Fuller: Butch Femme Fatale.”
concluded, a gesture in dance is only beautiful if it paints human passions, be it pain, tenderness, or pride. Dance can express anything. In a performance like the shawl dance, the play of abstract forms reinvents the “forms in which sensible events are given to us and assembled to constitute a world” (Rancière 100). Through her gestures and manipulation of the fabric, Valérie’s movements, as perceived by Gustave, display possibilities of impassioned, asexual being.

Escaping a reduction to words, the effect of the shawl dance is “inexprimable” (AV 103). Navigating the difficulty of describing the dance, Gustave qualifies Valérie’s poses and movements as a refined language communicating her inner state. The performance provokes a somatic reaction in its admiring spectator as Valérie embodies diverse qualities: “C’est elle qui, à la fois décente, timide, noble, profondément sensible, trouble, entraîne, émeut, arrache des larmes et fait palpiter le cœur” (102). Nonetheless, the dance is not “a symptom of how the dancer happens to feel; for the dancer’s own feelings could not be prescribed or predicted and exhibited upon request” (Langer 79). Instead, the dancer composes and expresses an idea of subjective experiences.

Crafting a dance involves selecting and refining human nature to transform the body into art. Like paintings, dance makes ideas visible. For the narrator, Valérie’s dance constitutes a work of art on a par with masterpieces depicting the virtue and love of idealized pure women. Absorbed in the dance, Gustave projects his desires on the performance. Krüdener alludes to a scene from Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night, or What You Will (1602) in which the Duke Orsino asks Viola (disguised as a boy) about her fictitious sister who once loved a man: “quand ses yeux se relevèrent, que ses lèvres
essayèrent un sourire, on eût dit voir, comme Shakespeare la peignit, la Patience souriant à la Douleur auprès d’un monument” (AV 102). In the play, Viola tells the Duke,

A blank, my lord: She never told her love,

But let concealment, like a worm in the bud,

Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought;

And, with a green and yellow melancholy,

She sat like patience on a monument,

Smiling at grief. Was not this love, indeed? (Shakespeare 2.4.106–111)

This fabricated sister, destroyed by her suppressed love, is a pure woman because she does not exist in the narrative. The blank and the worm in the bud symbolize her lack of sexual relationships. Nevertheless, the “rape-like, figurative language” of this passage creates a haunting ambiguity (Smith, “Telling Love” 197). Existing in the imaginary, her love can only be ideal since it can never be real or unchaste. Though this allusion to a deathlike stationary position contrasts with the active movement of Valérie’s dance, the comparison highlights how the idealized Valérie residing in Gustave’s imagination loves him but remains steadfast in concealing this love to maintain her purity. This version of Valérie, like Viola’s sister, is a creation of the imagination.

1 A surge in performances of Shakespeare in France turned him into a frequent reference among Romantic artists.
2 Samuel Richardson made an allusion to this passage of Twelfth Night in Clarissa after Lovelace rapes the heroine. Later in Valérie, Gustave and Valérie read Clarissa together.
From the Renaissance onward, depictions of veiled women produce a concept of feminine grace found in the fabric dissimulating the lines of the sexual body.\(^1\) Wrapped in a shawl, Valérie emblematizes modesty while also adhering to popular fashion. The letter compares her to Raphael’s paintings of the Madonna and sculptures of the *Venus Pudica*, classical Greek statues showing the goddess covering her breasts or genitals, an attitude frequently recreated in Renaissance paintings.\(^2\) Nineteenth-century writers and artists idolized women emulating the divine spectacle of maternity in Raphael’s paintings of the Virgin draped in a veil.\(^3\) Raphael’s paintings created a model of “la femme qui trouve son plus sublime accomplissement dans l’offrande du spectacle de sa maternité”

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1 As Claude Jamain concludes in his analysis of satin in paintings by Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), the fabric effaces the body by creating fluid, nonhuman lines. The metaphor of veiling contributed to understandings of the difference between grace and beauty. Louis-Jean Levesque de Pouilly (1691-1751), in *Théorie des sentiments agréables*, wrote: “Les grâces sont plus belles que la beauté du corps, parce qu’elles sont comme un voile transparent, à travers lequel l’esprit se montre. Elles sont attachées au juste rapport des attitudes, des gestes, des mouvements, des expressions, des pensées, avec la fin qu’on s’y propose” (67).

2 Gustave exclaims, “c’est elle qui était dans la pensée de l’artiste qui nous donna la Vénus pudique, et dans le pinceau de Raphaël” (102). The Venus Pudica contrasts with the statue known as the Callipygian Venus representing the goddess with exposed buttocks (*Καλλίπυγος* meaning beautiful buttocks) and breasts lifting the fabric draping her body. The attitude of the Venus Pudica reappear in Renaissance paintings such as Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* and Raphael’s *La Fornarina*. This is not the only instance in which the novel refers to a sculpture of Venus. During her stay in Florence, Valérie writes to Gustave about the works of art and architecture awakening her imagination to the Roman gods. Valérie, however, seems to marvel not at the goddess’s beauty but at her modesty: “L’on sent pourtant que s’il y avait une femme comme celle-là, les autres n’en pourraient être jalouse. *Elle a l’air de s’ignorer,* d’être étonnée d’elle-même! Sa pudeur la voile; quelque chose de céleste couvre ses formes; et elle intimide en paraissant demander de l’indulgence” (132). Later at the Palazzo Pitti, Valérie sees Raphael’s *Madonna della Seggiola*, whose saintliness inspires her.

3 French artists like Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun fashioned their models like those in Raphael’s paintings by draping them with scarves. In her memoirs, she wrote, “je disposais de larges écharpes, légèrement entrelacées autour du corps et sur les bras, avec lesquelles je tâchais d’imiter le beau style des draperies de Raphaël et du Dominicaïn” (1:37).
Through comparisons between the Valérie and hailed representations of Christian and pagan divine women, Gustave depicts the heroine as a muse and a maternal figure rather than a woman dancing. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, allegorical feminine icons representing reason and freedom began to replace images of the Virgin Mary in public places and art. Allegorical representations of motherhood became “the equivalent of the ideal patriotic soldier” who sacrifices himself “for the good of the nation” (Mahuzier 30). In literature and art, depictions of grace at the dawn of the nineteenth century fuse the social utopia represented by the Charites, the irresistible charm of Venus, and the maternal love of the Virgin Mary.

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1 In *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, Sand compared the Savinienne, who looks after the errant artisans, to Raphael’s Virgin: “C’était une femme d’environ vingt-huit ans, belle comme une Vierge de Raphaël, avec la même régularité de traits et la même expression de douceur calme et noble” (117).

2 Elsewhere in the novel, great works of art represent Christian values and ways of being. Writing to Gustave from Rome, the Count interprets artworks as conveyors of religious feelings working together to raise men to a pure understanding of Christianity through *charis*: “La peinture, la poésie et la musique, se tenant par la main comme les Grâces, vinrent une seconde fois charmer les mortels; mais ce ne fut plus, comme dans la fable, en s’associant à de folles absurdités. Ces pudiques et charmantes sœurs avaient apporté des traits célestes; et, en souriant à la terre, elles regardaient le ciel; et les arts alors se vouèrent à une religion épurée, austère, mais consolante, et qui donna aux hommes les vertus qui font leur bonheur” (140).
Valérie’s dance evokes eternity or what Julia Kristeva calls women’s time, a perpetuity of cycles.\textsuperscript{1} Comparisons between Valérie and representations of women from Greek mythology—Niobe, who turned into stone mourning her children, and Galatea, the sculpture created by Pygmalion—reduce her to a representation of maternal femininity founded on myths.\textsuperscript{2} Allusions to women made out of or transformed into stone present Valérie as an idealized creation but not an active subject or a sexual woman. Gustave

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{madonna_of_the_meadow.png}
\caption{Raphael, \textit{Madonna of the Meadow}, 1505. (Wikimedia Commons)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{1} According to Kristeva, philosophers have historically dissociated women, bound to the myth of the archaic mother, from the history of creating art or ideas and align them with eternity.

\textsuperscript{2} “Tantôt, comme Niobé, elle arrachait un cri étouffé à mon âme déchirée par sa douleur; tantôt elle fuyait comme Galatée, et tout mon être semblait entraîné sur ses pas légers” (AV 103). Cornelia Klettke reads these comparisons as a form of what Jürgen Müller calls intermediality, the production of meaning that emerges out of the convergence of different media. Through this intermediality, a doubling creates multiple perspectives and lends the novel a sort of “mythécriture” (Klettke 115). Élodie Salieto proposes that, by portraying Valérie as a model of Greek art, the dance scene reflects the myth of Butades, the Corinthian inventor of painting. According to Pliny’s \textit{Natural History}, Butades’s daughter traced the outline of the shadow of her beloved’s face before he left the country. Butades later pressed clay into the outline to make a relief thereby creating a work of art that fixed a fleeting image in time and space.

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describes the dance by its effects on his body without hinting at the bodily presence of the dancing pregnant woman. The dance displays what Alfred de Vigny names, in his 1835 play *Chatterton*, “la grâce maternelle” to identify a maternal kindness and beauty inspiring love in a suffering young man (51). By glorifying Valérie as a series of images, Gustave negates her body and escapes to a preoedipal dreamworld where idealized love and maternal love are one and the same. Like divine grace, maternal grace consoles those who suffer. The death of the father in *Valérie* symbolizes the loss of a patriarchal system giving legitimacy to the hero’s social and political identity.1 Gustave seeks to reconcile the idyllic memory of his fatherland with a corrupted cosmopolitan society. Horrified by modernity, he seeks a lost past in Valérie’s graceful movements.

Presenting her as an archetype, the novel portrays Valérie as the model of a portrait and then the model of an actual woman refashioned to be her doppelgänger. Angelica Kauffmann, “la fameuse Angelica,” paints a portrait of Valérie which becomes Gustave’s fetish object (*AV* 133).2 Later, while Valérie travels throughout Italy with her husband, Gustave, remaining in Venice, tries his hand at being a Pygmalion-like sculptor and attempts to recreate the image of Valérie using another woman’s body. He pursues an opera singer named Bianca, who looks like Valérie but lacks her grace.3 Embarking on a whirlwind tour of Venetian revelry, he distances his thoughts of Valérie from his

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1 See Doris Kadish’s *Politicizing Gender: Narrative Strategies in the Aftermath of the French Revolution*.  
2 Kauffman painted Krüdener’s portrait in 1807.  
3 “Elle a, de Valérie, presque tout ce qu’on peut séparer de son âme; il ne lui manque que ses grâces, que cette expression qui trahit sans cesse cet âme profonde et élevée, et qui est si dangereuse pour ceux qui savent aimer” (145).
Debauched escapades with her look-alike.\(^1\) Whereas Valérie inspires lasting religious and moral feelings in him, Bianca excites fleeting desires.\(^2\) Sexually arousing him, Bianca is the body that he suppresses in loving Valérie. He creates a tableaux vivant in which Bianca is dressed in the same style as Valérie during the shawl dance.\(^3\) Bianca sings a romance that transports him to a hallucinatory state in which he is with Valérie. When Bianca’s brother-in-law enters the room and she stops singing, the illusion disappears because she is no longer Gustave’s exclusive creation. He suddenly recognizes that he used Bianca like “une marionette” to stage a comedy devoid of genuine passion (150). The opera singer provides the protagonist a canvas on which he can project a sexualized version of his idealized love object. As a desiring subject, Bianca represents “a negative that comes into view only when it interferes with the ideal woman, who cannot be seen at all” (Poovey 22). In contrast, Valérie’s expressive dance awakens his desire to see goodness and maternal love instead of a sexual object. He perceives Valérie as a pure woman and Bianca as a bearer of human sexuality.

In addition to illustrating cultural anxieties about the female body, Krüdener highlights the hidden presence of women’s physical effort. Though Valérie’s corporeality

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1 Bianca stands for all that is superficial in Italy. Gustave qualifies Italy as a dangerous country where pleasure and love reign. He considers people accustomed to its climate to be insensitive because they only seek pleasure; whereas his Northern soul, susceptible to beauty and art, feels intense passions.
2 “Je sens que Bianca fait quelquefois une vive impression sur mes sens. Ce n’est rien de ce trouble céleste qui m’éle ensemble tout mon être, et me fait rêver au ciel, comme si la terre ne pouvait contenir tant de fêlicités; c’est une flamme rapide, qui ne brûle pas, qui n’a rien de ce qui consume, et que j’appellerais désir.” (AV 145-46).
3 A similar situation occurs in Georges Rodenbach’s Bruges-la-Morte (1892). The protagonist Hugues Viane attempts to recreate the image his deceased wife when he encounters a professional dancer who looks like her.
is effaced during the dance, her body reemerges afterward as the active source of her choreographic creation as she collapses in exhaustion. Philosopher Maine de Biran (1766–1824) developed a theory of effort that he sought to reconcile with divine grace. For Biran, grace penetrates a human being whose effort it solicits and helps carry out acts of grace. In Valérie, the dancer’s graceful movements conceal her bodily exertion so that her actions appear mysterious, divine, and pleasing; however, the appearance of effortlessness is the result of an intense physical effort.

The Romantics teach us that the idealization of women is perilous for men who cannot consolidate ideals with reality. Delphine’s polonaise incites Léonce to ignore his injury. Valérie’s danse du schall spurs Gustave to act irrationally reaching out his arms to grasp her, only to hurt himself trying to embrace a void:

Et je fermais les bras avec un mouvement passionné, et la douleur que je me faisais à moi-même m’éveilla, et pourtant je n’avais embrassé que le vide! Que dis-je? le vide; non, non: tandis que mes yeux dévoraient l’image de Valérie, il y avait dans cette illusion, il y avait de la félicité. (103)

Illusions spring not only from the dance but also from Gustave’s manner of perceiving it. As Mercier underscores in his introduction to the novel, Valérie must persist as a dreamlike image to awaken Gustave’s desires. The hero therefore keeps a certain distance from her body to preserve her ethereal status void of materiality. After the dance, Valérie leans against the window where Gustave covertly watches from the outside. Physically separated from her, he sees her not as a woman of flesh but as a representation, framed by the window. Comparing Valérie to paintings and secretly watching her through the
window, he flattens her into a representation of an ideal.\textsuperscript{1} Excited by the performance and his proximity to her, he kisses the glass through which he sees her arm, prefiguring the scene in which he kisses her hand while she sleeps veiled in her bedsheets. Her hidden corporeality and subjectivity attract his love. Like the Madonna, she is adored for being an image of virginity, even when she is pregnant.

Accentuating the heroine’s grace, Krüdener does not portray Valérie as impervious to vanity. Unlike Gustave, Valérie finds balls and the artifice of high society enchanting.\textsuperscript{2} Seduced by the idea of a party and intent on hiding her paleness, Valérie wishes to defy her husband by wearing rouge at the ball given by the Spanish ambassador.\textsuperscript{3} Although she is not as flawless as the hagiographic portrait that Gustave writes about her, she displays her grace in her acts of generosity and care.\textsuperscript{4} The novel depicts Valérie as two characters: the idealized image of her residing in Gustave’s imagination and a realistically virtuous woman who possesses some faults. When

\textsuperscript{1} See Cordova’s \textit{Paris Dances} (35).
\textsuperscript{2} Krüdener opposes reflective solitude to balls and \textit{le grand monde}. The Count chastises Gustave for choosing to be alone over fraternizing with other men. In a vain attempt to change his melancholic spirit, Gustave joins the festive social life of Venice. The parties bore him as he yearns for the contemplative space he finds in nature.
\textsuperscript{3} At the dawn of the nineteenth century, cosmetics, often made out of dangerous chemicals, sparked numerous debates. For example, the \textit{Encyclopédie} compares using rouge to ripping apart an organ. Morag Martin’s essay “Doctoring Beauty: The Medical Control of Women’s \textit{Toilettes} in France, 1750-1820” explains how medical practitioners disseminated arguments against the use of noxious cosmetics.
\textsuperscript{4} Valérie’s grace manifests in her actions to help others. Comparing her appearance to that of elegant women changing for the ball on her saint’s day, Valérie regrets her torn dress and disheveled hair resulting from a day of romping through the countryside. Suddenly, a beautiful dress and a diamond bracelet arrive from her husband so that she can look glamorous. As she gazes at herself in every mirror she encounters, her vanity surprises Gustave: “Elle a bien un peu plus de vanité que je ne croyais” (104). Nevertheless, this surge in narcissism is short-lived. When her maid coughs up blood after accidentally swallowing a pin, Valérie readily changes into her ratty dress and rushes the maid to a doctor causing her to arrive at the ball late and unkempt.
Gustave dies at the end of the novel, the idealized Valérie dies with him and the imperfectly graceful character remains. The novel suggests that perceiving graceful women as perfect recreations of idealized maternal figures can only lead to disappointment. However, slightly flawed grace can perfect humanity.

The Quadrille

Whereas dancing occults the material body in *Valérie*, the dancing body in Claire de Duras’s *Ourika* is hyper-visible as a racialized body. The African-born heroine performs a quadrille in which she represents the African continent. After the dance scene, her blackness becomes omnipresent in the narrative. Rehearsed like a court ballet, the quadrille attempted to choreographically reinstate French aristocratic practices during the First Empire and early years of the Bourbon Restoration. In *Ourika* and *Edouard*, both published in the 1820s, the dance scenes take place before the 1789 Revolution. The quadrille therefore connects the court culture of the 1820s to the final decades of the *ancien régime*, a period when the dance was not particularly fashionable. The quadrille functions in *Ourika* as the turning point at which the heroine learns that she can never integrate French aristocratic society because of her blackness.

A quadrille is a dance generally made up of four couples. First becoming a regular part of ballroom festivities under the Consulate, it reached the peak of its popularity during the Bourbon Restauration. The nineteenth-century quadrille derived from the eighteenth-century “pot-pourri de contredanses” (Guilcher, *Un tournant* 155). Performed at court, quadrilles took on spectacular dimensions during the First Empire and the Bourbon Restauration as they shifted from a participatory dance to a rehearsed
presentational dance with extravagant costumes. In her memoirs, the Queen Hortense (1783-1837) ridiculed non-professional dancers performing in quadrilles at Imperial balls.¹ Nevertheless, Hortense danced in an extravagant quadrille, choreographed by Gardel, that staged sun priestesses and Peruvian characters draped in feathers and precious stones. For an 1829 ball planned by the Duchess of Berry, the participants in a “quadrille de Marie Stuart” meticulously researched the historical accuracy of their costumes.² Such detailed preparation was limited to quadrilles performed at court, where allegorical costumes presented dancers as vehicles of recognizable signs arranged in relation to other symbols. Costumes gave meaning to the quadrille whose steps remained relatively constant. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the level of technical difficulty rose but then fell during the Restauration when virtuosity became a sign of bourgeois bad taste. As a result, dancing negligently became fashionable, and dancers would nonchalantly walk the quadrille.

Quadrilles frequently had names referencing a nationality or a subject that was important at the time (for example, during the Terror people danced le quadrille de la guillotine). The names almost never influenced the steps performed nor the music. *Edouard* includes a Russian quadrille that necessitates numerous rehearsals and the

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¹ She wrote, “selon moi, des personnes de la société ne dansaient jamais avec assez de perfection pour s’exposer à figurer dans un pas seules, que cela ne convenait qu’à des artistes habitués à compter sur leur talent, qu’une allégorie représentée à visage découvert peut prêter parfois au ridicule et que l’effet d’un quadrille de société devait reposer uniquement sur l’éclat et sur l’élégance des costumes, l’harmonie des couleurs, le bon goût des danses et la perfection de l’ensemble” (138).
² “Les belles aristocrates se ruèrent à la Bibliothèque nationale, feuilletèrent fiévreusement les grands recueils d’estampes” (Bouteron 71).
concoction of Russian-inspired costumes. In *Ourika*, the heroine represents the African continent in a quadrille of the four corners of the earth, a recurrent motif in art produced between 1650 and 1780. Although not well documented, the dance known as *le quadrille des quatre parties du monde* seemed to have resurfaced at balls and on stage throughout the nineteenth century. It appeared in Arthur Saint-Léon’s 1847 ballet *La Fille de marbre*. During the Second Empire, a February 1866 ball given by the Minister of the Navy included a performance of this quadrille in which women represented each nation: “l’Afrique, avec son teint basané, a été bravement adoptée par une belle princesse” (Paules 2). As in *Ourika*, dark skin was paramount for representing the European image of Africa.

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1 When a ball is planned at the home of the Prince de L., Madame de Nevers is solicited to dance in a Russian quadrille: “Pendant quinze jours, ce quadrille devint l’unique occupation de l’hôtel d’Olonne; Gardel venait le faire répéter tous les matins; les ouvriers de tout genre employées pour le costume prenaient les ordres; […] on consultait des voyageurs pour s’assurer de la vérité des descriptions, et ne pas s’écarter du type national, qu’avant tout on voulait conserver” (*OEO* 135-36). The research involved in creating an authentic representation of Russian culture focuses on the costume, not the dance steps. *Edouard* does not include a description of the performance of this quadrille.

2 Under the reign of Louis XIV, a court ballet included *ambassadours* of the four corners of the earth accompanied by dancers portraying different nationalities in a spectacular display of ornate costumes and props. In *Des ballets anciens et modernes*, Claude-François Ménestrier described this sumptuous ballet: “des peuples de diverses Nations, vêtus à la manière de chacun de leurs Pays faisaient un Ballet très agréable, composant quatre troupeaux ou quadrilles pour les quatre Parties du Monde. […] La diversité & la richesse des habits, ne faisaient pas le moindre ornement de ce Ballet & de cette Fête, quelques-uns ayant pour plus de deux cent mille Écus de Piergeries” (105).

3 In the *Figaro*, Nicolas Gentil also described this spectacle: “L’Europe, représentée par une Parisienne parlementaire, portant suspendue à son cou toutes les décorations connues, et traînées sur un char; L’Asie, en jupe relevée, crânement debout sur un pavoi; L’Afrique, sur un chameau énorme; L’Amérique, portée par des osages [sic] merveilleusement tatoués. Autour de chacune de ces quatre statues vivantes se pressait un groupe d’hommes, de femmes et d’animaux symboliques; chaque race avait son type, et chaque nation son représentant” (7).
Ourika: Veiled in Blackness

Claire de Duras wrote Ourika in 1822, shared it with her entourage, and then published it anonymously at the end of 1823. It was an immediate hit, and it remains “a startlingly modern commentary on race” (Miller 158). The title character became part of fashionable consumer society as necklaces, hair ribbons, flowers, and vases à l’Ourika became available for purchase.¹ Much to Duras’s chagrin, numerous poems, novels, and boulevard plays adapted Ourika’s story. As a result of this Ourika-mania, Ourika became a malleable plaything for French consumers instead of the heroine of her own story.²

Ourika is the first French literary work to consider the psychological effects of racism on a Black person.³ In the seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century, French engagement in trans-Atlantic slave trade was second only to Great Britain. Louis XIV’s 1685 Code noir reduced enslaved Africans to property without legal rights. A royal edict in October 1716 stated that colonists and military officers could bring enslaved persons to

¹ The presentation of the English translation of the novella in the 22 May 1824 issue of The London Literary Gazette attests to the rapid emergence of Ourika-mania: “About a month ago a very pretty story, under this title, was published in Paris. It soon not only attracted attention, but became quite the rage; and everything, in fashion, and drama, and picture, has since been Ourika. There are Ourika dresses, Ourika vaudevilles, Ourika prints. Mlle. Mars blacked her face to perform Ourika, but did not like her appearance in the glass, and refused the character. Such an event [...] was enough to set all that sensitive metropolis in a flame; and every mouth and every journal has run, and is ringing, with Ourika. Under these circumstances we have thought that London, and our readers generally, should share in the Parisian Ourika-mania” (1).
² For Robin Mitchell, this cultural phenomenon came to represent “a violent process in which the black female body moved from spectacle to cannibalization and dis(re)membrement” (103).
³ David O’Connell argues that Duras’s description of Ourika’s psychological disintegration concurs with Frantz Fanon’s conclusions in Peau noire, masques blancs (1952).
France, for a determined amount of time, without disenfranchising them. In the eighteenth century, a few Enlightenment thinkers began to reflect on the moral situation of slavery. For example, Louis Jaucourt, in the *Encyclopédie*, called slave trade “un négoce qui viole la morale, la religion, les lois naturelles, et tous les droits de la nature humaine” (532). A week after the 1792 declaration of the First Republic, the National Convention abolished slavery in France but not in the colonies. Two years later, the Convention voted to abolish slavery in all of France’s colonies. However, in 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte reestablished slavery in the French Empire before signing the 1815 Treaty of Paris ending slave trade but not slavery. It was not until April 1848 that the government officially abolished slavery in the French colonies.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nonwhite bodies appeared in literature and art as a source of fantasy. Though few Black women lived in France at the end of the eighteenth century, they “gave rise to cultural discourses about Frenchness that shaped the country’s postrevolutionary national identity” by allowing white French men and women to “fantasize about their black colonies” and by serving “as substitutes for

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1 Regarding the convoluted history of French slavery and the principle that French freedom would be extended to all who entered the nation, see Sue Peabody’s *There Are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Regime*.

2 Denouncing slavery as morally wrong, writers, such as Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), Sophie Doin (1800–1846), and Germaine de Staël, played a public role in the abolitionist movement. Olympe de Gouges wrote abolitionist pamphlets and the play *Zamore et Mirza ou l’Esclavage des Noirs* (1784). In 1814, Staël wrote an *Appel aux souverains* calling for the end of slave trade and a preface to the French translation of William Wilberforce’s 1807 *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Addressed to the Freeholders of Yorkshire*. Her 1786 short stories *Mirza* and *Pauline* likewise denounce slavery as an affront to the universal human right to freedom. Sophie Doin wrote several abolitionist texts, most notably *La Famille noire, ou le Traité de l’esclavage* (1825), and was the editor of the journal *Le Christianisme*. Though women writers were active in the French abolitionist movement, I agree with Christopher Miller’s critique of the collected volume *Translating Slavery*, which ignores important literary contributions to abolitionism by overemphasizing gendered approaches to denouncing slavery.
making sense of white bodies ‘behaving badly,’” namely feminine sexuality (Mitchell 3). Through depictions of Black women’s bodies, white French men and women grappled with issues related to race, gender, and morality. As Robin Mitchell argues, the eroticization and disavowal of the Black female body became a means for displacing the anxieties born out of the 1804 independence of Saint-Domingue and redefining Frenchness. During the Restauration, Black characters began to appear more frequently in French literature. Léon-François Hoffmann attributes this Romantic interest in people of African origin to artistic and journalistic representations of events such as the 1816 shipwreck of the Medusa, Haitian Independence, and the 1839 earthquake in Martinique.

The framing tale of Ourika begins, during the First Empire, in the Parisian faubourg of Saint-Jacques where a young doctor attends to Ourika, an ailing nun of West African origin. After several consultations, the melancholic nun recounts her sorrows to the doctor.1 Her story begins when the governor Monsieur de B purchases her as she is being carried onto a slave ship at the age of two. After leaving the coast of Senegal as chattel, she arrives in France at the home of the governor’s aunt Madame de B, who provides Ourika with a typical education in music, dance, and drawing. Before the dance scene, Ourika excels at being a well-educated young lady and plays the part of the “grateful negro” (Kadish, Fathers 112). The appearance of “perfect Frenchness” lends power to the representation of the heroine, whose education triumphs over nature until her presence in white society is deemed unnatural (Mitchell 101). In this aspect, Duras,

1 For Christian Chaulet Achour, the framing of the African woman’s story in a therapeutic confession to the young doctor underscores the morbid effects of racism.
like other abolitionist writers, creates an exceptionally accomplished Black character whose “credibility as a human being” appears dubious (O’Connell 51). On the one hand, this exemplarity contests theories of racial degeneracy, notably Georges Cuvier’s claim that Black people could never achieve greatness. On the other hand, such otherworldly perfection presents the Black characters as supernatural beings and not as human subjects.

After the ball at which Ourika performs the quadrille, she overhears the Marquise de …, the first character to pronounce Ourika’s name, tell Madame de B that Ourika will never be able to marry someone with an education equal to hers because of her skin color. At this moment, the image of France as “a space of freedom” shatters (Miller 164). This prediction throws the adolescent into a state of distress, which is exacerbated when her beloved Charles, Madame de B’s grandson, becomes engaged. Parading as a caring confidante, the Marquise de … further aggravates Ourika’s torment by suggesting that her pain stems from a secret love for Charles. Accepting that she is an anomaly in the social milieu where she grew up and unable to reintegrate into her native culture, Ourika joins a convent. When her story ends, the doctor once again employs the first-person narrator’s voice to announce her death.

Though slavery and colonialism are undeniably present in Ourika, Duras avoids any political statement on these institutions outside of the enclosed spaces where the
narrative takes place.1 Whereas extant slave narratives written in English exist, there are no equivalents in the French language.2 The Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé identifies Ourika as a Black woman’s first entry into French literature as a heroine. Ourika however accesses European society by alienating her native culture and has no future beyond excluding herself from the public eye.

Ourika combines stereotypes of Black people, though less blatant than those in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s Paul et Virginie (1788) and Victor Hugo’s Bug-Jargal (1826), with an interest in the Black heroine’s human situation as she negotiates love, religion, social prejudices, and estrangement. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha defines a stereotype as a fetishistic representation of cultural traits that surpass what can be proven. Through repetition, stereotypes produce problems of representation. The purpose of stereotypes is “not to reflect or represent a reality but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations” (Carby 22). Stereotypes produce what Patricia Hill Collins calls “controlling images” that make racism and sexism “appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (69). Though it sustains stereotypes and Eurocentrism, Ourika created a stepping-stone to the possibility of an anti-racist

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1 Rori Bloom argues that by focusing on one abandoned child instead of slavery, “Duras moves from the political to the emotional and appeals to the reader’s interest in the special destiny of her heroine” (22). For Christopher L. Miller the novella “nominally” associates slavery with vices while “the image of happiness in bondage lingers” (170).
2 The 1789 text Le More-Lack includes a dictated story of a slave’s experience that is probably fictitious. The Abbé Prévost translated a speech by the Jamaican Moses bom Saam, which became a touchstone in French representations of enslaved persons. As Miller demonstrates in The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade, French concepts of abolitionism were “largely translated from England and from English” (101).
discourse in French literature by vilifying a white woman and white society as the causes of the heroine’s suffering.

The real story of a young girl from Senegal named Ourika inspired this novella.¹ Eighteenth-century French nobles often adopted Black children and treated them as “pets” or jesters dressed up to entertain aristocrats and symbolize their power to acquire the exotic (Mitchell 22).² The military leader and poet Stanislas de Boufflers, governor of Senegal from 1785 to 1787 and later a member of the abolitionist group Société Française des Amis des Noirs, offered a Senegalese child, whom he named Zoé, to his future wife Delphine de Sabran. In a letter to Sabran, he informed her that he would offer “une petite captive,” Ourika, to his uncle Mr. de Beauvau (Sabran 513). Roger Little surmises that the real Ourika was of Peul origin and from Fouta-Djallon. In August 1786, she arrived in La Rochelle aboard Le Rossignol. It is quite likely that Germaine de Staël encountered Ourika in a salon and, for this reason, named a character Ourika in Mirza, Lettre d’un voyageur (1795). After Beauvau’s death, the artist Sophie de Tott (1758-1840) painted a portrait of Ourika holding a crown of flowers over a bust of Beauvau. Sexualizing the young girl, the portrait evokes an “Orientalist fantasy about Africa” (Mitchell 24). In

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¹ On 1 January 1824, Duras wrote to Rosalie de Constant, “Le fond de l'histoire est vrai. Ourika fut rapportée par le chevalier de Boufflers à Mme la maréchale de Beauvau, mais, hors leurs deux caractères et la triste cause de la fin d’Ourika, tout le reste est d’imagination” (Pailhès 279). Duras’s mother-in-law was the stepsister of the Marshal de Beauvau’s daughter the Princess de Poix.
² This practice dates back to the late fifteenth-century when Isabella, Marquis of Mantua, acquired “una moreta” (Strings 33). Tales of the Countess du Barry’s adopted child Zamore frequently resurface throughout the nineteenth century as a symbol of sexual excess. See Lise Schreier’s article “Zamore ‘the African’ and the Haunting of France’s Collective Consciousness.”
January 1799, Ourika, probably eighteen years old, died and was buried at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

Duras’s journal reveals that the Senegalese child living at the home of Beauvau provided a model for the novella. Duras wrote on 20 November 1821:

Le chevalier de Boufflers avait rapporté du Sénégal à Mad[am]e la maréchale de Boufflers une petite négresse à peine âgée de deux ans, on la nomma Ourika, et elle devint dans le salon de Mme de Beauvau le jouet et l’amusement de la société, on lui donnait du bonbon, on la faisait sauter, on s’amusait de ses enfantillages, on l’aimait car elle était douce, bonne et ces gâteries ne la gâtaient pas. Ourika grandit au milieu de la société la plus spirituelle de Paris, elle acquit de l’instruction, des talents, sans perdre la naïveté de sa nature et même un peu de sa nonchalance. Mme de Beauvau causait avec elle, formait son esprit, son jugement, sa raison, et l’on aurait pu souhaiter à sa fille la grâce et le maintien d’Ourika. (OEO 327, my emphasis)

In both the novella and this journal entry, Ourika provides her adopted mother entertainment and conforms to expectations for a graceful young woman. Dance serves a double purpose in this relationship: it charms onlookers with its graceful primitiveness and attests to a disciplined body. From the beginning of her framed story, Ourika, speaking in the first person, presents herself as created through her education. Telling the doctor that the governor saved her from slavery and offered her a new life, Ourika compares herself to Galatea, the marble sculpture that comes to life. This reference to a milk-white sculpture (Galatea, Γαλάτεια, includes the word for milk γάλα) suggests that
she initially perceived herself as *whitened*. The education she receives from her benefactress creates what Foucault calls a docile body, easy to mold into a body that entertains or is useful to those in power.

Learned social graces demonstrating obedience oppose instinctual passions for dance described in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing about Africans. At the age of twelve, Ourika blissfully accepts her difference because her acquaintances compliment her and appear to love her: “Je n’étais pas fâchée d’être une négresse: on me disait que j’étais charmante; d’ailleurs, rien ne m’avertissait que ce fût un désavantage” (*OEO* 68). She learns to value herself through the statements of others and thereby sees herself as an object to be evaluated. Praise for her grace, elegance, and the beauty of her stature, “la beauté de ma taille,” sets her apart from widely circulated images of Hottentot women (69). Given her graceful demeanor, it is logical that she learn the art of dance: “Madame de B. vait souvent ce qu’elle appelait ma grâce, et elle avait voulu que je susse parfaitement danser” (69). Reusing and transforming stereotypes about Africans, Duras presents Ourika’s grace and ability to dance as innate. In this sense, *Ourika* supports the Kantian belief that only white people can learn and acquire talents. The novella suggests that an instinct for grace eclipses acquired grace that requires good taste. Throughout the eighteenth century, philosophers claimed to distinguish “the ‘civilized’ from the

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1 See Sabrina Strings’s excellent study of racialized representations of fat women, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*.

‘savage’ based on the capacity to make aesthetic judgements (Bindman 12).¹ For Kant, Black people lacked the knowledge and abilities to appreciate the beautiful or the sublime and therefore contented themselves with base or silly (Läppische) pleasures.² Yet, to my knowledge, no argument regarding race and the experience of grace existed. For monogenists like Kant, it would be heretical to present the esthetic or divine effects of grace as inaccessible to sections of humanity.

Dancing, Ourika is proud of her body and its capabilities. Later, racist institutions teach her to hate her body and her existence. The novella demonstrates how an individual develops “mastery and awareness” of her body by investing “power” in her body through activities that lead her to perceive herself as desirable (Foucault, Power 56). However, moral norms and political institutions eventually persuade her to view her body as powerless. On the dance floor, Ourika sees her body as capable and worthy of praise, yet racism and the limited opportunities for women outside the domestic sphere obliterate her desire to live in her embodied situation.

The dance scene is the final moment before the Black heroine confronts the fiction of her integration into a French society. Madame de B organizes a ball for her grandsons. Ourika, however, believes the party to be an opportunity for her to flaunt her dancing abilities: “Pour faire briller ce talent, ma bienfaitrice donna un bal dont ses

¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in Laocoon, contended that Hottentots admired objects that would disgust Europeans.
² This argument appears in Kant’s 1764 essay Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime. Kant proposed a theory of racial divisions in On the Different Races of Man (Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen, 1778) and Determination of the Concept of a Human Race (Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace, 1785).
petits-fils furent le prélouge de moi montrer en mon avantage dans un quadrille des quatre parties du monde où je devais représenter l’Afrique” (69). It was common during this period to hire African performers for fashionable gatherings. Instead of coming out into society as an accomplished young lady, Ourika unknowingly provides the entertainment.

The turmoil and depression that Ourika suffers after the ball certainly stem from her liminal social status as a Black woman in France. Nonetheless, the narrative turn leading to her unhappiness also appears as a punishment for her vanity: “On m’applaudit, on m’entoura, on m’accabla d’éloges: ce plaisir fut sans mélange; rien ne troublait alors ma sécurité. Ce fut peu de jours après ce bal qu’une conversation, que j’entendis par hasard, ouvrit mes yeux et fini ma jeunesse” (70). Gabriel Gerberon, in his 1801 publication Jugement du bal et de la danse, condemned dancing at balls, not because dancing is itself sinful, but because dancing encourages vanity. Ourika’s dance procures her praise for her disciplined movements; however, it also places her body on display and provokes her coming out as a pariah.

European representations of Black women aware of their visible bodies symbolized the opposite of idealized white womanhood. In the 1580s, a frequently reproduced sculpture known as the African Venus, attributed to Jan Gregor van der Schardt, opposed the modesty of the Venus Pudica by showing a woman of African origin holding a mirror, with her breasts and genitals exposed, “mesmerized by her own
beauty as she gazes wistfully at her own reflection” (Strings 41). Similarly, Ourika’s excitement about her success distances her from a concept of modest grace emblazoned by refusals to dance.

![Figure 13 Reproduction of the *African Venus*, 17th century. (Mutual Art)](image)

Ourika’s preparation for the quadrille confirms her alienation from her parents’ culture and the docility of her body accepting European knowledge as truth. It underscores her assimilation as she, like the French characters in *Edouard*, studies a culture that is foreign to her. Before the ball, she researches what European travelers have written about African dances: “On consulta les voyageurs, on feuilleta les livres de costumes, on lut des ouvrages savants sur la musique africaine, enfin on choisit une *Comba*, danse national de mon pays” (69–70). Before the Marquise de … verbally articulates the visibility of Ourika’s blackness, she learns the signs of her Africanness

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1 This sculpture is typically attributed to the Dutch sculptor Johan Gregor van der Schardt; however, various sculptors imitated this work.

2 Dorothy Kelly reads this research as exemplifying Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the bodily acquisition of culture because Ourika mimes texts informing her about her ethnic heritage.

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(dress, music, dance) from texts. She never confronts physical abuse in the narrative, but discourse (parole), the medium through which she tells her story, harms her understanding of her body.

Some scholars conclude that Duras invented the name Comba, and others speculate its relation to African dances with similar sounding names. Roger Little suggests that the dance could refer to the goundbé (a traditional dance of the Lebu community in West Africa), the macumba (which is a creolized African religion in Brazil and not a dance), or kumpo, a Senegalese mask performance. Comba likewise resembles the name of a religion of the African diaspora known as Cadomblé, derived from the Kongo-Bantu word for “musical festival,” Kandombele, and “characterized by ritual dance” (Murrell 159). It is possible that Duras was referring to the cumbé, a dance defined in the 1729 Diccionario de la lengua castellana as an African dance consisting in jerky motions.1 The term appeared in Spanish to French dictionaries, with the same spelling in both languages, as early as 1812. According to musicologist Craig Russell, the suffix -umbé groups together various dances performed by enslaved West Africans in the Spanish-speaking world.2 Early-eighteenth-century accounts of the cumbé describe a man and woman dancing in a sort of “sexual mimicry” consisting in thrusting hips, twitching thighs, and moaning (Goldberg 66). As dance historian K. Meria Goldberg suggests, the

1 “Baile de negros, que se hace al son de un tañido alegre, que se llama del mismo modo, y consiste en muchos meneos de cuerpo a un lado y a otro” (700). “Negro dance, performed upon hearing joyful music, known by the same name, and consists in much jerking of the body from one side to another” (my translation).
2 The cumbé is related to the Afro-Uruguayan dance called the candombe as well as various predecessors of the tango, rumba, and cumbia.
cumbé resembled the chica performed in Saint-Domingue. An 1801 text on Caribbean dances compares the chica to “une espèce de lutte où toutes les ruses de l’amour, et tous ses moyens de triompher sont mis en actions” (Saint-Méry 44). Given that I have not found any accounts of the goumbé or kumpo written before 1823, I find it more likely that comba is a misspelling of cumbé.

Europeans have often articulated African dance to depict “the African body with heavy tones of racist discourse” and devalue dance as a prelinguistic form of expression “to make African dance a powerful icon of Primitivism” (Castaldi 1). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French travelers to Africa and the Caribbean, unable to communicate with the indigenous people, interpreted their dances as primeval modes of expression, evidence of their laziness, or sexual rituals.1 Describing his trip through West Africa between 1785 and 1787, geographer Sylvain de Golbéry concluded that “toutes les nuits toute l’Afrique danse” and that African women have a particular passion for dancing (414).2 Literary descriptions of African and Caribbean dances, such as the chica in

1 Nineteenth-century travelers often perceived African dances as trancelike or fetishistic displays of a “sexualité bestiale et déchaînée” (Yee 42).
2 Golbéry and the explorer Jean-Baptiste-Anne Raffanel (1809–1858) attempted to demystify this stereotype in their travel writings. In Voyage dans l’Afrique occidentale comprenant l’exploration du Sénégal (1846), Raffanel wrote, “On connaît assez par les voyageurs les danses des nègres; mais, dans les descriptions qu’ils en ont faites, ils les ont généralement présentées comme des exercices dans lesquels les gestes obscènes surabondent. Cela est vrai pour les danses du bas du fleuve et surtout de Saint-Louis, où les femmes se livrent à des mouvements de corps d’une dégoutante impudeur. […] Mais il n’en est point ainsi des danses que nous avons vues au Galam: celle des jeunes filles particulièrement est empreinte d’une modestie irréprochable. La danseuse penche la tête d’une façon qui ne manque pas d’une certaine grâce” (295, my emphasis).
Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal*, drew on an assumption that a penchant for pleasure dominated people from warmer climates.¹

Although European writers denigrated black dances as excessive, what they perceived as passion and enthusiasm in these dances fascinated white observers. In 1814, Charles-Joseph Auguste Colnet du Ravel wrote a series of satirical letters, in the style of Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*, employing the first-person voice of Sarah Baartmann, *la Vénus noire*. The first letter opposes women performing lifeless but graceful French dances and comically lascivious African dances to mock feminine prudishness and animalize feminine sexuality.² Similarly, an 1839 description of Martinique, published in *La Presse*, exalts the passion of Black dancers in comparison to insipid European attempts at eroticized dancing.³ Though hinting at a primitive instinct for lively dances, the dance scene in *Ourika* avoids the trope of licentious African dance.

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¹ During the slave revolts of Saint-Domingue, Hugo’s imprisoned hero witnesses this dance in horror: “Ces forcenées s’arrêtèrent subitement, et je les vis, non sans surprise, détacher toutes ensemble leur tablier de plumes, les jeter sur l’herbe, et commencer autour de moi cette danse lascive que les noirs appellent la chica. Cette danse, dont les attitudes grotesques et la vive allure n’expriment que le plaisir et la gaité, empruntait ici de diverses circonstances accessoires un caractère sinistre” (*Bug-Jargal* 109).

² “Les Françaises dansant avec grâce, mais sans passion, sans vivacité. Il est facile de voir que ce genre de divertissement n’est pas de leur goût, et qu’elles ne s’y prêtent que par complaisance. Aussi se font-elles toujours prier pour danser. Leurs danses d’ailleurs sont très monotones. Ah! cousin, vivent les nôtres, et surtout celle du singe et du babouin, que nous dansons à quatre pattes avec une si grande vérité d’imitation, et surtout avec tant de décéance, sans déranger notre tablier, au moins par devant, c’est le principal” (Colnet 56-57).

³ “On ne saurait imaginer combien loin la population, entièrement indigne de ce pays pousse la passion de la danse et de la musique; il faudrait pour cela assister un moment à un de ces terribles et magnifiques bamboulas de la savanne [sic] de St-Pierre. Quel spectacle! C’est en vain qu’on amalgamerait ensemble tout le tohu-bohu d’un raout du grand monde, à tout le désordre le plus passionné d’un bal masqué de l’Opéra, toute la frénésie de cette danse furieuse que l’on a importée des barrières aux bals des Variétés et de l’Odéon, à toute la hardiesse des danses espagnoles les plus lascives, Tout cela réuni ne donnerait encore qu’une très pâle idée de ce hardi bamboula des nègres” (“Saint-Pierre-Martinique” 3).
Duras accentuated the Black dancer’s expression of various passions in the same way that Krüdener and Staël described their heroines’ dances. Knowing nothing about African dances before consulting European accounts of Africa, Ourika surprises herself by her ability to allude to passions still foreign to her:

Tout entière au plaisir du bal, je dansai la Comba, et j’eus tout le succès qu’on pouvait attendre de la nouveauté du spectacle et du choix des spectateurs, dont la plupart, amis de madame de B., s’enthousiasmaient pour moi et croyaient lui faire plaisir en se laissant aller à toute la vivacité de ce sentiment. La danse d’ailleurs était piquante; elle se composait d’un mélange d’attitudes et de pas mesurés; on y peignait l’amour, la douleur, le triomphe et le désespoir. Je ne connaissais encore aucun de ces mouvements violents de l’âme; mais je ne sais quel instinct me les faisait deviner; enfin je réussis. (70)

Doris Kadish reads these movements of the soul as Duras’s acknowledgment that “feminine sexuality is a distinct component of her African protagonist’s identity” (“Women’s Stories” 83). Comparing this dance scene to those written by Staël and Krüdener, I see little difference in the authors’ technique of enumerating various passions to highlight the dancer’s expressive capacities. Moreover, as Marylee Susan Crofts and Denise Virieux-Ciamin note, Ourika’s steps are measured even as this unknown instinct

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1 Also suggesting that Ourika comes across as a typical literary heroine in the first half of the nineteenth century, Katherine Montwieler identifies Ourika as a “heroine of sensibility,” like Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa Harlowe, Mary Wollstonecraft’s Maria Venables, and Jane Austen’s Marianne Dashwood (72). For Montwieler, the novella questions received ideas about race by showing that “black women feel like white women—that femininity is not exclusive to race” (72).
impels her to move. Nothing in the text itself makes the dance more sexual than those of white literary heroines. Rather, nineteenth-century associations between black women and deviant sexuality led (and perhaps still lead) readers to interpret the zest of the dance as inappropriate sexuality.

Written from the dancer’s point-of-view instead of an onlooker’s perspective, *Ourika* presents a more subjective experience than the dance scenes in *Malvina, Delphine*, and *Valérie*. Yet, Duras suppresses Ourika’s expressive agency in the dance.¹ First, the guests’ enthusiasm aiming to please Madame de B presents Ourika as a creation fashioned by her benefactress. Secondly, Ourika’s knowledge of the dance comes from French books on Africa insinuating that the nation who took her from her homeland will also define her culture. Finally, her expressive ability emerges from an unknown instinct suggesting that her African origin predisposes her to dance passionately. The novelist stifled Ourika’s subjectivity by making her ignorant of her capacity to communicate through dance.

Suggesting a connection between skin color and behavioral proclivities without revealing a clear stance on slavery or racism, Duras’s novella engages with theories of race that began to develop during the second half of the eighteenth century as scientists debated if humans possess one shared origin or disparate racial origins. In 1758, the Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus formulated four varieties of humans (European,

¹ For Mitchell, Duras uses race in the novel to highlight the precarity of her situation as an émigré. The novel “refuses to acknowledge any agency for the black body while reinforcing Duras’s personal homogenization process on French soil” (Mitchell 88).
Asian, American, African) defined by specific physical and behavioral characteristics. Georges-Louis Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle*, written between 1749 and 1804, proposed that all humans originated from the Caucasian race, but environmental factors changed their pigmentation and behavior. In *Rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme* (1802), Pierre Cabanis, a monogenist like Buffon, conjectured that a relation exists between physiology and morality. Throughout the nineteenth century, comparative anatomists supported a belief in a “biological hierarchy among different races” (Prasad, *Colonialism* 16). Whereas eighteenth-century scientists attributed environment to racial inferiority, “nineteenth-century science emphasized race itself as the cause of black inferiority” (Mitchell 37).

Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), one of the founders of comparative anatomy, frequented Duras’s salon and corresponded with her. Cuvier dissected the body of Sarah Baartman, who arrived in Paris in September 1814, two years before her death. The image of Baartman, often referred to as the Venus Hottentot, came to represent a highly visible, “hypersexualized” alterity which justified French expansion (Mitchell 56). Cuvier published *Observations sur le cadavre d’une femme connue à Paris et à Londres sous le nom de Vénus hottentote*, in which he described Baartman as dancing “à la manière de son pays” and having a graceful her upper body (263). Whereas theories of racial hierarchies influenced concepts of attractive bodies, the beauty of movement, at times, escaped prejudices.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classifications of racial groups repeatedly represent Africans as people who dance. This belief relies on a concept of gesture as a
primitive or prelinguistic form of communication. Bernadin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie* (1788) further promulgated this theory: “La pantomime est le premier langage de l’homme; elle est connue de toutes les nations: elle est si naturelle et si expressive, que les enfants des Blancs ne tardent pas à l’apprendre, dès qu’ils ont vu ceux des Noirs s’y exercer” (157). European writers also developed a belief that Africans possess an unrelenting need to dance. For example, in *Histoire Générale des voyages* (1746–1759), the Abbé Prévost contended that African women dance night and day without getting tired (178). The dance scene in *Ourika* draws on strongly established stereotypes reducing cultural practices to instincts devoid of intellectual reasoning. French literary and scientific publications distorted understandings of African dances and led Europeans to expect Africans to dance.

The ball signals the beginning of a process of racialization in which Ourika transitions from ignoring her skin color to seeing herself as a racial identity. To represent the African continent, her white partner wears a mask made of black crepe (a fabric used for mourning clothes) while Ourika, without a mask, performs a culture that she represents but does not know: “Mon danseur mit un crêpe sur son visage: hélas! je n’eus pas besoin d’en mettre sur le mien; mais je ne fis pas alors cette réflexion” (70). Dancers appeared in blackface in ballets such as Gardel’s 1806 *Paul et Virginie* and Louis J. Milon’s *Les Sauvages de la Mer du Sud* (1816) as well as in theatrical productions like *Le
Nègre par amour (1806) and Robinson dans son île (1817). Actresses portraying Ourika in the spinoff plays, notably Ourika; ou, La Négresse, Ourika; ou La petite négresse, and Ourika: ou, L’Orpheline africaine, refused to darken their faces for the role because appearing in blackface could damage an actress’s career by marring her beauty. Mademoiselle Mars presumably declined the role of Ourika at the Comédie-Française because she did not want to blacken her skin with make-up. A March 1824 article in Le Diable boiteux suggests that audiences wanted to see actresses wearing blackface to give the play more local color: “nous aimons mieux croire, comme on le dit aussi, que Mlle. Bourgoin consentira à se noircir le teint, et à devenir un peu sauvage” (4). As Mitchell points out, white women in blackface became “too real” and escaped the “containment” enabling French fantasies about Black bodies (103). By limiting Black women to controlled stereotypes and negating their subjectivity, marionette-like images of Black women created by white artists and writers fueled these fantasies.

Whereas the masked partner’s performance is only a parade of alterity, Ourika’s uncovered face takes part in her performance of an identity that she learned through books and an identity imprinted on her skin. Her partner’s mask “performs her status in a symbolic way: she will be denied a white, noble partner, and the mourning associated

1 As Sylvie Chalaye’s research demonstrates, blackface was an integral part of French theater and court ballets dating back to the late fifteenth century. Actors darkened their skin to represent African or Moorish characters on the English stage in plays such as William Shakespeare’s Othello and Ben Jonson’s The Masque of Blackness. See Anthony Gerard Barthelemy’s Black Face, Maligned Race: The representation of Blacks in English drama from Shakespeare to Southerne.

2 In 1824, a journalist for Le Corsaire wrote: “Mlle Mars a essayé la peau noire, et après avoir consulté son miroir, a renoncé à Ourika et aux rôles de négresse. Nous conseillons à Mlle Mars de rester blanche” (“Butin” 4).
with the black crêpe will now be her grief over her social death” (Kelly, “Ourika” 87). Whereas the whiteness of Galatea represents her coming to life after arriving in France, the blackness of her partner’s mask augers the black habit that will hide her body at the convent and her death at the end of the novel.¹ After the ball, her blackness becomes a visible reminder of her unhappy destiny away from the society that, for her, constitutes humanity: “ma figure me faisait horreur, je n’osais plus me regarder dans une glace; lorsque mes yeux se portaient sur mes mains noires, je croyais voir celles d’un singe; je m’exagérais ma laideur, et cette couleur me paraissait comme le signe de ma réprobation” (OEO 73). The novella shifts from representing blackness as a superficial aspect like a mask to an abject marker of difference, a sign of the curse upon the descendants of Ham.² After she dances, Ourika becomes aware of her body as the visible proof of her difference and her damnation. Perceiving her blackness after hearing racist discourse, she no longer recognizes her capacity to move with grace.

From the eighteenth century onward, European esthetic theories of beauty and grace have bolstered racist ideologies. Edmond Burke, in A Philosophical Enquiry (1757), drew parallels between blackness and darkness, which he qualified as a source of pain and melancholy. Burke recounted a story of a blind boy who, after regaining his sight, was uneasy the first time he saw “a black object” and, “upon accidentally seeing a

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¹ When the doctor meets her in the frame tale, he does not at first see her black skin because of the black veil covering her body: “elle était assise, et son grand voile noir l’enveloppait presque tout entière. […] Elle se tourna vers moi, et je fus étrangement surprise en apercevant un nègresse” (OEO 64).
² “Ourika becomes a paradigm of the assimilated foreigner; she is ostracized not because she is foreign, but because she is black” (Crofts 4).
negro woman, was struck with great horror at the sight” (276). Esthetic theories associating blackness with the terrible and whiteness with goodness maintain systematic racism by contributing to racialized concepts of morally good and bad bodies.

Figure 14 “Beaupré dans le ballet de Paul et Virginie, acte 2, scène du miroir,” 1820. (The New York Public Library Digital Collections)
Exoticism transforms non-Europeans into spectacles or puppets to secure Eurocentrism.¹ When Ourika becomes aware of the social meaning of blackness, she discovers her lack of agency: “je me vis négresse, dépendante, méprisée, […] jusqu’ici un jouet, un amusement pour ma bienfaitrice, bientôt rejetée d’un monde où je n’étais pas faite pour être admise” (ŒO 71, my emphasis). Not only a puppet of her adoptive mother, Ourika is also a puppet for Duras and the readers who use Black women’s alterity to reflect on European notions of liminality instead of addressing the atrocities of slave trade and institutional racism.

¹ “Au fond, le Nègre n’a pas de vie pleine et autonome: c’est un objet bizarre; il est réduit à une fonction parasite, celle de distraire les hommes blancs par son baroque vaguement menaçant” (Barthes, Mythologies 62). Barthes explains how exoticism decontextualizes history to present non-Western countries as guignols or reflections of the West.
In contrast to her enthusiasm to dance unmasked before others, Ourika attempts to efface her bodily presence as she rejects her humanity. She tries to veil her blackness and blind herself from seeing her skin: “j’avais ôté de ma chambre tous les miroirs, je portais toujours des gants; mes vêtements cachaient mon cou et mes bras, et j’avais adopté, pour sortir, un grand chapeau avec un voile, que souvent même je gardais dans la maison” (82). Unable to marry and become a mother, her body no longer has a use value in patriarchal society and must be obfuscated. First, she masks her blackness with veils. Then, she covers her body with the nun’s habit hiding her femininity and protecting her virginity, or, as Crofts suggests, eliminating the “threat” of miscegenation (203).¹ The heroine’s previous vanity becomes analogous to her blackness as uncouth and exposed.

Duras presents women’s education as preparing girls for nothing beyond appealing to future spouses. Because Ourika is not a viable candidate in the sexual marketplace, her social performances are futile: “mes talents seraient comme la fleur du poète anglais, qui perdait son parfum dans le désert” (OEO 92). This allusion to the forgotten dead countryfolk in Thomas Gray’s 1751 poem “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” contrasting the light of human spirit to the darkness of their rural existence, hints at the admiration Ourika could have obtained if she had lived in different circumstances.² Since she would be equally out of place if she returned to Senegal, she

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¹ In 1778, a government edict forbade interracial marriages in France.
² “Full many a gem of purest ray serene / The dark unfathom’d caves of ocean bear: / Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air” (ll. 53-56).
sees herself as an alien without recourse to a community.\textsuperscript{1} Unable to marry or be the daughter of someone, Ourika views herself as outside of humanity: “Hélas! je n’appartenais plus à personne; j’étais étrangère à la race humaine toute entière!” (73). By entering a convent, she renounces her selfhood, identifies herself as God’s daughter, and joins a community of celibate women ruled by a paternal law.\textsuperscript{2}

The dance scene in \textit{Ourika} marks the final moment that the heroine can exist as an unveiled body. It is a dance scene much like those of other literary heroines, yet her black skin and putative instinct to dance overshadow her acquired skills. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers considered non-Europeans and women more primitive than white men, and therefore more graceful.\textsuperscript{3} Duras depicts Ourika, as both a woman and an African, dancing gracefully out of instinct, yet the heroine defies stereotypes about women’s and non-European’s intellectual capacities as she tries to outsmart racist ideologies by masking her skin. Gracefulness and intelligence coexist in \textit{Ourika}.

In this novella presenting “the impossible position of a black European aristocrat,” the similarities between Ourika’s dance scene and those of the female protagonists in novels by Staël and Krüdener accentuate the arbitrariness of this impossible position (Prasad 109). The spectacularization of her blackness during the

\textsuperscript{1} Her perception of her race moves from paternalistic pity to shame as she perceives enslaved Africans through European eyes. Talks of emancipation touch her romantic sensibility as she perceives Black slaves as lacking the power to liberate themselves. When she hears about the August 1791 slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue, she perceives the rebels as barbarians and assassins.

\textsuperscript{2} In her psychoanalytic reading of \textit{Ourika}, Mary Jane Cowles interprets taking the habit as a way for Ourika to give herself “entirely to the law of the Symbolic” and find herself “in the final image of the abject” (41).

\textsuperscript{3} In \textit{Sur les femmes}, Denis de Diderot argued that women, having less reason, are more instinctual than men. Similar arguments appear in the work of Schiller, Rousseau, and Kant.
quadrille and her later attempts to hide her skin oppose the “non-event” of whiteness (Lewis, Gendering 15). Western writers have traditionally represented grace as beauty and purity expressed as whiteness, as a milk-white Venus wearing her girdle, the cestus, that symbolizes and enforces chastity but also forces her onlookers to fall in love with her. During the first half of the nineteenth century, representations of Sarah Baartmann, la Vénus Noire, opposed Western concepts of grace and beauty. As Mitchell argues, Baartmann, who became an archetype of Black women, “represented the antithesis of Frenchness—inappropriate sexuality, feminine aggressiveness, and excess,” thereby revealing “the menacing power of all females of all races” and strengthening the impetus to dominate women (57). However, even the men like Cuvier and Colnet, who tried to suppress Baartmann’s humanity, could not deny the grace of her dance. Contradictory accounts of Black women’s graceful dancing and the whiteness of grace demonstrate how Western culture has twisted the concept of grace to align with hegemonic power structures dependent on racial politics exoticizing and execrating non-white bodies.

The Bolero

George Sand’s La Filleule references the bolero as a symbol of Spanish Gypsies, Bohemian freedom, and instinctive grace. The novel also describes the dance as a folk dance appropriated for French stages. The bolero, a couple’s dance performed in 3/4 time, developed from a regional dance of La Mancha called seguidillas manchegas, dating back to the tenth century, and became an aristocratic dance in eighteenth-century Spanish courts. Sebastián Cerezo, dance master at the court of Carlos III, was one of the first dancers to become famous for his performances of the bolero. Around the same time,
Sevillian dance master Antonio Boliche codified and initiated the *escuela bolera*. Derived from the Spanish verb *volar* (to fly), the term *bolero* or *volero* began to appear during the second half of the eighteenth century as it became popular in Spanish ballrooms and theatrical performances.

Differing from most earthbound Spanish dances, the choreography consists in elevations and jumps as partners create a Z-shaped figure and play castanets. According to Antonio Cairón’s *Compendio de las principales reglas del baile* (1820), observers first notice the serenity in the complicated steps constituting the bolero. Its final attitude creates movement through stillness, a sort of *fantasmata*. In Cairón’s view, Europeans outside of Spain degraded the dance by adding contortionist virtuosity that destroyed the coolness, or *sprezzatura*, of the choreography.

After the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, French composers and choreographers recreated the bolero with a new rhythm, and the dance became a French phenomenon. An 1822 issue of *Journal des dames et des modes* suggests that Spanish dances replaced traditional French dances in Paris: “Depuis longtemps la Gavotte n’est plus de mode; mais on danse le Fandango, le Bolero” (81). Fernando Sor (1778–1839), a Spanish composer who left Spain for Paris after the 1813 defeat of Joseph Bonaparte, claimed that a Spanish dancer known as Requejo cheapened the bolero by adding “des gestes qui n’appartiennent qu’à certaines danses des gitanas, bohêmiennes d’Espagne” (96). Later

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1 According to Cairón, its “una graciosa actitud, en la que debéis permanecer por corto espacio, sin hacer el más leve movimiento” (109). “A graceful posture, in which you must remain for a short period of time, without making the slightest movement” (my translation).

2 Frédéric Chopin, four years before first meeting Sand, composed a bolero for piano.
the French dancer Madame Lefèvre formed a dance troupe in Seville and became famous for her own rendition, which Sor qualified as a deformed version of the bolero because, unlike French dances, Spanish dances require a certain rigidity. In France, the bolero became a discordant mixture of Spanish folk dance and French court dances: “un mélange de toutes ces attitudes de mauvais ton en usage dans les danses du bas peuple espagnol et de quelques poses gracieuses et nobles de la danse française” (Sor 96). However, Sor considered French ballet more graceful than Spanish dances claiming that only a few Spaniards danced the bolero with as much grace as Marie Taglioni.

The bolero’s sensuality and seeming exoticness fascinated travelers. For example, Christian August Fischer, writing about his 1797-1798 journey through Spain, described the bolero as a lascivious dance tracing the mysteries of love.¹ Replicating arguments formulated by Etienne Bonnot de Condillac and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Fischer attributed the passionate nature of the dance to the warm Andalusian climate. In Un hiver à Majorque (1841), Sand’s description of the bolero focuses primarily on the male dancers:

Les boléros majorquins ont la gravité des ancêtres, et point de ces grâces profanes qu’on admire en Andalousie. Hommes et femmes se tiennent les bras étendus et immobiles, les doigts roulant avec précipitation et continuité sur les castagnettes. Le beau Raphaël dansait pour l’acquit de sa conscience. […] Un jeune gars, mince comme une guêpe, fit l’admiration universelle par la raideur de ses

¹ “Le Volero est donc le tableau réel de la jouissance ménagée dans ses préludes et dans toutes ses nuances, depuis le premier éveil des sens jusqu’au comble du désir satisfait” (2:201).
mouvements et des sauts sur place qui ressemblaient à des bonds galvaniques, sans éclairer sa figure du moindre éclair de gaieté. Un gros laboureur, très coquet et très suffisant, voulut passer la jambe et arrondir les bras à la manière espagnole; il fut bafoué, et il le méritait bien, car c’était la plus risible caricature qu’on pût voir. (145)

Sand, like many nineteenth-century travel writers, established her authoritative knowledge of the dance by comparing it to different regional variations. The dance takes part in a collective celebration of cultural history that conforms to outsiders’ perception of accurate execution of the choreography.

Bolero-style dances spread across the world after a section of the couple dance *boleras de la cachucha*, danced among Andalusian Gypsies, became a Romantic ballet variation. In 1834, the Spanish dancers Dolores Serral and Mariano Camprubi danced on the Parisian stage in Daniel Auber’s opera *La Muette de Portici*. Four years later, Fanny Elssler danced the *cachucha* in the Jean Coralli’s ballet *Le diable boiteux* greatly shaping how French theatergoers henceforth perceived Spanish dance. Little is known about how Elssler learned this dance. It is possible that either Serral or Lola de Valencia taught Elssler the choreography of the *boleras de la cachucha*. In *Petits mémoires de l’Opéra*, Charles de Boigne described Elssler’s *cachucha* as both sensual and graceful: “Ces déhanchements, ces mouvements de croupe, ces gestes provoquants, […] et par-dessus tout la grâce sensuelle, l’abandon lascif, la plastique beauté d’Elssler, furent très
appréciés des télescopes de l’orchestre” (132, my emphasis). Performing exoticized roles, she was sexual and terrestrial but still white and graceful.¹

Dance critics frequently compared the sensual charm of Elssler to the ethereal dancing of Marie Taglioni. Théophile Gautier called the Austrian ballerina “une danseuse païenne” and “la danseuse des hommes” (Écrits 78).² For the German writer Rahel Varnhagen, Taglioni danced with the invisible music whereas Elssler danced with a more human quality because dance penetrated her body. Putatively pagan dances freed dancers from restrictions on their visible bodily presence and effort. Exoticized dances thus allowed ballerinas to appear as corporeal humans.

Spanish dances in nineteenth-century French literature and ballets staged sexual desires with minimal attention to choreographic authenticity.³ Gautier believed Fanny Elssler’s cachucha to be superior to the dances of Spanish dancers: “Nous avons vu Rosita Diez, Lola et les meilleures danseuses de Madrid, de Séville, de Cadix, de Grenade; nous avons vu les gitans de l’Albaycin; mais rien n’approche de cette cachucha ainsi dansée par Elssler!” (Souvenirs 144). Gautier frequently compared Orientalist ballet

¹ Elssler’s biographer Auguste Ehrhard attributed her instinctive and grounded way of dancing to her Austrian origin: “La danse, pour être gracieuse, exige des tempéraments vifs, des corps vigoureux et souples, un sens instinctif du rythme, enfin un souci de beauté qui préside à toutes les évolutions. De tous les peuples de race allemande, l’Autrichien réunit au plus haut degré ces diverses qualités. La Viennoise surtout, par son instinct musical, sa docilité spontanée à la mesure, sa souplesse physique, son sentiment de l’élégance, est née danseuse” (4).
² Like Gautier, the Comtesse Dash described Elssler’s dancing as more voluptuous and terrestrial than that of Taglioni: “C’était une danse plus voluptueuse, plus aiguyante; elle n’était pas comme Taglioni, la sylphide ou la fille des nuages; elle descendait sur la terre et ses regards inspiraient aux hommes des espérances infiniment plus positives, ce qui leur plaisait, même avec la certitude que ses espérances ne se réaliseraient pas” (4:208). In Filippo Taglioni’s 1838 ballet La Gitana, his daughter Marie Taglioni, better known for her roles as supernatural creatures, performed a cachucha.
variations to national dances performed by dancers of that country to establish himself as an expert on authentic dances. By appropriating national dances, French ballet presented itself as the dance form capable of mastering all dance traditions.

Figure 16 Fanny Elssler in La Cachucha, 1836. (Wikimedia Commons)

**Morena and Fanny Elssler’s Bolero**

*La Filleule*, published in 1853, creates an intertextual mosaic absorbing and transforming *Ourika* and *Edouard*. There is no evidence that Sand read either of Duras’s texts; however, both novelists used exoticized characters to condemn women’s limited freedom. In *La Filleule*, Stéphen Rivesanges, a young man from a modest Berrichon family, encounters a pregnant Spanish Romany who gives birth and then dies. The novel reverses the widespread myth that Gypsies steal babies by having a French character adopt a Gypsy child. The Berrichon protagonist takes the infant, names her Morena (the Spanish adjective describing dark hair and brown skin), and asks an elderly couple to
raise her.\textsuperscript{1} Aging, the couple sends the child to live with Anicée de Saule and her mother. After meeting Morena’s adoptive mothers, Stéphen struggles to make a name for himself in order to marry Anicée, who is ten years his senior and above his social class. The couple secretly marries but obscures their liaison that would bring infamy to Anicée and her mother. Stéphen discovers that Morena’s mother Pilar was a Gypsy dancer and that Morena’s father is the Spanish Duke de Florès.\textsuperscript{2} Receiving payment from the Duke’s wife, Pilar’s adopted son Algénib pretends to be Morena’s brother and attempts to defame her. In the end, Algénib reveals the truth and his love for Morena. The two \textit{gitanos} marry and leave for Italy to become artists singing and dancing across Europe.

Interchangeably using the words \textit{bohémien} and \textit{gitano}, Sand exploits the Romantic appeal of Spanish Gypsies’ seemingly mysterious origin.\textsuperscript{3} In the nineteenth century, the Gypsy represented a pre-industrial link to nature allowing for an uncivilized form of grace. The term \textit{Gypsy} (\textit{gitan} in French, \textit{gitano} in Spanish) designated a racialized category referring to “any number of ethnic groups as they are imagined by nonmembers of those groups” (Charon-Deutsch 12). It was also a derogatory term describing people assumed to be thieves. In \textit{La Filleule}, Sand employs this label to

\textsuperscript{1} The skin color of Gypsies is likewise a central theme in Sand’s novel, set in the seventeenth century, \textit{Les Beaux Messieurs de Bois-Doré} (1858). When the aging marquis first perceives Mario, who turns out to be the son of the marquis’s deceased brother, among a group of gypsies, the boy’s whiteness sets him apart: “ce petit garçon était moins sale et moins noir que les autres et que ses traits agréables et délicats n’avaient aucun rapport de type avec celui des bohémiens” (1:28).

\textsuperscript{2} The fragmentary and “hybrid” nature of the text consisting in letters, journal entries, and narrative parallels the “cultural and racial hybridity” of the heroine (Rea, “\textit{La Filleule}” 52).

\textsuperscript{3} Early in the novel, Stephen as the first-person narrator states, “Les bohémiens sont une race dégradée par la misère et l’abandon. Leur type étrange, leur mystérieuse origine, prêtent sans doute à la poésie, et, à l’époque où je faisais cette rencontre, ils étaient à la mode en littérature. Mais j’avais assez lu un peu de tout pour connaître la réalité des choses et pour voir, à côté de ce charme pittoresque que l’on avait le caprice de leur prêter” (\textit{LF} 7).
identify members of Spanish Romany groups who arrived in Spain during the fifteenth century.¹

The dancing Spanish Gypsy was also an iconic figure during the Spanish Golden Age of literature (1556-1659). By glamorizing a pseudo-Gypsy woman and questioning if Gypsy traits are acquired through birth or education, Miguel de Cervantes’s novella “La gitanilla” (1613) traced a precedent for Prosper Mérimée’s Carmen, Hugo’s Esmeralda, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Preciosa, and Sand’s Morena. Questions regarding the chastity of these heroines rely on stereotypes about Gypsy women moving sensually but violently defending their chastity.

In Spain, non-Gypsies attended gitanerias to see the musical and choreographic performances. According to George Borrow, whose 1841 book on Spanish Gypsies influenced Mérimée, the “wild and singular” Gypsy women were “capable of exciting passion of the most ardent description, particularly in the bosoms of those who are not of their race” (51-52). Borrow, like Sand, maintained that, despite the unparalleled “licentious” nature of their dances, Gypsy women would brandish a dagger if an outsider attempted to make advances (52).

The Romantic mythification of Gypsies as well as the conflation of Gypsy and Spanish identities led to the “orientalization of Spain” as well as “the cultural appropriation of the Gypsies’ mystique” and “their commodification as embodiments of the exotic” (Colmeiro 127). This exoticization at times hints at a loosening of morals.

¹ After the 1848 Revolution in Romanian, a mass of formerly enslaved Romany immigrated to France. Many of them were deported in 1851.
Borrow claimed that the Gypsies in Spain were more depraved than those of other nations as a result of living in “a country unsound in every branch of its civil polity” (35). After the 1808 Napoleonic invasion of Spain and its 1814 independence, travel to Spain became highly popular among French writers and artists. This Iberian version of the Grand Tour resulted in numerous travelogues, novels set in Spain, paintings of Spanish Romany dancers, and Spanish-inspired ballet variations. For Romantics, Orientalized Spain, because of its proximity to France, offered a “sheltered space onto which the fears and anxieties caused by modernity could be safely projected” (Colmeiro 130).

Though the political stakes of Orientalist literature changed after the Napoleonic Wars and the 1830 colonization of Algeria, the concept of Enlightenment Orientalism remains relevant for reading Romantic writers disappointed by the failed Revolutions defining the nineteenth century. Orientalized characters proposed existences incompatible with modern society. Symbolizing unconventionality and freedom of movement, the Gypsy woman, embodying a “fantasized abject,” expressed and buffered fears of otherness (Charnon-Deutsch 242). Nomadic and liminal in all nations, the Gypsy character embodied freedom of movement and freedom from the law because by being a Gypsy she has always already transgressed the law.¹ For the Romantics, the Gypsy woman was a liberated woman because society had already rejected her. La Filleule glorifies Gypsy characters’ instinctive grace, which manifests as a love of freedom.

¹ As songwriter Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780-1857) wrote in “Les Bohémiens,” “Le bonheur, c’est la liberté” (316).
Moreover, the novel reveals that Gypsies are not as corrupt as the aristocrats who use them for their own benefit.

Gypsy freedom was also evident in their art which differs from codified forms of dance and music. In line with early theories of a link between warm climates and an excessive passion for dance, French and British travelers considered Spanish Gypsies, “living under the most glorious sun,” to be “an indolent frivolous people, fond of dancing and song, and sensual amusements” (Borrow 214). Northern travelers often associated the castanets, guitars, and pelvic gyrations of Gypsy performances with Egyptian culture, thereby contributing to the Africanization of Gypsies.¹ Like many of Sand’s novels, La Filleule privileges folk music over academic music. The musical creations at the Opéra cannot compare to the Berrichon songs Stéphen plays on the piano nor Algénib’s singing. Dance receives a similar treatment insofar as Sand exposes the prejudices against Gypsies dancing in the street and the artificial virtuosity of ballerinas performing on stage. When Stéphen tells Anicée about his encounter with Algénib, she fears that Algénib will force Morena to become a street acrobat, “une saltimbanque” (LF 12). By referring to street performers as saltimbanques, Anicée implies that such performances possess no artistic attributes and are immodest.² Exoticism transforms dances into commodities as the

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¹ As Hugo wrote in the preface to Les Orientales (1829), “l’Espagne c’est encore l’Orient; l’Espagne est à demi africaine, l’Afrique est à demi asiatique” (52). In Un hiver à Majorque, Sand created parallels between Mallorcan and Arab music to conclude that the lack of intellectual life on the island made its denizens more like Africans that Europeans (Un hiver 89). The Mayor of Gibraltar, Sir William Dalrymple, surmised in 1774 that the fandango performed in Spain, a “lascivious dance,” derived from African dances performed with castanets (667).
² From the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century, jumping women, saltarelles, where associated with witches (Marqué 153).
“foreign becomes invested with the potential to satisfy desires for excitement or satisfaction, either as a respite from the quotidian or as an expansion into unknown territory” (Foster, *Valuing Dance* 60). Though Sand despised the commodification of art depriving it of its authentic grace, she capitalized on a tradition of exoticized literary dances.

Sand contested theories associating education and social class with good taste by ridiculing upper-class characters unable to appreciate grace. The “sentiment assez borné des arts” of the Duchess de Florès becomes evident as she focuses on the superficial elements of an opera, ballet, or play to the detriment of the art’s beauty: “Elle s’extasiait sur une roulade, sur une pirouette, lorgnait un bel acteur ou critiquait les toilettes de l’avant-scène, mais n’était pas réellement touchée d’une phrase bien dite, d’un sentiment bien exprimé, d’une grâce vraiment poétique” (47). Comparing the Duchess to Anicée, who has a moral sensibility when observing art, Morena perceives the former’s artificial taste and the latter’s grace allowing her to appreciate grace. A penchant for grace attests to an openness to be moved by graceful movements and a refusal to be impressed by virtuosity or ornamentation masking a lack of imagination or passion.

In *Histoire de ma vie*, Sand contrasted false grace and superficial taste with the simple beauty of peasants. For Sand, beauty and justness, “le beau et le bon,” reside in “le vrai et le simple” (*Histoire* 699). Physical weakness and laziness, according to Sand,
prevent members of *le grand monde* from acquiring true grace in their movements. Grace comes from effort and an unpretentious desire to live. Sand praised Spanish peasants dancing the bolero as superior to French performers at the Opéra because the Spanish women’s grace emerged out of instinct instead of a desire to please: “leur grâce ne leur vient que de leur belle organisation qui porte son instinct avec elle” (699). Aristocratic and bourgeois “fausse grâce,” based on pretense and social codes, tormented Sand by hindering free movement (699). Sandian grace is not a matter of being dainty. It necessitates grit and an impulsive expression of bodily existence.

Graceful dancing in *La Filleule* is simultaneously chaste and seductive. Morena’s mother Pilar told fortunes, sang, and danced in the streets. The Spanish elite would hire her to enchant them with her mysterious dances. This practice of hiring Gypsies to provide entertainment at parties also appears in Cervantes’s “La gitanilla” and Mérimée’s *Carmen*. Purchased exotic performances of this sort “draw viewers toward imaginary realms where sexual satisfaction is promised or where the enactment of alternative sexual

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1 In contrast, Sand described Spanish peasants in *Un hiver à Majorque* as lazy and fatuous people who dance out of vanity: “N’était la vanité qui l’éveille de temps en temps de sa torpeur pour le pousser à la danse, ses jours de fête seraient consacrés au sommeil” (58).
2 Sand’s concept of graceful dancing is similar to a description of young girls dancing in Charles Dickens’s 1846 novel *The Battle of Life*: “they danced to please themselves. […] Not like opera dancers. Not at all. And not like Madame Anbody’s finished pupils. Not the least. It was not quadrille dancing, nor minuet dancing, nor even country-dance dancing. It was neither in the old style nor the new style, nor the French style, nor the English style; though it may have been, by accident, a trifle in the Spanish style, which is a free and joyous one. I am told, deriving a delightful air of off-hand inspiration” (11).
3 Using similar language in *François le Champi* (1848), Sand opposed rural life, “la vie primitive,” to urban life, “notre vie développée et compliquée, que j’appellerai la vie factice” (42).
4 “Il n’était pas une fête, une noce où on ne la mandât pour figurer les danses mystérieusement voluptueuses de sa tribu” (F 26).
mores gives access to other forms of identity gratification” (Foster 60). Despite the sensuality of her dances, Pilar is not a sexual commodity:

Tous les jeunes gens en étaient amoureux, tous les hommes lui faisaient la cour; mais elle était méfiante et farouche avec les chrétiens d’Espagne, comme le sont beaucoup de gitanas, en dépit de la liberté de leur langage et de la lascivété de leurs poses mimiques. (F 26-7)¹

In the same way that Sand criticized superficial aristocratic enthusiasm for the arts, she accentuated the artificiality of Catholic virtue in contrast to what she considered the primitive goodness of marginalized people.

In contrast to Mérimée’s and Longfellow’s gypsy heroines, Pilar dances with grace and sensuality. In the Duke’s confession regarding his adulterous relationship with Pilar, he claims to have fallen prey to her entrancing movements: “je commis la faute de succomber à l’enivrement que la belle Pilar produisait par la grâce sensuelle de ses danses” (27, my emphasis).² Mérimée’s Carmen portrays the gypsy heroine as “une servante du diable” who dances “comme une folle” (27, 56). The gypsy dancer’s chastity structures “The Spanish Student” (1843), Longfellow’s rewriting of “La gitanilla,” as the

¹ Sand’s description of Pilar echoes the portrait she painted of her own mother Sophie Delaborde, who went from being a courtesan to the wife of an aristocrat. Sand considered her plebian mother a bohemian. In an 1844 letter to Alphonse Fleury, she wrote, “Je suis fille d’un patricien et d’une bohémienne” (Correspondance 4:487). In an 1843 letter to Charles Poncy, Sand described her mother as a Bohemian dancer: “Elle était de la race vagabonde et avilie des Bohémiens de ce monde. Elle était danseuse, moins que danseuse, comparse sur le dernier des théâtres du boulevard de Paris, lorsque l’amour du riche vint la tirer de cette abjection pour lui en faire subir de plus grandes encore” (Correspondance 6:327).

² In Cervantes’s “La gitanilla,” the gypsy heroine is likewise praised for her modesty: “Preciosa la más única bailadora que se hallaba en todo el gitanismo, y la más hermosa y discreta que pudiera hallarse” (61). “Preciosa the most original dancer in the gypsy universe, and the most beautiful and discreet that there could be” (my translation). Preciosa, however, is actually the daughter of aristocrats.
virtuous heroine, who dances a cachucha before a Cardinal set on banning staged dances in Spain, is characterized as outwardly virginal, but a sinner within. In Sand’s 1857 novel set in the seventeenth century, Les Beaux Messieurs de Bois-Doré, a gypsy dancer, also named Pilar, dances with a “grâce violente” that appears like “une télégraphie épileptique” and excites a drunk crowd (2:197). In La Filleule, Pilar’s dances appear seductive and intoxicating yet her conduct suggests that she does not seek to allure men; rather, the gazes of others determine the licentious connotations of her gestures. The dance may produce an intoxicating appeal, but the observer decides to drink it and pursue the dancer.

Whereas Ourika’s dance spectacularizes her Africanness in the salon halfway between domestic space and public space, Morena hides her Gypsy identity dancing only in secret until she becomes a stage performer at the end of the novel. Upon meeting the Duke for the first time, Morena sings and plays the piano for him to show off her education. Yet, she does not perform the dance that she taught herself: the bolero. She practices this Spanish dance alone in the intimate space of her bedroom: “Pour un peu, j’aurais dansé le boléro, que j’ai appris toute seule, en secret, devant la psyché de ma chambre, après l’avoir vu danser à Fanny Elsler. Je sais bien que je le danse, sinon mieux qu’elle, du moins plus dans le vrai caractère” (39). Morena’s bolero becomes a hybrid choreography incarnating her Spanish Gypsy heritage as well as her white-European heritage as she imitates the emblematic variation created by the Austrian ballerina. The dance thus becomes a means for negotiating ethnic and maternal origins.
In her correspondences and her autobiography, Sand referred to the bolero multiple times as a dance that she performed and admired. According to her autobiography, her interest in this dance developed as a child during her family’s 1808 stay in Madrid, where she would imitate Spanish dancers in front of a mirror (with her pet rabbit):

Aussitôt que je me voyais seule dans ce grand appartement que je pouvais parcourir librement, je me mettais devant la psyché, et j’y essayais des poses de théâtre [...] Alors le lapin et moi nous adressions en pantomime des saluts, des menaces, des prières aux personnages de la psyché. Nous dansions le boléro avec eux, car, après les danses du théâtre, les danses espagnoles m’avaient charmée et j’en singeais les poses. (Histoire 601-02)

Dancing before a mirror is a form of escape as well as source of information. As Laura’s epiphany while waltzing demonstrates, life appears differently in the reflection of a mirror. Imitating stage performances in front of a mirror, Morena and the young Aurore Dupin see themselves as dancing subjects and objects of their own gazes. Solo dances in privacy allow an individual “to cope with loneliness” by becoming an audience to herself, moving as she wishes, and perceiving herself as an observer (Hanna, To Dance 32).

Morena dances with an idealized version of herself as she discovers her maternal heritage through movement. Drawing on Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage, I consider this dance a moment of constituting the origin of the self. The mirror stage “produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction,” yet the future and past remain “rooted in an illusion” (Gallop 80–81). During the mirror stage the ideal ego, the
ideal of perfection that the one wishes to emulate, emerges. Like a child struggling with the discord between the complete image in the mirror and the muddled reality of the lived body, Morena tries to construct her identity through the dance, through the phenomenon of creating illusions out of movement. Underscoring the double meaning of psyche referring to a swing mirror and psychic traits constituting a personal identity, Annabelle Rea reads Morena’s dance in front of the mirror as an act of what Linda Hutcheon calls creative birthing as Morena connects with “her dancer-mother’s knowledge” and unwittingly gives birth to her mother through dance (Rea, “Dance” 18). The mirror and the dance allow Morena to discover herself and her origin.

Morena’s bolero remains in the safety of her bedroom, away from observers who may reject her because of her maternal origin and the sensuality expressed in her dance. Different from her adoptive family, Morena sees herself as ugly yet wishes to please others. Her brown skin, accentuated by her name, marks her as a liminal member of French society.¹ Before embarking on a social whirlwind with the Duchess de Florès, Morena, like Ourika, dreams of attending a ball where others will see her and praise her so that she can know her value in society:

Je voudrais bien aller dans le monde, ne fût-ce qu’une fois… ne fût-ce que pour me voir là, en toilette de bal, devant une grande glace, afin de me juger et de me connaître; mais on dit qu’on ne se voit jamais tel qu’on est! Eh bien, je verrais

¹ The association between blackness and ugliness among Gypsies stands out in Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris: “Ils étaient basanés, avaient les cheveux tout frisés, et des anneaux d’argent aux oreilles. Les femmes étaient encore plus laides que les hommes. Elles avaient le visage plus noir et toujours découvert” (174).
Looking into the *psyché*, Morena judges herself based on her abilities and graceful movements. The large mirrors adorning ballrooms juxta expose her appearance and actions with those of other young women. Morena longs to compare her natural grace to their trained grace lacking the indispensable originality, to borrow from Søren Kierkegaard’s reading of “La Gitanilla,” that draws Europeans to Romanticized images of Gypsy women.

The prospect of attending a ball inflates Morena’s vanity; however, prejudices against her dark skin destroy her self-love. Like Ourika, Morena regrets having received an education to fit into a society that does not accept her: “c’était bien la peine de me donner tant de talents et de me façonner aux manières du grand monde!” (43). The adoptive families of these young heroines mold them into talented women for the sexual marketplace. Yet, when their dark skin impedes them from finding white husbands, they must leave the social milieu of their adoptive parents.

From a Romantic perspective, becoming a performer is perhaps the only destiny for an exoticized person educated in white values because her identity is a performance. Morena lives out Anicée’s fear and becomes a dancer. Instead of becoming a street dancer like her mother, Morena develops a stage act with Algénib, who teaches her the songs and dances of their tribe. Guided by instinct, she has no need for dance instruction: “Son corps souple trouvait en lui-même, et sans autre guide que l’instinct, toute la grâce des almées. Algénib n’avait plus qu’à régler à sa guise les pas et les poses de sa danse”
(53, my emphasis). Sand scholars often stress the importance of work in the development of Sandian artists; however, in descriptions of exoticized dancers like Morena and Albine Fiori, instinct precedes effort.\(^2\)

Instinct implies that a natural and naïve grace inspires the dancer’s movements. At the same time, the reduction of talent to instinct animalizes dancers. In *Carmen*, the narrator compares the dancing Gypsy to a monkey: “elle dansait, et elle déchirait ses falbalas: jamais singe ne fit plus de gambades, de grimaces, de diableries” (Mérimée 89). Hugo compared Esmeralda to “une espèce de femme abeille, ayant des ailes invisibles aux pieds” (381). Descriptions of exoticized dancers celebrate their animalistic nature but also question their humanity by equating their graceful movements to irrational behavior.

The reference to Almehs (*almées*) places Morena within a homogenized concept of Orientalized performers. Nineteenth-century writers and artists, most notably Gustave Flaubert and Eugène Delacroix, confused Almeh, a term designating Egyptian female singers that literally means learned women, with *ghaziyas*, Egyptian dancers who were often prostituted. By the mid-nineteenth century, Europeans understood *Almeh* to designate “any female dancer” whose dance carried a sexual connotation (Lewis 173). In actuality, the Almeh neither danced nor displayed herself, “but sang from behind a

\(^1\) Similarly, in *Les Beaux Messieurs de Bois-Doré*, Mario, raised by a Gypsy and then adopted by a Marquis, learns court dances but maintains his natural grace: “Le marquis avait eu beau lui démontrer la grâce par principes, il avait conservé sa grâce naturelle, et, quant à celle du gentilhomme, il l’avait rencontrée dès le premier jour, en endossant le justaucorps de satin. Les savantes études chorégraphiques qu’on lui faisait faire ne servaient donc qu’à développer dans le sens de son organisation, qui était de celles que l’on ne fausse pas” (2:247).

\(^2\) In “La danseuse et l’actrice chez George Sand,” Rea concludes, “Riches ou pauvres, les jeunes artistes sandiennes ne réussiront dans le monde du spectacle que par le travail” (204).
screen, or from another room” during festivities (Irwin 43). The comparison between Morena’s grace and that of Almehs locates the enchanting quality of Orientalized characters in their malleable alterity.  

Whereas Ourika’s hyper-visible blackness excludes her from all public spaces, Morena manages to hover between two worlds without being corrupted by the values of either. Since her *métissage* and Christian education efface her belonging to “an abject race,” she remains above Gypsy thievery and continues to be loved by white Europeans as an exotic performer (Charnon-Deutsch 66). At the same time, her Gypsy instincts prevent the superficiality of French society from impeding her natural urge to dance freely and passionately. Like her mother, Morena executes choreography with “une grâce si voluptueuse” (*LF* 53). Due to her alterity, her sexuality is acceptable and fascinating. Recourse to exoticized characters to describe female sexuality persisted throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century in literature and on stage. Still visible in the twenty-first century, this phenomenon supports a notion of disembodied white feminine grace opposed to hypersexualized non-white women’s grace.

Grace enchants because its constant movement makes it difficult to dissect and analyze. As a dancer creates mesmerizing images, the dance produces grace. This is not to say that the dancer disappears. She remains present as the active creator of graceful inclinations. Nonetheless, a spectator can negate the dancer’s lived presence, project

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1 Rea surmises that, through the etymological relation between *almée* and the Latin *alumna*, Sand “highlighted Moréna’s education, which will now allow her to realize her ambitions in the theaters of Europe” in contrast to the fate of her illiterate mother (“Dance” 18). Given the plethora of visual and literary descriptions of Almehs as sexualized dancers, I find this interpretation dubious.
desires or fears onto her, and transform her into a symbol. In *Valérie*, the protagonist perceives the heroine as a representation of maternal grace. Shrouded by her shawl, Valérie becomes a sexless image of a feminine ideal and of chaste love. In *Ourika*, the process of racialization veils the dancer’s grace when she is perceived as only a Black body. The non-white body is forced to appear as entertainment for European spectators. In *La Filleule*, sensual grace depends on exoticism that excludes the dancing woman from the white sexual marketplace as a potential spouse (but not as a potential sexual partner). Italian art historian Francesco Milizia (1725–1798) defined grace as more universal than beauty because it is not acquired and is the same in all nations. Graceful inclinations affect observers even when they ignore the human subjectivity of the graceful mover.

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1 “La grazia non si acquista, non conosce né principii, né convenzioni. Ogni nazione può avere il suo genere di bellezza, ma la grazia è una per tutti i paesi. Ella non può descriversi, né misurarsi, né determinarsi; è più fina, più fuggitiva, più universale della bellezza” (77). “Grace is not acquired; it knows neither principles, nor conventions. Each nation can have its own genre of beauty, but grace is the same for all countries. It cannot be described, nor measured, nor determined; it is more precious, more fleeting, more universal than beauty” (my translation).
Chapter Four The Tarantella: Voluptuous Modesty and Enthusiasm

Ils commencent par former de grands ronds au milieu desquels la tarentelle se danse, au bruit du tambour de basque et de longues guitares à trois cordes dont ils tirent des sons vifs et harmonieux. On ne saurait décrire ni l’activité, ni l’expression d’amour, qu’offrent tous leurs mouvements; aucune danse ne ressemble à celle-là.

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs*.

La danse est un excellent remède pour le spleen et les courbatures.

George Sand, *Lavinia*.

Sexuality and grace come together in expressive dance performances when the dancer is recognized as an autonomous dancer and not an archetypal image. In *Corinne, ou l’Italie* (1807), Staël’s description of the tarantella is a meditation on overflowing sentimentality, the possibility of feminine sovereignty in male-female relationships, and praise of a scorned art form. In great contrast to the contradances executed by Oswald and Lucile near the end of the novel, Corinnee performs her tarantella as if it were a ballet
telling a story for the audience to contemplate. Unlike social dances directed by the music, Corinne’s dance collaborates with the music and inspires art. George Sand’s novels staging Mediterranean dances likewise attest to a freedom that makes them superior to Northern European dances. In this chapter, I show how the origins of the tarantella and tarantism characterize Corinne as a sensual artist influenced by Catholic and pagan traditions. I then examine how Mediterranean dances in Sand’s Lavinia (1833) and La Daniella (1857) elaborate Staël’s notions of glory and sensual grace.

Descriptions of Italian and Spanish dances demonstrate how exoticism and national identities were paramount in nineteenth-century understandings of dance. Likening voluptuous European women to images of Orientalized European women made it possible to laud feminine sensuality without destabilizing idealizations of Christian women. Nonetheless, in Corinne, the heroine’s independence and talent appall her onlooking Protestant lover. Reminiscent of spectacularized Catholic rituals, the excess of the dance can only exist in decadent Italy, a culture on the verge of ruin. Mediterranean dancers in the works of Staël and Sand represent a concept of voluptuous grace synonymous with freedom but incompatible with Northern European social and esthetic prejudices.

**Tarantism and the Tarantella**

The tarantella music and choreography were born out of tarantism rituals. Tarantism refers to both the cultural practice of dancing to expel spider venom and a dancing malady observed among Southern Italian peasants from the Middle Ages until its
decline in the nineteenth century.¹ Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century doctors qualified tarantism either as a syndrome caused by a tarantula bite or as a symptom of melancholy. The eighteenth-century French doctor François Boissier de Sauvage identified the principal symptom of this disease, occurring among the denizens of Apulia, as “une envie extrême de danser ou d’entendre des instruments de musique” (695). Since Southern Italians already possessed a proclivity for music, a lively imagination, and a melancholic temperament, Sauvage doubted that a spider bite caused the disease. Characterized by its public nature, the passionate dance supposedly transformed “rude” country people’s movements by giving them “an unusual degree of grace as if they had been well practiced in elegant movements of the body” (Hecker 108). Since the spider’s venom acted on the nervous system, the German physician Justus Karl Hecker, in his 1832 study The Epidemics of the Middle Ages, attributed this acquisition of grace to an altered condition of the organs of motion controlled by a strained mental state. Similarly, the tarantella dance proposes a form of grace born out of excessive passions.

Within tarantism, the tarantula takes on a symbolic role of awakening inconscient worries, thus becoming a symbol of an undesirable past. Its bite communicates choreographic, melodic, and chromatic yearnings that the spider possesses. The victim must imitate its fast-paced dance to cause the tarantula to dance itself to death. Ernesto Martino’s extensive study of tarantism practices concludes that the ritual consists in a regularly repeated choreography, performed both on the ground and upright, ending with

¹ The first known written account of tarantism appears in De venenis (1446), a medical treatise by the Venetian physician Santes de Ardoynis.
a fall symbolizing the victim’s death. Ballroom forms of the tarantella maintained the repetition, fast pace, and use of various levels.

Over time, tarantism transitioned from being understood as the result of a single spider bite to a recurrent dancing mania. Dancing supposedly caused the spider’s poison to spread through the victim’s body and expel it through the skin; however, if any of it remained in the body, dancing fits would repeatedly overtake the victim whenever excited by music. As such, tarantism affected more and more people each year, “for whoever had either actually been, or even fancied that he had been, once bitten by a poisonous spider or scorpion, made his appearance annually wherever the merry notes of the Tarantella resounded” (Hecker 109). This choreomania transformed into a cultural tradition and a sign of women’s mental instability.

As was also the case for other dancing diseases, explanations of tarantism associated women’s vigorous physical movements with mental illnesses.¹ According to Hecker, “inquisitive” women caught the disease from “the mental poison which they eagerly received through the eye; and thus the cure of the Tarantati gradually became established as a regular festival of the populace, which was anticipated with impatient delight” (109). In the seventeenth century, this festival known as the carnevaletto delle donne, meaning the “women’s little carnival,” became synonymous with an evolving notion of tarantism. Hecker and other scholars of his era attributed the large number of female victims to women’s deceptive and instable character. The Roman doctor Giorgio

¹ Some scholars such as Robert E. Bartholomew contested that tarantism affected more women than men.
Baglivi, in his 1696 treaty *De anatomie, morsu et effectibus Tarantulae*, claimed that women feigned the symptoms because, “whether they be under the power of love, or have lost their fortunes,” tarantism allowed them “to enjoy the agreeable diversion of music” (qtd. in Daboo 138-9). Emphasizing the manic nature of the victim’s dancing, Hecker compared tarantism to Saint Vitus’s dance, a form of choreomania first witnessed in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Germany.

Since the Middle Ages, uncontrollable movements have been viewed as symptomatic of choreomania, meaning diseases causing an individual’s gesticulations to evade what is considered to be reasoned movement. Whether in a performance or everyday setting, when dance or dance-like movements communicate without employing recognizable signs or movements, they confuse “hegemonic meanings” by creating “an aesthetic interruption” or a new mode of communication (Hewitt 83). Consequently, transgressive dances based on bodily states of supposedly diseased dancers, typically members of marginalized groups, act as a means for communicating without recourse to a language steeped in dominant ideologies. The apparent loss of bodily control in these dances reveals “an attempt to regain control through aestheticization” (Hewitt 83-84). Arising from anxieties and fantasies about the Orient and the dark continent of the feminine, choreomania allowed Western bodies to perform histrionically “pre-civilized” states (Gotman 167). As dancing diseases influenced new and transgressive social dances, their origins in choreomania lent them a subversive valence as a mode of political or cultural resistance.
Tarantism partook in Catholic and pagan traditions. It integrated into a cult dedicated to Saint Paul, considered to be the protector the *tarantato* or *tarantata* (the person bit by a tarantula). According to Ioan Lewis, the recognition of the saint’s power to cure the victim likely enabled the assimilation of a Dionysian cult into a local Christian practice. During antiquity, Apulian Korybantes (followers of the Phrygian goddess Cybele) and devotees of Bacchus engaged in therapeutic dances performed to music. With the introduction of Christianity in Italy, “dances were no longer tolerated,” and, perhaps for this reason, “tarantism commenced as the peasants were accustomed to rapid open air dancing done to fast rhythmical music which provided scope for self-expression” (Russell 419). When pagan cults faded away, their dances integrated into Catholic belief systems as religious rituals. In a similar vein, Renaissance artists used the dancing Maenads of Dionysiac rites as models for Mary Magdalene mourning. The expressiveness of a “pagan frenzy of delight could serve as a pattern for a Christian frenzy of grief,” because it is the “expressive impact” that counts (Spivey 119). Like the agreeable experience of grace, this frenzy, whether pagan or Catholic, enabled individuals to support hardships.

Although the choreographic lineage between tarantism and the tarantella remains nebulous, the mythologized disease adds to the exciting and mysterious appeal of the dance. Choreographer Carlo Blasis (1797-1878) questioned whether the tarantella dance “was first used as a remedy for the bite of the spider” or if the victim’s gestures and attitudes inspired the dance, concluding that “it is impossible to determine; still there can
be no doubt that, in some way or other the dance is owing to the malady” (Notes 35).\(^1\)

Despite the multitude of medical and psychological studies on tarantism, it was most likely “a culturally specific instrument of explanation” defining a phenomenon irreducible to a single interpretative schema (Lüdtke 70).

By the mid-eighteenth century, the tarantella, a popular dance throughout southern Italy, was understood to be loosely based on the ritual movements of tarantism. To dance like a tarantula’s victim (ballare a tarantata) meant to dance the “profane” tarantella considered to be a folk dance without any curative powers (Gentilcore 265). As tarantism lost ground, the tarantella became increasingly popular among the upper classes, a fate for many folkdances from the sixteenth century onward. According to Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, ballroom tarantellas were only “une faible copie” of the dance performed by Italian peasants (1:223).\(^2\) Over time, this lively-paced dance evolved into regional styles such as an Apulian version called the pizzica (pizzicare meaning to bite or pinch) and the Campanian tammurriata. The Neapolitan tarantella, on which Staël based Corinne’s dance, incorporates gestures perceived in the dancing victims of the tarantula bite in addition to figures from a variety of popular dances.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Casting doubt on the salutary nature of the dance, Blasis cited two Neapolitan physicians, Claritio and Serrao, who diagnosed tarantism as a myth founded on quackery.

\(^2\) The tarantella that Vigée-Lebrun saw performed in Rome left her in awe: “Après la messe, toutes ces bonnes gens se réunirent sur la place de l’église pour y danser la tarentelle; c’est là seulement qu’on peut prendre l’idée de cette danse” (223). Her emphasis on the setting of the dance suggests that in front of the church the dance transpired as a religious event.

\(^3\) Staël’s knowledge of the tarantella likely derived from various sources. During her travels, she danced and watched dancing at balls, ballets, and local festivals. After witnessing a tarantella performance in Naples, during her 1805 journey through Italy, she wrote in her journal: “Vivacité de la tarantèle [sic]. Passion italienne dans cela, encore plus que gaité profonde, plus remuante que la gaité” (Carnets 141).
Descriptions of this peasant dance appear in travel writings produced during the Grand Tour of Italy, eighteenth-century excursions through Italy, the site of grace where travelers could admire the works of Raphael and Correggio as well as the vestiges of the Roman Empire. Excited to see the origins of European greatness, many Northern European visitors complained of contemporary Italian decadence and poverty. In 1783, British travel writer Henry Swinburne described the tarantella in Naples as a basse danse consisting in “turns on the heel, much footing, and snapping of the fingers” (94). He wrote an acerbic portrait of Neapolitan women, “far from handsome,” with a predilection for this dance (94). A comparison between the description of the tarantella in Swinburne’s travelogue and the dance in Corinne illustrates a common difference between romanticized portrayals of foreign dances in literature and observations in travelogues revealing prejudices and “an upsetting demystification of images culled from texts” (Said, Orientalism 101). Although fictional dances exemplify graceful sensuality, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelers often found local social dances maladroit or even grotesque. The fantasy, not the authenticity, afforded the dances their charm. Since Staël imagined the dance scene in Corinne as a series of relationships between the crowd, the dancers, and the music: “Les réflexions pour les autres, pour les hommes, pour Corine [sic]. Gaité et légèreté, tambour de basque, castagnettes. Hommes à genoux au milieu, elle dansant autour” (141). In the novel, the prince dances with castanets while Corinne beats a tambourine; however, she dances with only one man.

1 I use the term Italy to identify the Italian peninsula, which was divided into ten states prior to the 1796 Napoleonic invasion and became a unified nation with Rome as its capital in 1871. See Claude Jamain’s chapter on Italy in La Douceur de vivre.

2 Basses danses or low dances were slow fifteenth- and sixteenth-century court dances in which partners glided across the flow without lifting their feet. In contrast, hautes danses were lively dances with skipping, jumping, and running movements.
beauty “takes place in the particular,” a lack of knowledge about a given culture can impede an observer from appreciating the beauty of a dance (Scarry 18).

Although a single individual typically executes the dancing ritual of tarantism, the tarantella as a couple’s dance acts out a heterosexual narrative that “is often openly sexual in its connotations” (Gambino 155). According to a nineteenth-century German encyclopedia aimed toward women readers, the tarantella expresses intimacy and voluptuous grace (“voll der wollüstigsten Anmuth”) as the female dancer seeks to seduce her cavalier (Damen-Conversations 28). ¹ Considering the dance as it was executed across Europe, Blasis emphasized the choreographic revelation of love and pleasure as each gesture is composed of “the most voluptuous gracefulness” (The Code 19). According to Blasis, the woman tries “to excite the love of her partner, who, in his turn, endeavors to charm her with his agility, elegance and demonstrations of tenderness” as they “unite, separate, return, fly into each other’s arms, again bound away, and in their different gestures alternately exhibit love, coquetry, and inconstancy” (19). ² Acting out the pursuit

¹ Homogenizing Mediterranean folkdances, the author associated the tarantella with the fandango and describes it as representing heterosexual love story: “Tarantella, der dem Fandango nahverwandte Nationaltanz der Neapolitaner, eine zauberische Guirlande leidenschaftlicher Gesten und Pas, welche die Innigkeit und Sprödigkeit, das Sehnen und Zürnen zweier Liebenden darstellen. Voll der wollüstigsten Anmuth athmet die T. nichts als Liebe und Vernügen. Das Weib sucht durch Grazie und Lebhaftigkeit die Liebe ihres Tänzers zu erwecken, während dieser seinerseits sich bemüht, sie durch Gewandtheit, Zierlichkeit und Beweise von Zärtlichkeit zu gewinnen” (28).

² In the same vein, William Stamer, in an 1878 account of his six-year stay in Naples, described the tarantella performed for the festival of the Madonna dell’Arco as “a choreographic love-story” of quarreling lovers reuniting through a whirlwind of passions: “Enraptured gaze, coy side-look; gallant advance, timid retrocession; impassioned declaration, supercilious rejection; piteous supplication, softening hesitation; worldly good’s oblation, gracious acceptation; frantic jubilation, maidenly resignation” (123, my emphasis). The Russian count and travel writer Grégoire Orloff (1734-1783), relating an account of the Neapolitan festival of the Madonna dell’arco, described women dancing the tarantella with their eyes cast down and few signs of coquetry. For him, the tarantella represents a romantic narrative typical of most
of potential sexual partners, the dance rehearses and repeats gestures defining gender performances.

The tarantella joined exoticized dances like the bolero allowing Northern European women to express their sexuality without overstepping the rules of decorum. As various versions of the tarantella moved northward from southern Italy, its figures became “a crucible for phantasmatic imaginings of exotic alterity” inspiring Fanny Elssler’s provocative variation in the 1839 ballet La Tarentule and Lola Montez’s sexually-charged Spider Dance in 1855 (Gotman 183). Giving birth to Orientalist fictions, the tarantella projected fantasies about rural Italians’ unrestrained sexuality.

Figure 17 La Tarentule as danced by Fanny Elssler, 1840. (New York Public Library Digital Collections)

The description of Corinne’s tarantella defies the heterosexual choreographic storyline by focusing predominately on her and the whirlwind of passions that she expresses to the crowd, not to her cavalier. In this respect, her performance approximates the folklore surrounding tarantism more closely than the peasant dance adopted for ballroom settings.

**Enthusiasm for Dancing**

The tarantella emphasizes Corinne’s Italian nationality and passionate nature shifting from joyful frenzy to melancholy. Throughout her oeuvre, Staël analyzed the political, philosophical, and literary practices of various nations with the aim of creating a European spirit that would allow the *esprit général*, to borrow Montesquieu’s term, of different nations to guide each other during a politically and ideologically tumultuous period. Self-reflection and intercultural dialogue, creating what Homi Bhabha calls “sites of collaboration” in defining the idea of society, are fundamental to Staël’s theory of human perfectibility (2). She encouraged her readers to study the practices, laws, and arts of other cultures in order to adopt those most suitable to human progress. *Corinne* focuses on cultural modes of perceiving art, engaging in social spaces, and understanding women’s social roles.

As an allegory for the acme of Italian culture, the heroine incarnates the treasure that foreigners should admire but not conquer. In an obvious admonishment of Napoleon Bonaparte, Corinne’s friend Prince Castel-Forte tells the assembly at her coronation that foreigners, who insult Italy, should look toward Corinne to see the untainted image of the
country she embodies. Repeated comparisons between the heroine and the Erythraean Sibyl, credited for bringing the Sibylline books of prophecy to Italy, further depict Corinne as not only an allegory of Italy but also a protector of the nation. She represents an ideal Italy through her passion for the arts, the talents that she has honed, her intellect, and the grace with which she acts. As Castel-Forte proclaims, she is the image of what Italy would be if ignorance, envy, and indolence were abolished. This pantheonization of Corinne’s talents as a model for Italy echoes Staël’s argument in “De l’esprit des traductions” (1816) that Italians should continue to cultivate their arts to make up for their weak political and economic situation. Advocating for a trans-European perspective, Corinne criticizes and praises Italy while also comparing it to France and England.

Although Corinne appears as an exemplar of a talented woman in a country that allows her to achieve her greatness, Staël remains critical of both the heroine and Italy. Corinne’s fervent devotion to art and Catholicism appear in a negative light next to Oswald’s melancholic pensiveness and Protestantism infused with Kantian notions of rationalism and moral duty. The juxtaposition of Corinne’s enthusiasm for creation and Oswald’s steadfast attachment to duty suggests a need to meld both qualities. Echoing Friedrich Schiller’s call to embody both dignity and grace, Staël wrote in *De l’Allemagne* (1813): “L’enthousiasme est à la conscience ce que l’honneur est au devoir” (250). In *De

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1 “C’est l’image de notre belle Italie; elle est ce que nous serions sans l’ignorance, l’envie, la discorde et l’indolence auxquelles notre sort nous a condamnées [...] quand les étrangers insultent à ce pays d’où sont sorties les lumières qui ont éclairé l’Europe; quand ils sont sans pitié pour nos torts qui naissent de nos malheurs, nous leur disons: — regardez Corinne” (C 31).

2 Karen Pagani, in the article “Judging Oswald Within the Limits of Reason Alone in Madame de Staël’s *Corinne,*” explains how *Corinne* testifies to Staël’s insight into the ramifications of Kant’s philosophy of moral judgments.
la littérature (1800), Staël presented Italian literature as inferior to Northern literature. Presaging her Italian heroine’s broken engagement, the Italian canon, Staël argued, lacks novels since Italians experience love as a whim instead of a deep passion. Staël’s early writing on England favors a character like Oswald. For her, the English government provided the best model for a government of free people, and only a Protestant government can promote freedom. Corinne suggests that Protestantism and English mores, though propitious for men’s freedom, create a sort of hell for women, a hell in which they must become automata programmed to follow restrictive rules. Depicting a portrait of an ideal military citizen and an ideal woman artist, the novel introduces two significant challenges for European societies: defining freedom within sexual difference and consolidating political and artistic life.

Dancing in Corinne exemplifies two antithetical forms of being: Lucile’s subjugation to social norms and Corinne’s artistic endeavors to share her enthusiasm, express her freedom, and celebrate her motherland. The tarantella takes place in the sixth book, entitled “Les mœurs et le caractère des Italiens,” underscoring the vast differences between Italian, French, and British cultures. Gesturing toward an artistic utopia, the tarantella scene proposes what dance, and art in general, could become by embodying freedom and finding inspiration in other art forms. Corinne’s performance, in contrast to

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1 Nevertheless, during the First Empire, England, harboring numerous French émigrés, posed the threat of helping restore the ancien régime.
2 Dismantling and investigating conjugal subjugation, Corinne became a frequent reference for nineteenth-century women writers, despite Staël’s assumption that active and independent women, like Corinne and herself, are exceptions destined for unhappiness. For female readers, “Corinne’s megalomaniacal aspirations resounded as a prophecy of intellectual emancipation and freedom” (Szmurlo, “Introduction” 18).
her half-sister’s execution of contradances, confirms her talent as an artist and her
deviance from the paragon of marriable Northern women. Written after the 1804
Napoleonic Code denied women political and civil rights, the tarantella scene highlights
Oswald’s tyrannical desire to subjugate his beloved and quell her enthusiasm. Since
Corinne has already enchanted the masses, he can never claim exclusivity over her
graceful inclinations.

Enthusiasm is a key notion in Staël’s concept of perfectibility. Excited by “le
sentiment de l’infini,” enthusiasm is a form of human energy, a potential which an
inspired individual converts into action (Staël, De l’Allemagne 714). Appreciation of
beauty and art depends on enthusiasm, which Staël defines as “l’amour du beau,
l’élévation de l’âme, la jouissance du dévouement, réunis dans un même sentiment qui a
de la grandeur et du calme” (779). Staël’s concept of enthusiasm closely approximates
that proposed by Kant in The Critique of Judgement (1790), though Staël probably did
not read this text.¹ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a negative
connotation of enthusiasm persisted until Kant’s 1790 publication.² For him, enthusiasm
is the idea of the good conjoined with spontaneous affect. Enthusiasm motivates an
individual to arouse admiration (Bewunderung, an amazement that persists after the

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¹ My comparison between Kant’s and Staël’s theories is not a reflection of Staël’s description of Kantian
philosophy in De l’Allemagne, which has received significant criticism since its publication. Staël claimed
that Kant assigned sentiment as more important than reasoning in understanding transcendental truths. In
fact, for Kant, rational deliberation is necessary for any act to be considered moral. See Louis Moreau de
Ballanger’s L’Enthousiasme de Madame de Staël.
² Philosophical treaties such as Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan (1651), Anthony Ashley Cooper of
Shaftesbury’s A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm (1708), and Voltaire’s Lettres philosophiques (1764) warn
against enthusiasm, almost synonymous with fanaticism.
novelty is gone) through her actions. It is an operation in which the imagination is unshackled but not without rule. In Corinne, Staël formulates a notion of subjective enthusiasm that garners admiration not only for its display of unbridled imagination but also for its expression of complex ideas.

The novel opposes admiration in a crowd inspired by enthusiasm and intimate love. Oswald and Corinne embark on an exploration of the most beautiful sights of Rome. She eventually regrets being separated from her Italian devotees as she spends her days exclusively with Oswald. Sensing that love has subjugated her to one man, she attempts to free herself from this yoke by accepting an invitation to a ball to determine if he alone can satisfy her or if she still needs public admiration.\(^1\) He believes that she begins to mirror his gloomy disposition and to lose her penchant for public performances. The invitation to the ball breaks this imagined projection of his desire onto her: “tout à coup elle lui parut vivement occupée de la danse, de ce talent dans lequel elle excellait” (C 128). Dance prevents him from determining her use of time and space as well as the emotions she expresses.

Through Oswald’s disdain for balls, his friend the Count d’Erfeuil’s understanding of dance as a diversion, and Corinne’s enthusiasm for dance, the novel questions the philosophical position that dance belongs to the lower arts, bordering on a

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\(^1\) She tells him, “il faut pourtant que je sache s’il n’y a plus que vous au monde qui puissiez remplir ma vie; si ce qui me plaisait autrefois ne peut pas encore m’amuser, et si le sentiment que vous m’inspirez doit absorber tout autre intérêt et toute autre idée” (C 128). Later, when Corinne tells Oswald that since meeting him her taste in art has changed from preferring joyful images to melancholic works, he blames himself for weakening her imagination. She responds that it is not his fault but rather the fault of a deep passion because talent necessitates “une indépendance intérieure, que l’amour véritable ne permet jamais” (402).
silly divertissement. For example, Kant, in *Critique of Judgement*, defined dance as a purely spatial, and not temporal, play of figures. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (whose works were likely unknown to Staël) categorized dance as an external execution of dramatic art, which neither relates deeds “for our spiritual contemplation,” nor expresses “an inner and subjective world” appealing to the heart and imagination (*Aesthetics* 2:1182).¹ For Hegel, dance simply portrays an action, which could be expressed in words. In his view, dance is an imperfect art because the performer’s corporeality and movement through space blur the dance instead of holding fast to the fixed delimitations.²

Although such attitudes prevailed among many philosophical circles, dance attracted a few supporters. Arguing that improvements in opera could create performances on a par with ancient drama, Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) believed that the unification of poetry and painting through dance could become “the most perfect composition of all the arts” (280). In *Corinna*, Staël placed dance among the higher arts by including it in a series of poetic, dramatic, and musical performances. When relating Corinne’s enthusiasm to dance at the ball, the narrator claims, “Corinne n’était pas une personne frivole” (C 128). Her penchant for dance does not reduce her position as a genius and artist.³

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¹ In *Off the Ground*, Francis Sparshott explores the various reasons for which philosophers do not give dance the attention it deserves. He identifies an incoherence in Hegel’s denigration of dance given that his lectures on sculpture identify the human body as the only form able to express the Idea. Yet, Sparshott ignores that a sculpture is a sexless body incapable of sinning. For Hegel, the human body expresses the Idea in sculpture because the living human body fails to create this Idea.

² Hegel also considered music a form of entertainment instead of a supreme art.

³ Hortense Allart (1801-1879), in her 1824 *Lettres sur les ouvrages de Madame Staël*, praised *Corinne* but disliked the tarantella scene: “Corinne, si simple et si bonne, prête quelquefois au ridicule. […] Elle danse,
The ball scene questions the merits of art meant to improve humanity, art for entertainment, and art based on melancholic reflection. Corinne praises graceful art that incites its observers to better themselves and expand their knowledge or affective faculties. Less interested in questions of taste, she extols art and beauty encouraging intellectual reflection, happiness, and moral development.¹ Throughout the novel, Staël argues that Italians, ruled by a weak state, possess a predisposition for the appreciation of beauty and art, in contrast to France where “la société est tout” and England where political interests consume everything (C 19).² The Count d’Erfeuil hungered for entertainment but scorched art and cultures different from his own. Disdaining foreign languages and Roman monuments, he prefers pleasures that require little intellectual effort.³ Representative of aristocratic prejudices, Erfeuil assimilates “la perfection française” to a universal ideal (Gengembre 67). According to the narrator, such frivolity is founded on a complete lack of enthusiasm, opinion, and sensibility—the qualities necessary for the appreciation of art and moral beauty. The Count’s levity, intolerance for

et sa danse et sa pantomime, quelque décentes qu’elles soient, ne sont point dans la dignité d’une femme qui s’élève aux plus hautes méditations de la pensée” (92-93). For Allart, genius is disembodied contemplation.

¹ Corinne argues that enthusiasm for “la dignité de l’espèce humaine et la gloire du monde,” inspires artists to create beauty (57).

² Staël made a similar observation in De la littérature attributing English people’s delays in acquiring good taste to the fact that they establish their freedom on national pride rather than philosophical ideas (223).

³ The Count says, “Un plaisir qu’il faut acheter par tant d’études ne me paraît pas bien vif en lui-même; car, pour être ravi par les spectacles de Paris, personne n’a besoin de pâlir sur les livres” (C 129). While traveling in Germany, Staël described this French phenomenon of remaining closed to other cultures and giving too much value to amusements. On 15 November 1803, she wrote in her journal, “On se moque beaucoup des Français parce qu’ils ne savent pas s’accoutumer aux usages étrangers; ils ont grand tort, ils sont misérablement frivoles […] Il faut pardonner aux Français d’aimer leurs usages qui tous sont fondés sur l’art d’embriller les jouissances de la vie commune et de tirer de la société le plus grand amusement possible” (Carnets 32-3).
the unfamiliar, and opiniated disdain for intellectualism perfectly match Staël’s portrait of French aristocrats in her later work, *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, in which she blamed the *ancien régime* and then Bonaparte for encouraging flippancy among the upper classes so that the government could easily manipulate them.¹ The novel does not propose a theory of taste, rather, like Staël’s literary treatises, it places art within a frame of social and political institutions shaping its creators and observers.

A woman who dances in public as part of a ritual demonstrating her availability for marriage or her correct feminine education searches either to be loved or to comply with social norms, whereas the woman who dances to express herself and move her audience stands out. An artist like Corinne does not perform to garner praise for herself, but rather glory for art and human possibility. This love for humanity, however, detracts from exclusive love for one person. Corinne dances a tarantella, which the narrator defines as “une danse de Naples, pleine de grâces et d’originalité” with the Prince of Amalfi, “Napolitain de la plus belle figure” (129). Unlike in *Delphine*, a dance uniting the two lovers does not follow the heroine’s dance with another man. Corinne’s eagerness to dance reminds Oswald of the incongruity between a glory-loving artist and a submissive wife.

¹ For Staël, there exists “une certaine fatuité aristocratique dont on ne peut avoir l’idée nulle part ailleurs qu’en France; un mélange de frivolité dans les manières et de pédanterie dans les opinions; et le tout réuni au plus complet dédain pour les lumières et pour l’esprit” (*Considérations* 144). She pinpointed this frivolity’s source in the state: “Les Français sont frivoles, parce qu’ils ont été condamnés à un genre de gouvernement qui ne pouvait se soutenir qu’en encourageant la frivolité” (512).
Staël, in *De l’Influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations* (1796), named the love of glory the passion most capable of moving the soul. Unlike ambition, which leads to ephemerous and selfish successes, the love of glory incites genius and virtue. The most elevated aspects of human nature inspire the love of glory. Ambition, in contrast, is founded on fixed goals for obtaining and maintaining power without any recourse to imagination. Glory is not the praise itself, but rather the influence that one’s talents exert on other people. According to Staël, the person who loves glory creates a treaty with humanity swearing to act for the happiness of others, in a sense to act with *charis*. The love of glory is not a desire to be recognized for surpassing what has already been done. It is a desire to inspire those who recognize the glory of talented individuals.1 In post-1789 France, glory became a means for creating “distinctions on bases other than wealth” and for constructing a collective memory (Morrissey 4). For readers in France and abroad, Corinne became a fictional model of artistic glory and of a woman who loves glory. The applause that she receives in the novel expresses the emotional and intellectual excitement of her admirers, the sparks inciting them to better themselves through emulation.

Unlike glory, vanity is a passion without value or lasting effects. Whereas a desire to improve humanity instigates actions leading to glory, vanity finds its origin in the opinions of onlookers. Vanity, Staël stressed, develops more often in women than in men because the same efforts by which men garner power and glory only give rise to

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1 Julia Kristeva reads Staël’s definition of the love of glory as a “narcissisme universel” (“Gloire” 10).
ephemeral acknowledgements when a woman demonstrates her faculties. Writing from first-hand experience, Staël, also known as “la trop célèbre,” presented the status of the celebrity as antagonistic to women’s dependency on men. *Corinne* plays out Staël’s lament of the incompatibility between glory and what society deems a woman’s natural destiny.¹ Talented, generous, and enthusiastic, Corinne represents Staël’s ideal woman creator. Corinne’s sensual grace and love of glory, however, conflict with patriarchal understandings of feminine grace as ephemeral, disembodied, and mute.

In Corinne’s eagerness to dance, despite Oswald’s disapproval, she enthusiastically transgresses gendered expectations. Proud of her talent and thirsty for glory, she shocks the Count d’Erfeuil, who is accustomed to women feigning modesty before agreeing to show off for others (in line with Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s concept of modesty as a social invention in *Lettre à d’Alembert*). Unlike Malvina, Delphine, and Valérie, Corinne jumps at the opportunity to dance demonstrating an enthusiastic consent:

> Elle accepta sans se faire prier, ce qui étonna assez le comte d’Erfeuil, accoutumé qu’il était aux refus par lesquelles il est d’usage de faire précéder le consentement.

> Mais en Italie, on ne connaît pas ce genre de grâces, et chacun croit tout

¹ “Quand elles aspirent à la célébrité, leurs efforts, comme leurs succès, éloignent le sentiment qui, sous des noms différents, doit toujours faire le destin de leur vie. Une femme ne peut exister par elle; la gloire même ne lui servirait pas d’un appui suffisant, et l’insurmontable faiblesse de sa nature et de sa situation, dans l’ordre social, l’a placée dans une dépendance de tous les jours dont un génie immortel ne pourrait encore la sauver” (*De l’Influence* 189). *De la littérature* also explains this phenomenon: “S’il existait une femme séduite par la célébrité de l’esprit, et qui voulût chercher à l’obtenir, combien il serait aisé de l’en détourner s’il en était temps encore! On lui montrerait à quelle affreuse destinée elle serait prête à se condamner. […] La gloire même peut être reprochée à une femme, parce qu’il y a contraste entre la gloire et sa destinée naturelle” (338-39).
simplement plaire davantage à la société, en s’empressant de faire ce qu’elle désire. Corinne aurait inventé cette manière naturelle, si déjà elle n’avait pas été en usage. (129)

Alluding to Italian women’s markedly freer situation than that of French and English women, Staël characterizes Corinne’s enthusiasm as acceptable in Italy. Throughout the eighteenth-century, which the Venetian playwright Pietro Chiari baptized il secolo delle donne (the century of women), women artists and writers gained prominence in several Italian regions, particularly Bologna, Milan, Venice, and Genoa. Italy “produced more learned women than any part of Europe,” wrote Irish novelist Sydney Morgan in 1821 (292). In Corinne, the denizens of Rome celebrate the heroine by inscribing her name in a pantheon of exceptional beings. With fewer social constraints, Italian women developed their intellectual and artistic talents to achieve glory.

Most often, balls served as a site for women to display their beauty and talents without regard for their effect on others beyond receiving social approbation or being considered superior to their rivals. A woman at a ball serves as Staël’s prime example of vanity. Yet, the woman at the ball derives little pleasure from this task as she exerts great effort to appear more pleasing than the other women.¹ Corinne’s tarantella incites joy and action as the dancer and the audience bathe in a shared enthusiasm. Spectacle, as Staël demonstrated in her discussion of Greek tragedies in De la littérature, has the power to

¹ “Regardez une femme au milieu d’un bal, désirant d’être trouvée la plus jolie, et craignant de n’y pas réussir. Le plaisir au nom duquel on se rassemble est nul pour elle; elle ne peut en jouir dans aucun moment; car il n’en est point qui ne soit absorbé, et par sa pensée dominante, et par les efforts qu’elle fait pour la cacher. […] c’est au superflu de ses efforts enfin qu’on aperçoit son travail” (De l’influence 192).
create a collective enthusiasm as it acts on the spectators by elevating their feelings and ideas. Corinne does not hesitate to dance because she wishes to share moral beauty with others, not to feed her vanity with the audience’s approval of her performance.

**Corinne’s Tarantella: Mania, Melancholy, and Sovereignty**

In the novel, the tarantella dance, embedded in a romanticized mythology, simultaneously attests to Corinne’s emotional swings from sadness to euphoria and the ardent character of her motherland. It is transgressive for its displays of unrestrained emotions and glorification of feminine authority. Dancing, she is an artist whose gesticulations cannot always be translated into legible language. At the same time, the tarantella estheticizes her boundless enthusiasm for glory, art, and humanity. Unable to interpret this enthusiasm, Oswald understands it as excessive and against the alleged laws of nature minimalizing women’s bodily freedom.

Though grace tends to imply composure and calmness, grace can also be born out of frenetic movement eliminating boundaries between authentic emotions. Historically associated with melancholy and mania, the tarantella reflects Corinne’s ability to shift quickly from one passion to another. In Book Three, the narrator describes the heroine as shifting in a single instance “de la mélancolie à la gaieté” (C 50). When she later improvises at the Cap Misène, she expresses both her English tendency toward melancholy and her Italian creativity, “les sentiments mélancoliques exprimés avec l’imagination italienne” (340). This combination of melancholy and joy approaches what Schiller defines as sublime, two contradictory perceptions demonstrating “moral independence” (*Naïve* 198). Throughout the novel, Corinne’s enthusiasm emerges as
happiness, yet, at the same time, she harbors the sadness of her orphanhood and expulsion from her father’s country. Neurotically reenacting the lost object of her father’s love, her sensibility possesses remarkable affinities to Freud’s theory of mania as the counterpart to melancholy.\(^1\) Oscillating between extreme happiness and fatal sorrow, the heroine appears “stranded between a fantastic megalomania and its opposite, nothingness” (Gutwirth 203). At the end of novel, her grief inhibits her talent because, as the narrator concludes, “le bonheur est nécessaire à tout” and even the greatest sadness is futile (C 473). Manic joy may be dangerous, but melancholy is fatal. Like a victim of tarantism, Corinne zealously dances to suppress the sorrow tied to her fatherland.

A symbol of Italian history, the tarantella accentuates Corinne’s timeless genius allowing her to glean aspects of different eras and systems of thought.\(^2\) By frequently comparing Corinne to Sibyl and Sappho, Staël associates her heroine with antiquity. Corinne’s strong attachment to Catholicism becomes evident when she retreats during the Holy Week and, repudiating Oswald’s notion of religion based on reason, advocates for religious enthusiasm offering believers the capacity to feel compassion. In contrast to Oswald’s austere Protestant values, the tarantella, like Corinne, represents a mixture of pagan and ostentatious Catholic practices. Oswald’s deprecation of the tarantella in a way parrots St. Augustine’s scorn of dancing Roman pagans. The association between

\(^1\) See Margaret Cohen’s chapter “Melancholia, Mania, and the Reproduction of the Dead Father” in *The Novel’s Seductions: Staël’s Corinne in Critical Inquiry*.

\(^2\) Constructed on a multitude of traditions and myths, the tarantella dance develops into a sensuous and kinetic experience of Italy’s diverse cultural present and past. Nanette Le Coat, in her essay “Places of Memory: History Writing in Staël’s *Corinne*,” convincingly shows how the novel presents history as a “vital, sensuous link with the past” (148). Within this paradigm, the tarantella is the ultimate demonstration of an embodied memory of Italian culture.
dancing and paganism remained prevalent in the early nineteenth century. In *Le Génie du christianisme* (1802), Chateaubriand denounced dancing as blasphemous: “Si l’Église en a seulement banni les danses, c’est qu’elle sait combien de passions se cachent sous ce plaisir en apparence innocent” (2:72). Staël, a Protestant who later took interest in Krüdener’s mystical teaching, demonstrates that a certain beauty exists in different religious traditions while also exposing the impossibility of conjugal love between Protestants and Catholics.

Rarely referring to Corinne’s partner, the dance scene centers on the relationship between her and the crowd. Oswald’s rival is not another man but the party guests admiring Corinne’s talents. Before beginning the tarantella, she performs a large reverence to her audience. Whereas Karyna Szmurlo reads Corinne’s “salut plein de grâce à l’assemblée” as an act meant to seduce the audience with the hope of being seen and accepted, I understand Corinne’s reverence as an invitation to witness the possibilities of dance (C 130). Although the performance enthralls its observers, nowhere does Staël indicate that Corinne desires to increase her celebrity. Rather, the heroine performs as if she were in what Jacques Rancière calls “un théâtre sans spectateurs” where the observers learn and become active participants instead of passively observing seductive images (*Le spectateur* 10). Motivated by enthusiasm, Corrine seeks to move her spectators to act. Her reverence and choreography represent her enthusiasm for art, glory, and human progress rather than a story of heterosexual love.

The tarantella can be read as a remonstration given tarantism’s historical situation as a form of protest affording women and socially disadvantaged men a position of active
agency in their community. By defying Oswald’s wish to hide from admiring audiences, Corinne uses the tarantella to protest his attempts to quell her glory. Her dancing allows her to outshine her cavalier and appear as a sovereign artist without any need for protection. Her dominance in the dance creates a striking tension with Oswald’s repeated pleas to act as her defender. Antipodal to characterizations of feeble women, her dignity underscores her independent nature.

Even when she drops to a position of resignation, her enthusiasm and self-respect prevent her from losing her glory. Her kneeling position creates a form of grace in line with twentieth-century philosopher Simone Weil’s concept of grace as “la loi du mouvement descendant” proposing that moral weight pushes individuals to fall toward a higher place (10). Corinne falls upward because grace is an ascensional abandon expressed through the pleasure of effort.1

1 Michel Guérin compares grace and ennui as opposite forms of abandon. For him, ennui is a matter of creating emptiness, whereas grace is an ascensional abandon characterized by the “plaisir d’une dépense de soi” (Guérin 78).
The tarantella hints at the possibility of a non-dialectical relationship between the sexes in which positions of supremacy are not predetermined. The exchange of the leading, upright position between Corinne and the prince inverts the development of her relationship with Oswald. In the plot, although Corinne first circles “victoriously about the smitten Oswald, entreating and rebellious,” in the end, he rises in triumph and she falls into obscurity (Balayé, “Plotting with Music” 74-5). Challenging socialized expectations of dominance patterns, the dance traces a different model of male-female interactions, one in which the woman dominates even when lowering herself before the man. When Corinne later kneels before Oswald as the inhabitants of Ancona honor him for having rescued citizens from a massive fire, Oswald becomes angry with her. It is at this moment that Corinne makes the fatal mistake of submitting herself to Oswald, whom she tells, “Les hommages extérieurs sont dirigés vers nous; mais dans la vérité, dans la nature, c’est la femme qui révère profondément celui qu’elle a choisi pour son défenseur” (C 390).1 Abdicating her intellectually and artistically superior position, Corinne commits what twentieth-century philosopher Luce Irigaray calls women’s sin of leaving themselves by abandoning their desires, beliefs, and maternal genealogy in order to love others. In the dance, however, Corinne cherishes these fundamental elements of her personhood.

1 The narrator accentuates Corinne’s error in abandoning her enthusiasm and freedom for a man who represses her talents: “Corinne avait tort, pour son bonheur, de s’attacher à un homme qui devait contrarier son existence naturelle, et réprimer plutôt qu’exciter ses talents” (404).
Suggesting subservience, the prince’s role in the dance illustrates the Italian masculinity excoriated by Oswald. In a letter written to Corinne, after the ball, Oswald claims that she will never find happiness or dignity if she marries an Italian because her masculine compatriots possess “les défauts des femmes,” namely meekness and obedience (C 138). For Oswald, Italian women’s superiority over men reverses a sacred order in which men protect women and love them for their weakness that confirms masculine strength: “Il faut, pour que la nature et l’ordre social se montrent dans toute leur beauté, que l’homme soit protecteur et la femme protégée” (139). In the tarantella and eighteenth-century Italian society, women were not women in the Freudian sense that being a woman signifies being the negative of man.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Italians, Englishwomen, and Frenchwomen were without “political unity” and remained excluded from public affairs (Casillo 78). Politicizing male-female relationships, Oswald attributes Italian men’s effeminacy to their lack of military careers and political involvement. According to Oswald’s logic, they lack a patriarchy in the same ways that Englishwomen—banned from political, economic, and intellectual life—inhabit a system in which their voices and actions carry no sway. From a Northern European perspective, Italian effeminacy strips men of their positions as Western males: “les femmes sont le sultan et les hommes le sérail” (C 139). Comparing Italian women to Sultans, this passage brings to mind the 38th letter of Montesquieu’s Lettres Persanes (1721), in which Rica discusses the advantages and disadvantages of limiting women’s freedom in addition to questioning if nature dictates women’s submission to men. Although Staël, like Montesquieu, did not articulate an
explicit notion of desired male-female relationships, *Corinne* shows how men’s ascendency over women prevents the latter from reaching their fullest intellectual, moral, and artistic potential.

Oswald’s critique resonates with a widespread prejudice against *cicisbeismo*, the Italian practice of a *cavaliere servante* openly keeping company with a noblewoman. According to Joseph-Jérôme de Lalande’s 1790 *Voyage en Italie*, to which Staël regularly referred while writing *Corinne*, the cicisbeo sits with his lady, attends to her toilette, takes her to mass, and entertains her from dawn to dusk. Unlike secret lovers, the lady and her cavaliere servante (typically paid for his companionship) maintain a public relationship. Developed at the end of the seventeenth century, cicisbeismo offered travelers a different vision of gendered social roles. Staël’s friend Jean Charles de Sismondi (1773-1842) blamed this practice for dismantling patriarchal control and comfort: “aucun mari ne regarde plus sa femme comme une compagne fidèle, associée à toute son existence […] aucun père n’osa s’assurer que les enfants qui portaient son nom étaient à lui” (238). For Sismondi, this loss of “bien patrimonial” emerged from political, social, and economic changes immobilizing individual ambition and encouraging indolence (242).¹ Staël’s travel notebooks reveal her disapproval of cicisbeismo; the novel, however, suggests that it is propitious to women’s celebrity and glory yet antagonistic to romantic love.

¹ In *Account of the Manners and customs of Italy* (1769), Joseph Baretti asked how Italians can be of the same species as other Europeans given their customs related to marriage.
In *Corinne*, sexual attraction mainly exists outside of marriage in Corinne’s former romantic relationships and Oswald’s previous affair with a Frenchwoman whom he wrongly believed to have impregnated. He and Lucile have a child after their marriage, yet Oswald has already left for the West Indies with his military regiment when Lucile discovers that she is pregnant. Passion and drama surround extramarital sexuality whereas conjugal sexuality is reduced to stolid procreation. After Oswald attends a party in his honor at Corinne’s Roman home, her captivating charms bring him to question if he has become victim to a femme fatale. He forgets his former opinions on “l’obscurité qui convenait aux femmes” and wonders if it is possible to be loved by such a phenomenal woman (C 51). The narrator compares Corinne to Tasso’s Armida, who uses her seductive powers to divert crusaders, and Sappho, the great lyric poet of Lesbos, situating Corinne in a lineage of successful women whose sexuality evades patriarchal laws. By establishing ascendancy over her male dance partner, Corinne further inscribes herself in a sexual order antipodal to Oswald’s notion of female submission.
Figure 18 Filippo Falcìatore, *Tarantella a Mergellina*, 1750. (Wikimedia Commons) In Falcìatore’s painting, the woman remains upright as the man bows before her hinting at her dominant position in the dance.

**Voluptuous but Modest Bayadères**

The mysterious origins of the tarantella coupled with comparisons between Corinne and women from distant lands or the distant past dissociate the heroine from familiar contexts to accentuate her exceptionality. Like Delphine’s polonaise, Corinne’s tarantella produces an indescribable sight that the narrator, unable to find the right words to express the wide range of emotions and ideas evoked, identifies as belonging to a realm outside the dancer’s temporal and geographical context.

Elle se mit à danser, en frappant l’air de ce tambour de basque, et tous ses mouvements avaient une souplesse, une grâce, un mélange de pudeur et de volupté qui pouvait donner l’idée de la puissance que les bayadères exercent sur l’imagination des Indiens, quand elles sont pour ainsi dire poètes avec leur danse, quand elles expriment tant de sentiments divers par les pas caractérisés et les tableaux enchanteurs qu’elles offrent aux regards. (C 130)
Staël proposes a concept of graceful movement that is simultaneously modest and sensual. Women’s grace, according to Montesquieu’s *Essai sur le goît*, resides in the combination of their modesty and transgressions of proper conduct: “Comme elles ont tout à défendre, elles ont tout à cacher; la moindre parole, le moindre geste, tout ce qui, sans choquer le premier devoir, se montre en elles, tout ce qui se met en liberté, devient une grâce” (57-58). Just as grace opposes static beauty, it resists assimilation to the simple execution of expectations. Grace, as Montesquieu and Staël conceived it, reveals the possibility of acting out, or creating something different, without dismantling the laws of decorum. Sensuality tempered by modesty creates a corporeal grace that neither denies nor reifies the body but instead liberates intrepid movements.

The opposing qualities of Christian _moderatio_ and pagan _voluptas_ signal the variety of sights and emotions escaping normalized moral and esthetic categories. From a Schillerian perspective, the tarantella appears equidistant from monotony and chaos. Its unified tableaux satisfy the need for unity demanded by reason, and the diverse passions expressed satisfy the multiplicity required by nature. Similarly, Montesquieu pinpointed the balance between variety, order, symmetry, contrasts, and surprises as the combination favoring visual pleasure. For him, dance pleases the observer through its grace, its representation of a variety of ideas about movements, and its blending into the music:

La danse nous plaît par la légèreté, par une certaine grâce, par la beauté et la variété des attitudes, par sa liaison avec la musique, la personne qui danse étant

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1 In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller advocated for art that “rests equidistant from uniformity [Einförmigkeit] and confusion [Verwirrung]” (34).
comme un instrument qui accompagne; mais surtout elle plaît par une disposition de notre cerveau, qui est telle qu’elle ramène en secret l’idée de tous les mouvements à de certains mouvements, la plupart des attitudes à de certaines attitudes. (Essai 52)

Obfuscating the aspect producing the observer’s pleasure, dancers never expose all their intentions nor all the capacity of their art. It is this very challenge that makes dance enjoyable to watch. Like a well-mannered woman who craftily bends the rules of decorum, the dancer never fully reveals the possibilities of her actions.

Dancing in public creates an ambiguous situation for women because dancing authorizes seduction and self-indulgence even when it requires demureness and compliance with rules.\(^1\) Staël showed how sensuality and modesty come together as a dancer enacts the possibilities of grace.\(^2\) If the dance combines both *pudeur* and *volupté*, it is because these two elements are inevitably codependent. In *De l’amour* (1822), Stendhal claimed that “pudeur” creates the imagination that makes love possible, because by silencing our desires we allow them to act without contemplation.\(^3\) Etienne Pivert de Senancour, in his philosophical novel *Obermann* (1804), anticipated Michel Foucault’s definition of pudor as the repression of discourse on sexuality: “La vraie pudeur doit seule contenir la volupté. La pudeur est une perception exquise, une partie de la

\[^1\] See Claire Roussier’s introduction to *La Construction de la féminité dans la danse.*

\[^2\] Jean Taffin, in his 1596 moral treaty, referred to dancers at balls as “esclaves de volupté” moved by “impudicité” to commit horrible sins (438).

\[^3\] “Quant à l’utilité de la pudeur, elle est la mère de l’amour; on ne saurait plus lui rien contester. Pour le mécanisme du sentiment rien n’est si simple; l’âme s’occupe à avoir honte, au lieu de s’occuper à désirer; on s’interdit les désirs, et les désirs conduisent aux actions” (Stendhal 66).
Obermann exalts the censorship of sexual desires as the origin of pudicity and grace, Corinne proposes a coexistence in which modesty comesling with visible expressions of desire. Instead of submitting her body to reason, Corinne instantiates both her corporeal and intellectual impulsion. Portraying Corinne as a sexual, moral, and intellectual being, Staël idealizes a creative woman “as a human being without converting her into an abstraction” nor stripping her of her femininity (Moi, “A Woman’s” 158). Sensuality tempered by, but not muted by, modesty gives birth to grace exciting the imagination.

Corinne’s voluptuous and modest grace reorients eighteenth-century concepts of grace and femininity. Modesty, as Jean Claude Bologne shows in his history of the term pudeur, has been associated with femininity since antiquity. The noun la pudeur entered the 1694 Dictionnaire de l’Académie to designate a movement away from anything potentially opposing honesty. Incorporating the notion of deference into the term, the 1798 edition of the dictionary adds that pudeur denotes “une certaine timidité, d'une certaine retenue qu'on remarque en quelques personnes, lorsqu'elles paraissent en public.”

Voltaire, in his critique of La Fontaine’s use of pudeur to mean honte in the fable “Les deux amis,” defined honte as a feeling and pudeur as what incites an action (Connaissances 330). For the Cartesian theologian François Poullain de La Barre, nature gave women modesty to provoke fear and curb them from actions provoking men’s scorn. A flagrant inconsistency in Rousseau’s work appears in his explanations of

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1 In Pierre de Changy’s 1542 translation of the Spanish humanist Juan-Luis Vivès’s 1523 book De institutione feminae Christianae, the term pudeur made its first appearance in the French language.
modesty. According to *Lettre à d’Alembert* (1776), modesty is a social invention set in place to maintain familial (meaning patriarchal) order; in *Émile*, however, the Genevan argued that modesty is a natural (but not innate) attribute that all children must learn. The “mélange de pudeur et de volupté” born out of Corinne’s movements shows that she simultaneously transgresses and adheres to the norms of feminine conduct (*C 302*). She acts with virtue and self-respect all while assuming her passionall being. Unlike Lucile replicating stable images of virginial and maternal femininity, Corinne creates grace through her audacious acts.

Expressions of voluptuousness through dance and reactions to watching dance reflect cultural values.¹ In general, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French and English travelers considered Italian dance more sexual than their own national dances. In Stendhal’s distinction between French and Italian ballets, the latter was more sensual but not necessarily licentious.² Corinne’s dance hints at Northern European perceptions of Southern Europeans as less civilized while also aligning artistic freedom with a certain degree of sexual freedom, such as that found in the dances of antiquity. For the painter Anne-Louis Girodet (1767-1824), the dances of Spain and Italy more closely resembled the dances of antiquity than French dances composed of “des pas difficiles qui n’expriment rien” (164-65). The ancients, according to Girodet, utilized “toutes les

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¹ Dance anthropologist Deidre Sklar explains that “the way people move provides a key to the way they think and feel,” and spectators’ “empathic kinesthetic perception” provides clues to a complex web of abstract and concrete elements of a culture (6).
passions” to create nuanced expressions through graceful movements (166). Passionate and unpretentious, Corinne’s dance expresses grace unaccompanied by the “pudeur craintive” inseparable from Northern interpretations of feminine grace (Girodet 176).

The cultural fluidity created by the narrator’s comparisons between Corinne and Cleopatra, Scheherazade, Semiramis, and a bayadère removes the national specificity of the dance.¹ In Castel-Forte’s speech at the coronation, he likens Corinne’s grace to that of the Egyptian queen, as if Corinne’s vivacity escaped European concepts of grace: “je lui crois quelque chose de cette grâce tant vantée, de ce charme oriental, que les anciens attribuaient à Cléopâtre” (C 30). When Corinne tries to divert Oswald from forming plans for their relationship by directing his attention toward other objects of interest, the narrator compares her to Scheherazade.² Later, Corinne is begged to portray Semiramis in a play. The narrator qualifies this Assyrian queen, whom Dante placed in the sphere of the lustful with Cleopatra, as “la coquette douée de talents; par l’enfer et le ciel, pour subjuger le monde” (C 406). The character of Semiramis, “élève dans un antre comme une Sauvage, habile comme une enchantresse, impérieuse comme une reine,” suits Corinne because her feminine grace melds with her courage and oscillating temperaments

¹ The connection between the tarantella and bacchanalia further sexualizes and Orientalizes the dance. Due to Euripides’s The Bacchae, apparently licentious cultural practices considered to have Bacchante origins were associated with Bacchus’s Asian origins and the excesses of the Orient. In the collection of essays Italie pittoresque, written over two decades after the publication of Corinne, Charles Didier shined light on the tarantella’s poignantly expressive character, referring to it as “une danse volcanique comme les émotions qu’elle exprime” (48). According to him, the choreography begins with modest movements before recreating the voluptuous dances of Bacchanalias.

² “…cette sultane des contes arables, qui cherchait à captiver par mille récits divers, l’intérêt de celui qu’elle aimait, afin d’éloigner la décision de son sort, jusqu’au moment où les charmes de son esprit remportèrent la victoire” (C 113).
Cleopatra, Scheherazade, and Semarimis charm and outsmart men using their talents, grace, willfulness, courage, and desire for freedom. Likening the Italian-English woman to Oriental women, Staël drew on Western representations of non-Europeans to propose a notion of femininity free from the institutional and cultural norms fettering European women.

Orientalist comparisons afforded the novelist an unknown space to imagine a character passionate about dancing. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European thought, populations in southern climates were more inclined to dance given their lack of gravity and penchant for pleasure. Blasis claimed that the muse Terpsichore, whose name derives from the Greek terms *terpein* (to delight) and *khoros* (dance, chorus), served mainly the inhabitants of hot climates, where pleasure reigned. In contrast, denizens of Northern countries, forced to combat the rigors of the cold, remain wholly ignorant of “the delicate sentiments that voluptuousness imparts” (Blasis, *The Code* 7). The tarantella epitomizes a hedonistic nature antipodal to Oswald and Lucile’s serious English contradances.

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1 “Elle réunit la vivacité naturelle à la grâce méditée avec art, le courage guerrier à la frivolité d’une femme, et l’ambition à l’étourderie” (406).
2 Staël, in *De la littérature*, associated the Orient with an insouciance antipodal to Northern people’s melancholic tendencies. She compared Eastern populations’ melancholy to that of “des hommes heureux par toutes les jouissances de la nature,” only regretting life’s brevity (203). In the wake of Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Condillac’s differentiations of Northern and Southern cultures, Staël attributed differences in temperament and taste to differences in climate. This contrast between Northern and Southern temperaments explains the English-Italian character’s drastic shifts from the acme of joy to the hollows of gloom.
3 Blasis wrote, “there is a passion; warmed by an incessant heat, the glowing constitution of the native of the South contains the seed of every pleasure; each moment of his rapid existence seems to him made only for enjoyment” (*The Code* 7).
Staël’s comparison between the heroine and a bayadère joined numerous literary, pictorial, theatrical, and balletic representations of the famous temple dancers.  

Enlightenment thinkers and Romantics developed a cult around Indian culture, most evident in Carl Schlegel’s 1808 essay *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians (Über die Sprache und die Weisheit der Indier)*. European accounts of bayadères, in Sanskrit called *devadasis*, date back to Marco Polo’s late-thirteenth-century expedition to India.

In 1768, an Indian dancer known as Bebaïourn performed for the court of Louis XV. Pierre Sonnerat, author of *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (1782), translated the widely used Portuguese term *balliadera* into French, initiating the noun *bayadère*. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, bayadères populated literary works such as Goethe’s poem *Der Gotte und die Bajadere* (1797) in addition to operas and ballets like Charles-Simon Catel’s *Les Bayadères* (1810), Daniel Auber’s *Le Dieu et la bayadère* (1830), and Gaetano Gioja’s *I Riti indiani* (1814).

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1. *Bayadères or devadasis* disappeared in India at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of the anti-nautch, meaning anti-dance, reform begun in 1892. In the 1930s, Rukmini Devi and others sought to celebrate Indian heritage and contest colonialist accusations of stagnation by reinventing and revaluing the outlawed dances with the creation of bharata natyam.

2. A 1526 document studying the Portuguese conquest of Goa, *Foral de usos costumes dos Gancarres e Lavadores de esta Ilha de Goa*, identifies women performing in villages and then in the home of the wealthiest man of the village as *balliaderas*. In 1590, Gasparo Balbi, an Italian merchant, termed the dancers *puttane de pagoda*, meaning temple whores.

3. According to the legend, a naval captain captured three temple dancers in India yet only one survived the long journey to France, the six-year-old Bebaïourn. The Countess du Barry welcomed the young dancer on her arrival in France, and Louise de France later became her protector. Bebaïourn joined a convent, which she left during the Revolution. When a professional Indian dance troupe performed at the Parisian Théâtre des Variétés in 1838, retrospective accounts of the first temple dancer in Paris conjectured that Bebaïourn’s performance was both strange and amazing: “Déjà, en 1768, une dévadies [sic], avait émerveillé, sinon toute la ville, du moins toute la cour, et produit, par son costume bizarre, par ses gestes étranges et par sa légèreté de gazelle, la profonde et singulière sensation que chacun s’empressa d’aller recevoir” (Berthoud 1).
In the European imaginary, Bayadères were slaves who possessed a thirst for freedom. Goethe’s poem Der Gotte und die Bajadere, which Staël translated in 1800, “created an image of the bayadères as sophisticated, honest and faithful women” (Bor 69). The poem relates a story about the god Brama masquerading as a mortal man to judge humans while experiencing the passions of a human soul. Traveling through India, he encounters a bayadère who performs for him. Goethe’s original poem gives little

1 Staël praised this poem for its description of the bayadère’s dance: “Il y a tant de poésie, une couleur si orientale dans la peinture des danses de cette bayadère, des parfums et des fleurs dont elle s’entoure, qu’on ne peut juger d’après nos mœurs un tableau qui leur est tout à fait étrange” (De l’Allemagne 300).
attention to the dance steps, whereas Staël’s translation underscores the Bayadère’s active role in creating a seductive performance:

Elle prend sa cymbale et s’apprête à la danse,
Elle charme les yeux par mille pas divers:
Elle arrondit ses bras, se courbe, se balance,
Et s’entoure de fleurs qui parfument les airs. (ll. 25-28)

Sie rührt sich die Cymbeln zum Tanze zu schlagen,
Sie weiß sich so lieblich im Kreise zu tragen,
Sie neigt sich und biegt sich und reicht ihm den Strauß. (ll. 20-22)

In the French translation, the bayadère is not just a slave extending flowers to her observer but also an artist.1 Similarly, the bayadère in Amélie-Julie Candeille’s unsuccessful 1795 five-act comedy, La Bayadère, ou le Français à Surate, is “une artiste esclave, mais vertueuse” (“Théâtre” 232).2 Candeille proposed an image of a bayadère

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1 The poem’s narrative, in both the original and translation, creates a parallel between heterosexual love and believers’ devotion to gods. To prove himself as a master, the god commands the dancer to serve him. Descending to the position of a “humble esclave” (“Und er fordert Sklavendienste; Immer heittrir wird sie nur”), she obeys without reticence as a sign of love (ll.34-35). When the god disguised as a young man dies, the Bayadère, because of her low social status, is not recognized as his legitimate spouse. In desperation, she throws herself into the flames immolating her lover who, as a god, receives her and takes her to heaven. This suicide allows her to cast off the shame of her status and become virtuous. In both the original and the translation, the bayadère, a woman considered unmarriable because of her profession, arrives at virtue through love and devotion. For Kate Marsh, Goethe’s rescued bayadère evokes the repentant figure of Mary Magdalene. The narrative of a traveling godlike man happening upon a beautiful woman, with whom he becomes enamored but, because of his origin, cannot live with her forever, structures both the poem and Corinne. Given Oswald’s unrealistically majestic heroic deeds saving a population from a fire and then saving a drowning man in a stormy sea, I maintain that Staël, at times, paints him as godlike.

2 In the play, a bayadère is ordered to marry a Frenchman, whom the jealous governor of Surate arrests and imprisons. Using a disguise, she takes her lover’s place allowing him to escape his confinement, dethrone the governor, save her as she is paraded toward her execution, and then marry her. No copy of this play

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closer to a character like Corinne than a naïve seductress. As one journalist observed, Candeille “n’a pas fait de sa Bayadère une courtisane; qu’elle s’est proposée en la mettant sur le théâtre, de nous présenter la vertu embolie par les talents et les grâces” (L’esprit des journaux 235). The article dedicated to Candeille in J.-M. Quérard’s 1838 La France littéraire describes the play’s heroine as “belle, spirituelle, brillante de grâce et de talents, bonne, sensible, et qui plus est, malgré son état de danseuse, fière, chaste et vertueuse” (179). The spiritual and sensual bayadère, mythologized in travel literature, served as a model of voluptuous grace.

Bayadères fascinated tourists with their hypnotizing movements that, when compared to European dances with little manipulation of the hips and torso, appeared highly sexual. In both fictional and factual accounts of India, representations of bayadères contributed to the “received idea of les grandes Indes as a site of sexual availability” (Marsh 43). Yet, these accounts repeatedly nuance the dancers’ perceived provocativeness with allusions to their chastity as travelers compared them to courtesans and actresses in their homelands.\(^1\) Comparing the temple dancers to European courtesans, historian Guillaume-Thomas Raynal (1713-1796) attributed the former’s success, both in India and as imitated on European stages, to their sexuality marked by a certain modesty.\(^2\)

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1 In 1670, the doctor François Bernier (the first French writer to use race to describe taxonomic divisions of humankind) equated the temple dancers to prostituted women striking prurient poses before recounting their celebrated dignity when refusing the advances and presents of various men.

2 “Elles n’y prétendent pas par cette hardiesse décidée qui caractérise nos courtisanes. Leurs manières ont une douceur engageante, une aménité qui captive; leurs caresses sont assez tendres, assez bien ménagées pour prévenir, pour éloigner du moins la satiété. On résiste difficilement à leur séduction. […] La modestie,
Sonnerat, in his 1782 travelogue, sketched their career path as one similar to that of French actresses from humble homes, whose careers are seemingly constructed and directed by men. For Sonnerat, the dancers are merely marionnettes exchanged between men and manipulated to dance, yet the discreet movements of the dancers’ eyes bewitch him. Descriptions of seductive women on display color accounts of bayadères throughout the nineteenth century. Over time, bayadères came to represent a generalized image of Oriental women as well as an Ideal inspiring art and literature.

Nebulous generalizations about different cultures allowed Staël to idealize the grace of women living under different codes of conduct. According to Staël, Russian and Indian cultures resemble each other because, in these cultures, speech carries less weight than gestures. In her journal relating the events of her journey through Russia, she described a dance performed in Kiev evoking sensuality and imagination without recourse to virtuosity: “Danse voluptueuse. Pas de grands sauts, mais des jouissances d’imagination” (Carnets 283). In Moscow, peasants dancing with an exotic zest enraptured her:

ou plutôt la réserve naturelle à de superbes esclaves séquestrées de la société des hommes, lutte en vain, et ne tient point contre les prestige de ces courtisanes exercées” (Raynal 32).

1 “Le mouvement de leurs yeux, qu’elles ferment à moitié […] annonce la plus grande volupté” (Sonnerat 41).

2 Théophile Gautier, writing about the troupe of Bayadères from India who performed in Paris in 1838, exclaimed, “Le seul mot de bayadère éveille dans les cerveaux les plus prosaïques et les plus bourgeois une idée de soleil, de parfum et de beauté” (Écrits sur la danse 64). In the Dictionnaire des idées reçus, Gustave Flaubert defined all Oriental women as bayadères: “Toutes les femmes de l’Orient sont des bayadères. Ce mot entraîne l’imagination fort loin” (20).

3 In Dix années d’exil, Staël described a Russian prince who offered ladies presents instead of compliments at a ball and qualified this as an Eastern practice, “comme cela se passe dans l’Inde et dans ces contrées silencieuses de l’Orient, où la parole a moins de puissance que chez nous” (182).
Je ne connais rien de plus gracieux que ces danses du pays, qui ont toute l’originalité que la nature donne aux beaux-arts; une certaine volupté modeste s’y fait remarquer; les bayadères de l’Inde doivent avoir quelque chose d’analogique à ce mélange d’indolence et de vivacité, charme de la danse russe. (Carnets 283, my emphasis)

The comparison to bayadères marks the dance as sexual yet suitable for a public performance. Staël’s fascination with the Oriental nature of Russian and Italian dances mirrors an enthusiasm for alterity in French dance performances evident in ballets from the sixteenth century onward. Dance captivates by its strangeness in comparison to quotidian movements. By equating this incongruity to national difference, writers and choreographers tried to name the abstract charm of dance. As a result, the je ne sais quoi of grace became entangled in attempts to name cultural differences.

Emma Hamilton and Corinne: Dancing Statues

References to antiquity in dance scenes bespeak a desire to resuscitate classical ideals of grace. Staël combines the exotic excitement of the tarantella with attitudes and tableaux imitating the performances of Emma Hamilton, who may have served as one of the several models for Corinne.¹ Although most of Emma’s attitudes were based on images of antiquity, she also danced the tarantella for her renown guests. According to her biographer Kate Williams, women dancing an energetic tarantella in Puglia inspired Emma to incorporate it into her salon performances. Gilbert Elliot, a British diplomat

¹ For Geneviève Gennari, Emma was the most important model for Corinne: “modèle parfait de la femme du Nord modelée par la facilité du Sud, pourvue de toutes les grâces et de tous les dons” (146).
sojournning in Naples, described her attitudes as superior to “the most graceful statues or pictures”; her performance of the tarantella, however, was only “beautiful to a degree” (406). The British writer Nathaniel William Wraxall saw Sir William and Emma dance a sprightly tarantella, which he explained as “a copy of the Bacchant amusements of antiquity” demanding “animal strength and spirits” (99). Only Emma seemed to support the dance’s strenuous nature. After her husband, the Duke of Noi, and a maid danced with Emma until exhaustion overtook them, “another female attendant a Copt, perfectly black” from Egypt, finished the dance with Emma (99). Although the veracity of Wraxall’s anecdote is uncertain, it suggests that, for a Northern observer, only an extraordinary or non-European dancer can perform this vivacious dance.

*Corinne* offered readers a language for understanding the tarantella. Struggling to identify “any adequate idea of this dance,” Wraxall resorted to Staël’s description of the tarantella (99). He concluded that Corinne “could not be more familiar with the attitudes of the antique statues, than was lady Hamilton; nor more capable of transporting the spectators to Herculaneum, by her accurate and picturesque imitation of the models” (99). For Wraxall, Emma’s tarantella should only be performed “before a select company; as the screams, attitudes, starts, and embraces, with which it was intermingled, gave it a peculiar character” (99-100). This dance was reserved for women liberated from restrictive laws of propriety.

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1 Elliot dissociated her performance from tarantism and described it as a dance from Taranto, a coastal city in Apulia: “It is not what the spider makes people dance without a master, but the dance of Tarentum, and the most lively thing possible” (406).
Emma conceived of a way to contemplate art through imitation and embodiment. Staël’s comparison between Corinna and the dancers of Herculaneum may also be a nod to the British model. Vigée-Lebrun’s painting *Emma Hamilton as a Bacchante* (1790) draws on poses visible in the *Herculaneum Dancers*, stored in Naples since 1749 (Figures 20 and 21). These figures became a symbol of feminine grace in European literature, painting, and decorative arts throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.¹ By reproducing images of grace in corporeal movement, Corinna, like Emma, becomes an artist. Although Corinna’s “tableaux enchanteurs” recall Emma’s attitudes, at the end of the sentence describing the tableaux, Staël included a footnote crediting her friend Juliette Récamier as the inspiration for this dance:

C’est la danse de madame Récamier qui m’a donné l’idée de celle que j’ai essayé de peindre. Cette femme si célèbre par sa grâce et sa beauté offre l’exemple, au milieu de ses revers, d’une résignation si touchante et d’un oubli si total de ses intérêts personnels, que ses qualités morales semblent à tous les yeux aussi remarquables que ses agréments. (C 532-33)

Given that Récamier was praised as an excellent dancer, it is not unreasonable to believe that her dances inspired Staël. Moreover, this footnote reveals Staël’s understanding of grace as an expression of moral goodness and generosity serving as a model for others.

¹ The painting is from Pompeii, not Herculaneum, and depicts either dancing or “floating in the air” (Ramage 167). Praise of this painting appears in Ann Radcliffe’s 1797 novel *The Italian*. When the hero sees a half-finished drawing of a dancing nymph, he notes that it is a copy from Herculaneum in which the dancer’s “light steps appeared almost to move, and the whole figure displayed the airy lightness of exquisite grace” (24). Similarly, in Gérard de Nerval’s *Sylvie* (1853), the narrator compares an actress’s beauty to that of the frescos of Herculaneum.
Reminiscent of antiquity and alluding to contemporary salon performances, Corinne’s tarantella spawns an atemporal experience. Her dance attests not only to her grace and skill but also to her knowledge of antiquity and artistic principles. Just as her vast theoretical and historical knowledge animates her discourse as she leads Oswald through Rome, her poses, like Hamilton’s attitudes, bring art to life as she embodies the ideas expressed in ancient masterpieces:

Corinne connaissait si bien toutes les attitudes que représentent les peintres et les sculpteurs antiques, que, par un léger mouvement de ses bras, en plaçant son
tambour de basque tantôt au-dessus de sa tête, tantôt en avant avec une de ses mains, tandis que l’autre parcourait les grelots avec une incroyable dextérité, elle rappelait les danseuses d’Herculaneum, et faisait naître successivement une foule d’idées nouvelles pour le dessin et la peinture. (130, my emphasis)

Kélina Gotman reads this passage as proof of Corinne’s capacity to use her “intellectual and carnal knowledge of antiquity and the East” to imitate past forms of erotic dance (184). However, the erotic is secondary to the esthetic proposition. The heroine’s creative reformulation of images from Antiquity gesture toward new ways of thinking about art. Corinne’s exactitude in performing successive poses reproduces the dignity evident in Greek figures, which Johann Winckelmann praised for their bodily tranquility revealing “the true character of the soul” (On Art 43). Corinne’s evocation of the Herculaneum dancers attests not so much to her imitative talents but rather to her skill as an artist painting a scene with her expressive movements, transforming ruins into embodied ideas.¹

Through this metamorphosis, the performance constitutes an attempt to use the beauty of the past to create beauty for the present. Since antiquity, dance and pantomime have functioned within a scheme of perfectibility. As Lycinus exclaimed in Lucian of Samosata’s dialogue De Saltatione, this living art form has an educative purpose, “instructing, informing, perfecting the intelligence of the beholder; training his eyes to

¹ The post-1789 veneration of ancient Rome was greatly influenced by excavations of the ruins in Herculaneum and Pompeii. The Romantics, intent on rehabilitating the past, used references to antiquity throughout the nineteenth century.
lovely sights, filling his ears with noble sounds, revealing a beauty in which body and soul alike have their share” (241). Through its beauty and grace, pantomime (closely related to dance and attitudes) illustrates beauty’s alliance with goodness as it trains the eye to “wakefulness” (Lucian 263). The sophist Libanius posited that dancers are superior to sculptors because, if observing sculptures of gods “makes people more sound of mind through the medium of sight, the pantomime dancer makes it possible for you to look at all the gods on stage, for he does not imitate them by means of stone but represents them by and in himself” (qtd. in Lada-Richards 7). Evoking images of art, dancers perform a sort of somatic ekphrasis. They are simultaneously the artistic creation and creator, perfecting themselves as they present a work to inspire reflection.

Contesting the myth of Zeuxis, Staël chose one woman as the artist’s ideal model who, instead of providing an example of perfect beauty, offers novel ideas. In texts like E.T.A. Hoffmann’s The Sandman and much later L’Ève future (1886) by Auguste de Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, the beauty of living women compete with fabricated representations of women. Schiller recommended contemplating living feminine beauty

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1 As Nathalie Lecomte indicates, scholars now question if Lucian of Samosata wrote this text.
2 See Ismene Lada-Richards’s “Callistratus to Emma Hamilton and Andrew Darcrow.”
3 According Marcus Tullius Cicero’s On Invention, Zeuxis was capable of painting an ideal woman that surpassed the beauty of any real woman. When the men of Crotona commissioned him for a painting to place in the temple of Juno, Zeuxis decided to paint Helen of Troy “in order that one of his mute representations might contain the preeminent beauty of the female form” (308). Since “all the component parts of perfect beauty” cannot exist in one person, “because nature has made nothing of any class absolutely perfect in every part,” Zeuxis painted the beautiful body parts of five different models and ignored their imperfect traits (308). This myth is represented in paintings such as François-André Vincent’s Zeuxis choisissant pour modèles les plus belles filles de Corotone (1789) and Nicolas André Monsiaux’s Zeuxis choisissant des modèles (1797).
4 Swinburne, in his 1783 travelogue, compared dancing Neapolitan girls to the Herculaneum paintings and declared the two-dimensional dancers to be more graceful than the living girls: “With greater elegance in
as if it were painted in order to experience pure esthetic pleasure. Corinne, in contrast, favors the living woman who inspires art. The dance scene bolsters Corinne’s argument against historical paintings and her advocacy for works of art that imagine life from the artist’s personal inspirations and feelings. Passionate dances, like emotionally stirring paintings, propose different ways of living and move their beholders to act.

As expounded in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dance and acting manuals, expressive movements aim to recreate the natural beauty of authentic human emotions. Staël distinguished Corinne’s tarantella from virtuosic French dances: “Ce n’était point la danse française, si remarquable par l’élégance et la difficulté des pas; c’était un talent qui tenait de beaucoup plus près à l’imagination et au sentiment” (C 131). French dance refers to the complicated footwork of la Belle Danse, which like seventeenth-century classicism sought to display order, clarity, reason, and restrain. Corinne’s dance, in contrast, evokes a muddle of emotions and ideas. Her tarantella demonstrates how graceful movements glean from existing works of art to nourish the future of art.

Corinne, the Creative Artist

Corinne’s greatest talent is, by far, her rhetorical and poetic finesse when improvising (so much so that certain nineteenth-century dictionaries attribute the noun

the position, and more airiness in the flow of the drapery, striking likeness of them may be found among the paintings of Herculaneum” (Swinburne 180).

1 “Living feminine beauty [lebende weibliche Schönheit] will certainly please us just as well as, even somewhat better than, what is equally beautiful but only painted [gemalte]; but insofar as it pleases us better than the latter, it pleases us no longer as absolute appearance, it pleases no longer the pure aesthetic feeling [reinen ästhetischen Gefühl]; even the living pleases this feeling only as appearance, even the actual only as idea; but certainly it requires a further, and much higher, degree of liberal culture to perceive in the living itself only pure appearance, than to dispense with life in the appearance” (The Aesthetic Education 128).
improvisation to the novel). Her dancing, like her singing, acting, and painting, expresses passions and engages with an audience. Improvisation, like dance, “privileges the experience shared between performer and audience here and now” (Esterhammer 4). When creating a form of communication between the artist and observers, these ephemeral arts heighten awareness of the everyday practice of sharing time and space, in effect acknowledging the inevitable situation forming the bonds of humanity.

Never described performing alone, Corinne gives her art to the audience as a shared moment of investigating sentimental possibilities. In interactive improvisational performances, “the improvisatrice’s subjectivity is shaped by, and dependent on, audience response” (Esterhammer 85). The unplanned performance of the tarantella “provides the novel’s ideal example of the ecstatic improvisation experience shared by performer and audience” as this non-linguistic medium exemplifies the embodiment of collective feeling (Esterhammer 86).

The novel breaks down hierarchical categories of art and turns our attention to what art instigates. Without boundaries between the arts, universal artistic projects directed toward human improvement can emerge. Staël placed the effects of the tarantella on a par with those of declamation, drawing, and music:

Corinne, en dansant, faisait passer dans l’âme des spectateurs ce qu’elle éprouvait, comme si elle avait improvisé, comme si elle avait joué de la lyre ou dessiné quelques figures; tout était langage pour elle: les musiciens, en la regardant, s’animèrent à mieux faire sentir le génie de leur art. (C 131)
Corinne’s dance affirms her presence by exteriorizing her inner self. She seems to echo Johann Gottfried Herder’s contestation of the Cartesian “Cogito ergo sum” by crying out “Ich fühle mich! Ich bin!”—I feel! I am! (qtd. in Pross 90). She dances. She is. Her sensuous existence is not only the condition for her self-awareness but also the foundation of the spectators’ experience of her performance.

By suggesting that the dance inspires the musicians to perfect the music, the novel elevates dance to parallel what German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) named the highest form of art, most capable of penetrating the soul.1 As the frontiers between fleeting and intangible art forms like dance, spoken improvisation, and music blur, Corinne’s gestures align perfectly with the music: “Le caractère de la musique était exprimé tour à tour par la précision et la mollesse des mouvements” (C 131).2 Staël raises dance to music’s sister art instead of simply a musical interpretation or ornamentation.3 The dance appears perfected in the Schillerian sense that an art approaches perfection when its frontiers with other arts fade. Later in the novel, in an homage to Italian opera, the narrator qualifies music as the art acting most directly on the soul changing its

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1 The status of music among the arts rose after Arthur Schopenhauer’s 1819 publication The World as Will and Representation.
2 The music of the tarantella, dissociated from tarantism, became a captivating genre for “quick lively dancing” with references to different temperaments propelling the dance’s popularity throughout Europe (Hecker 113). Coupled with “the vivacity of the movement,” the tarantella’s marked cadences and repeated triplets create an “electrifying” effect (Blasis, The Code 19). The repetitions, polyrhythms, and final crescendo allude to the tarantato’s repetitive gestures and the final fall as the victim exorcises the spider venom.
3 The novel corroborates the assertions of anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan and philosopher Michel Guérin that dance is the first art inspiring all other arts. For Leroi-Gourhan and Guérin, dance is the only natural art because the body, gesture, tool, material, and product are inseparable. For me, dance is in constant dialogue with other art forms. Though dance is inseparable from the body, any act of dancing is also inseparable from the dancing space and moment. To classify dance as an organic art form ignores the information and the ideas that the dancer uses in her performance.
disposition while other arts can only direct the soul toward an idea. Acting on the listener, music changes the body, produces pleasure, and incites the listener to exist beyond her situation.\(^1\) Creating a dialogue between music and the body’s lived experience, dance creates a visual and kinetic tableau of a penetrating art that escapes visual perception. Together the two arts amplify their effects on their audience.\(^2\) Through their simultaneously independent and coordinated creative production, musicians and dancers move their admirers to experience different feelings of existence.

The dialogue created between the dancer and the musicians grants artistic autonomy to the dancer who works with the music instead letting it direct her. In Alphonse de Lamartine’s *Graziella* (1849), a novel about a Frenchman in Italy who falls in love with the title character, Graziella dances a tarantella as a response to the music, “aux sons du tambourin frappé par son frère” (91). Lamartine stressed not the grace but the manic frenzy of the dance:

\[\text{il y avait dans l’air, dans les attitudes, dans la } \text{frénésie } \text{même de ce } \text{délire} \text{ en action, quelque chose de sérieux et de triste, comme si toute joie n’eût été qu’une } \text{démence} \text{ passagère, et comme si, pour saisir un éclair de bonheur, la jeunesse et la beauté même avaient besoin de s’} \text{étourdir} \text{ jusqu’au vertige et de s’} \text{enivrer} \text{ de mouvement jusqu’à la folie} (91, my emphasis).\]

\(^1\) “Le cœur bat plus vite en l’écoutant; la satisfaction que cause la régularité de la mesure, en rappelant la brièveté du temps, donne le besoin d’en jouir” (*C* 237-8).

\(^2\) As Corinne explains to Oswald, although one art form should never impinge on another, the arts can produce infinite effects: “Les arts sont bornés dans leurs moyens, quoique sans bornes dans leurs effets” (*C* 210).
Dancing in *Graziella* becomes a symptom of hysterical femininity instead of a creative, collaborative experience. Whereas Graziella’s tarantella degenerates into delirium, Corinne gracefully communicates a wide range of sensations. Staël’s heroine is just as much an artist on the dance floor as she is painting, improvising, or singing.

**What Dance Does**

Beginning in the eighteenth century, art gradually became understood as a materialization of subjective impressions instead of as a form of knowledge. With Isaac Newton’s discoveries in physics, thinkers became more interested in the ways objects or experiences affect individuals than the things themselves. Corinne’s dance leads onlookers to experience space and time differently, as if they were transported to another realm. In a rare moment where the narrator uses the first person, she presents herself as befuddled, like the awestruck spectators: “je ne sais quelle joie passionnée, quelle sensibilité d’imagination électrisait à la fois tous les témoins de cette danse magique, et les transportait dans une existence idéale où l’on rêve un bonheur qui n’est pas de ce monde” (C 131, my emphasis).1 The dance does not simply represent an idea. It makes the Ideal imaginable by creating a utopian image of existing beyond one’s situation.

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1 According to the definitions of *électriser* and *électricité* in Jean-François Féraud’s 1788 dictionary, it is possible to electrify not only bodies but also souls. In *Dix années d’exil*, Staël uses the reflexive form of this verb to describe the spiritual agitation among members of the Tribunat struggling to halt the Consulate. She wrote, “les hommes réunis en assemblée publique finissent toujours par s’électriser dans le sens de l’élévation de l’âme” (40, my emphasis). This usage also appears in the speech of the *dames de la halle*, a group of Parisian female vendors, before the National Assembly in August 1791: “L’idée de la liberté a agrandi les âmes, enflammé les esprits, électrisé les cœurs” (1, my emphasis). Regarding the narrator’s role in reinforcing Corinne’s ideological position, see Yves Ansel’s essay “Corinne, ou les mésaventures du roman à thèse.”
By proposing different ways of bodily and spatiotemporal being, the tarantella encourages spectators to reimagine current ideologies related to art and male-female relationships.¹ Twentieth-century philosopher Paul Ricœur defines ideology as a praxis shaped by an imaginary representation and utopia as an exercise in envisioning a different social subjectivity. For him, a utopia prevents experience and tradition from subduing hope. He concludes that ideology and utopia are complementary because utopian thought allows for critiquing ideologies through contestation and projection into different possibilities, while ideologies provide the narrative identities necessary for evaluating utopian thinking. The dance scene creates a utopian vision of women freely and subjectively expressing themselves in public.

By expressing emotions in a manner that escapes everyday language, Corinne’s movements produce an “explosive potential” and a “body language of immediacy” challenging reigning orders of knowledge (Miller, “Performances” 90). The narrator attempts to make dance comprehensible through language by comparing it to texts and speech in addition to non-linguistic expressive arts. Corinne’s expressive movements, like her speech, represent her freedom and her genius.² Unlike speech, dance demonstrates the possibilities of an expressive human body allowing spectators to seek their “ideal human likeness in the dancer” (Fraleigh xvi). For Szmurlo, Corinne’s dance

¹ Analyzing how ideas established moral and political ideologies among a given people, Staël’s thinking shared similarities with the philosophy of the Ideologues, led by Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836).
² According to Christine Planté, the dance scene is “un exemple d’activité artistique féminine” (“Ce qui parle” 93). Consequently, for Planté, the dance scene fails to act as a subversive performance in the feminine. I disagree with this interpretation. Instead of reducing the dance to an example of a feminine artistic activity familiar to her contemporaries, Staël presented Corinne’s tarentella as an artistic creation, not an execution of expected social rituals like Lucile’s contradance.
functions as a discursive form analogic to poetic improvisation and conversation. Margaux Morin suggests that, through dance, the body speaks for Corinne, as if the speaking subject were other to the dancing subject. Daniela Keil reads the dance scene as bringing to life an ideal that can only exist in poetry. However, if the dance can create this ideal, then it also exists in dance as non-linguistic communication. Dance is a kinetic language, different from linguistic forms of expression. It is a “vehicle for conceptualization,” and its meaning goes “beyond and outside the dance” (Hanna, To Dance 26). From antiquity to the end of the nineteenth century, European societies tended to approve of dances comprehensible in relation to symbolic language or words and spurned dances that lack linguistic equivalents. This reduction of dance to discourse reduces it to a confession transforming bodily desires into disembodied words. Dances evading explanations point to ideas not yet articulable through words. The je ne sais quoi of dance makes it a powerful tool for contemplating the possibilities of the unknown.

Unlike written or spoken language, a dance is a visual presentation of a creation and its creator. During the dance, “the dancer’s body becomes the objective dance—an object, an it—but at the same time an I, because the lived dimension is always present”

1 In “Anne-Marie Stretter danse: fonctionnement du bal dans les œuvres de Marguerite Duras,” Christophe Meurée draws on Maurice Blanchot’s argument that the word of the Self is never equal to that of the other, in order to show how dance becomes a means of communication, transcending codified language. Meurée argues that dance creates an atemporal illusion and reveals a language outside of logos. Frédéric Pouillaude maintains that the logic of gesture exists outside discourse as dance brings us face to face with the dancing subject’s singularity and “la vérité tautologique de l’expression,” which makes a vocabulary impossible (233). Because dance consists in a continuous of infinitely varying signs, it cannot, according to Pouillaude, be reduced to a single discontinuous category.

2 In a similar fashion, Foucault compares Catholic confessions to an attempt to transform desire into discourse.
(Fraleigh 36). Sarah Davies Cordova reads the comparison of Corinne’s improvisation to her dance and the comparison in Delphine between the polonaise and “les idées et les sensations poétiques” as transforming dance into a more valued signifying system as it expresses the unsayable (D 107). For Cordova, Staël’s descriptions of dance emphasize mimesis and the expression of ideals on a par with the dance reviews of Gautier as well as the poetic grappling with dance in the texts of Mallarmé. However, Staël’s heroines express ideas through dance whereas the dancers described by Gautier and Mallarmé become dehumanized metaphors.\(^1\) Dance and poetry express the unsayable through disparate modes of representing ineffable ideas.

Although words can describe it or even inspire it, dance is a different mode of expression and representation.\(^2\) As modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan stated, “If I could tell you what I mean, there would be no point in dancing” (qtd. in Hanna, The Performer 7). Through movement, the dancing “body subtends the word and surrounds the thought,” but dance does not parallel language (Fraleigh 71). For twentieth-century American philosopher Susanne Langer, language does not readily present the patterns of emotional life, but dance is “a perceptible form that expresses the nature of human

\(^1\) In her 1992 thesis, The female form: Gautier, Mallarmé and Céline Writing Dance, Felicia McCarren, argues that, for Mallarmé, feminine sexuality is somewhere between the visual and the metrical, the plastic and the poetic: “Mallarmé seems to find in femininity an assertion of a sexuality which makes lack crucial to creation, and ambiguity, doubleness or multiplicity of identities as an aid in creation” (137). Hélène Stafford looks at Mallarmé’s dance writings in relation to his fashion magazine La Dernière Mode. She shows how, in his writings on dance and fashion, women are “metaphors rather than women, their bodies absent, or negated by the gaze of the poet” (203). In my view, Mallarmé continued a Romantic motif of the dancing woman transforming into lightness or something non-human.

\(^2\) We could however include dance in the numerous forms of translation that are essential to Corinne’s fame as well as her demise. In this sense, dance does not translate speech but rather ideas and emotions. See Yota Basaki’s “Exile as the Inaudible Accent in Germaine de Staël’s Corinne, ou l’Italie.”
feeling” (“The Dynamic Image” 79). Plutarch (46-125 CE) identified three elements of dance: phrase (phorai), pose (schemata), and pointing (deixis). Phrases make dance like music by transforming melodies and rhythms into movement. Poses, “the representational position to which the movements lead and in which they end,” liken dance to paintings (Plutarch 291). Finally, by pointing, Plutarch meant indicating or pantomiming objects in the way that a poet uses proper nouns. Dance communicates through multifarious combinations of visual, rhythmic, and kinetic elements. In Corinne, the narrator’s comparisons between dance and spoken improvisations designate the tarantella as an expressive dance that, like linguistic forms of expression, affects its observers. The multitude of similes, metaphors, and antitheses in the descriptions of dance in Delphine and Corinne hardly suggest a reduction of dance to a kinesthetic representation of discourse. Gestures “of not being able to figure something out in language” constitute these dances (Agamben 58). I Literary dances like Corinne’s tarantella point to an ecstasy or jouissance beyond the limit of other forms of communication represented in the text, most notably speech.

An Unhappy Spectator of Corinne’s Performances

In Corinne, Valérie, and Delphine, the male observer’s reactions are paramount for understanding the stakes of the dances. Oswald’s judgements circumscribe all of Corinne’s performances. Before the tarantella, he escapes to a room next to the ballroom

1 I disagree with Giorgio Agamben’s qualification of dance as “the endurance and the exhibition of the media character of corporeal movement” with only an esthetic dimension of gesture (57). Dance fits his notion of gestures exposing a mediatity to make visible the human condition of “being-in-a-medium” (57).
with no aim to watch Corinne dance and then, hearing her name announced, stands in the doorway like a spy. Corinne’s charisma, which for him signifies her independence, troubles him: “Il s’indignait d’être captivé par des charmes dont il devait se plaindre, puisque, loin de songer à lui plaire, c’était presque pour échapper à son empire que Corinne se montrait si ravissante” (C 129). Throughout the narrative, the conflict between his desire to subjugate Corinne and his love for her distresses him. On the dance floor, her performance demonstrates the strength of her love for her fellow Italians, as she tests her love for a man who wishes to hide her from the rest of humanity. Later, in a concert hall loge, she sings for a Roman audience whose applause moves her to tears and quickens her heartbeat. Oswald reacts with jealousy, warning Corinne, “Il ne faut pas, madame, vous arracher de tels succès, ils valent l’amour, puisqu’ils font ainsi palpiter votre cœur” (237). Recreating the distance between himself and Corinne at the ball, he places himself in the opposite part of the theater box. His efforts to separate himself from her shine light on the extent to which her embodied love of glory appalls him.

To perceive grace, the observer must be open to receiving the benefits of a graceful performance. Aware of Corinne’s talents, Oswald actively resents the effects of her performances. Before the heroine’s moment of glory acting in Romeo and Juliet, the narrator analyzes the causes of Oswald’s equivocating reactions to Corinne’s public success:

Oswald avait un mélange d’inquiétude et de plaisir à l’approche de ce nouveau succès; il en jouissait par avance; mais par avance aussi il était jaloux, non de tel homme en particulier, mais du public, témoin des talents de celle qu’il aimait; il
eût voulu connaître seul ce qu’elle avait d’esprit et de charmes; il eût voulu que Corinne, timide et réservée comme une Anglaise, possédât cependant pour lui seul son éloquence et son génie. (177)

Selfishly wishing to be the sole beneficiary of her grace, he abhors her ability to move others and elicit their love. Moreover, her genius rouses his self-doubt regarding his own accomplishments: “Lord Nelvil, de quelque avantage qu’il fût doué, ne croyait pas l’égaler, et cette idée lui inspirait des craintes sur la durée de leur affection mutuelle” (177). She emasculates him first by denying him the right to be the only person to love her, then by leading him to realize his inferiority. Obsessed with dignity and duty, Oswald rejects grace as a gift with no strings attached and fails to see the beauty in what escapes his control.

Whether dance promotes vanity or humanistic urges depends not only on the dancer’s intentions but also on those of her observers. In her relationship with Oswald, Corinne’s glory creates an inequality born out of perfectibility and talent. In Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité* (1755), idle men and women come together to dance, observe each other, and recognize who is the most beautiful, the strongest, or the best dancer. These assemblies, according to Rousseau, plant the seeds for envy and feelings of incompetence which later give birth to inequality, vanity, and shame. Corinne’s performances are generous acts offering beauty, grace, and wonder. Oswald, in line with Rousseau’s thinking, perceives her dance as a vain desire for praise.

The abject for Oswald is the idea of a woman as a human with as much potential as he has. During the ball scene in Corinne’s representation of *Romeo and Juliet*, Oswald
falls in love, not with Corinne as herself, but Corinne playing the part of a woman who
kills herself for love.1 Confusing fiction and reality, Oswald sees Corinne as Juliet, capable of living and dying for the man who yearns for her. As Toril Moi demonstrates, Oswald watches the play in the same way that Denis Diderot, in his Éloge de Richardson (1761), reads Samuel Richardson. Completely absorbed in the object, they confuse the experience of art and that of reality. Instead of seeing the performance as imitation, Oswald watches it as an original expression of true sentiments and thoughts.2 He projects his fantasies on Corinne as Juliet, just as he projects them on the silent Lucile, yet when he sees Corinne as herself expressing her humanness, “with all the potential for conflict, pain, and disappointment that that entails,” he retreats from acknowledging the fact that he is an object of Corinne’s subjecthood (Moi 159).

Unlike Léonce, who recognizes Delphine’s grace as superior to Matilde’s physical beauty, Oswald fails to appreciate spontaneous, active, and marginally transgressive grace. During the tarantella, he interprets Corinne’s grace as vain seduction rather than goodness and beauty inciting love: “Mais qui peut résister aux séductions de la grâce?” (C 130). Watching the Shakespearian play, however, he perceives her grace as a revelation of her deepest feelings and loves her for its effect on him: “Il ne pouvait se

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1 “La première fois que Juliette paraît, c’est à un bal où Roméo Montague s’est introduit [...] Ses premiers regards découvriront à l’instant Oswald et s’arrêtèrent sur lui; une étincelle de joie, une espérance douce et vive se peignit dans sa physionomie; en la voyant, le cœur battait de plaisir et de crainte: on sentait que tant de félicité ne pouvait pas durer sur la terre; était-ce pour Corinne que ce pressentiment devait s’accomplir?” (C 179).
2 Abbé Du Bos wrote, “tout ce que nous voyons au théâtre concourt à nous émouvoir, mais rien n’y fait illusion à nos sens, car tout s’y montre comme imitation. Rien n’y paraît, pour ainsi dire, que comme copie” (145). For Du Bos, if spectators see the performance as reality, they have lost awareness of their surroundings in a theater and place within an audience.
lasser d’admirer la grâce de ses gestes, la dignité de ses mouvements” (180). Prejudiced notions of femininity mixed with a selfish mode of observing beauty suffocate his capacity to appreciate her grace in action when she is playing the part of a liberated woman.

Misconceptions of the difference between beauty and grace are contagious. Corinne scorns her artistic and intellectual activities comparing her perfected gifts to Lucile’s beautiful countenance. When she first catches a glance of her half-sister at a theater in London, Corinne compares herself to the younger woman’s alluring beauty. The narrator, however, informs us that Corinne is wrong in doing so: “[Corinne] se compara dans sa pensée avec elle [Lucile], et se trouva tellement inférieure, elle s’exagéra tellement, s’il était possible de se l’exégréer, le charme de cette jeunesse” (442). Oswald seems to have accomplished his mission in making Corinne more like him. She wavers about spurning her active performances as incommensurate to silent, stationary beauty: “elle se sentit presque humiliée de lutter par le talent, par l’esprit, par les dons acquis enfin, ou du moins perfectionnés, avec ces grâces prodiguées par la nature elle-même” (442). Compared to Lucile’s helpless innocence, Corinne perceives talent as a ruse, “l’esprit une tyrannie, la passion une violence” (447). Corinne reduces her graceful performances to unfeminine trumpery. It is not talent itself that is a ruse, rather the notion of a talented woman suddenly appears to her as a sham. Renouncing her actively acquired skills and natural enthusiasm, Corinne accepts a porcelain doll as representative of the acme of what it means to be a woman.
By repeating similar conflicts after Corinne’s performances, the novel makes it clear that, for a Northern European, a woman’s enthusiasm to perfect humanity through intellectual and artistic cultivation is unacceptable. After dancing, Corinne wishes for Oswald to bear witness to the enthusiasm of the crowd, but he scolds her for finding joy in the applause. He beseeches her to compare male protection to public ovation: “au milieu de ces adorateurs si enthousiastes, y a-t-il un ami courageux et sûr? y a-t-il un protecteur pour la vie? et le vain tumulte des applaudissements devrait-il suffire à une âme telle que la vôtre?” (132). At the concert in Rome, Staël likewise creates a stark contrast between the hyperbolized praise of Corinne’s talent and Oswald’s cold rejection of her celebrity. Compared to a military victory, the singing performance represents both Italian culture and the freedom to be an accomplished woman outside of the confines of domesticity. When Oswald reproaches her for being moved by this veneration, Corinne once again despairs that he does not understand her love of imparting the *sentiment de l’infini* through her performances. In both instances, Oswald attempts to depreciate the effects of grace to restore his dignity.

Staël frames Oswald’s inability to admire Corinne’s performances and Italian art as an unnatural consequence of his excessive dedication to socially defined duties. Prejudices blind him from seeing beauty and creativity in art.\(^1\) His view of women as feeble objects, obliged to fulfill the role of wife and mother, to be safeguarded from

\(^{1}\) “Lord Nelvil avait sans doute tout l’esprit nécessaire pour admirer l’imagination et le génie; mais il croyait que les relations de la vie sociale devaient l’emporter sur tout, et que la première destination des femmes et même des hommes n’était pas l’exercice des facultés intellectuelles, mais l’accomplissement des devoirs particuliers à chacun” (*C* 325).
prying eyes, makes the notion of a female artist impossible. Unable to recognize artistic, humanistic, and intellectual production as a task that women can shoulder, he fails to appreciate Corinne as simultaneously an artist, a moral subject, and a woman.

In the novel, happiness from enthusiasm and happiness from romantic love repel each other. At a party that Corinne organizes in Oswald’s honor, before revealing the secrets of her past in England, her desire to dance, associated with a natural reaction to joyful music, comes into conflict with the somber attitude that she adopts to please him. At first, the music incites Corinne, like her compatriots, to dance: “L’air qu’on respirait était ravissant; il pénétrait l’âme d’un sentiment de joie qui animait tous ceux qui étaient là, et s’empara même de Corinne. On lui proposa de se mêler à la danse des paysannes, et d’abord elle y consentit avec plaisir” (331). Yet, her fear of losing Oswald and desire to change for him halt her instincts. Instead of savoring the collective joy, she distances herself from the music and the crowd. In the same way that he rejects her love of glory, she abandons her love of dance.

In contrast to Lucile’s tedious execution of contradances, Corinne’s tarantella tests the possibility of throwing one’s self into an embodied project toward infinite possibilities. Yet, patriarchal societies are not ready for this dance. The ball in Scotland announces the end of Corinne’s relationship with Oswald as well as the end of her glory. Walking about the estate, she observes the music and lanterns illuminating the manor, yet

1 “…à peine eut-elle commencé que les sentiments les plus sombres lui rendirent odieux les amusements auxquels elle prenait part, et s’éloignant rapidement de la danse et de la musique elle alla s’asseoir à l’extrémité du cap sur le bord de la mer” (331).
the crowd, which in Italy sever Oswald from her, now separates her from her beloved: “La foule des paysans rassemblés pour voir danser empêcha qu’elle ne fût remarquée” (454). Insofar as her Italian audiences admire her talents and enthusiasm, the Northerners ignore her as they flock to venerate Lucile’s timid demonstration of docility.

Though success for women artists is rare at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the few exceptions, according to Staël, are destined to unhappiness. Despite Corinne’s immense glory and celebrity, she dies with only one friend by her side, reinforcing Staël’s assertion that glory is not enough to enable women to overcome “l’insurmontable faiblesse de sa nature et de sa situation” (De l’influence 189). Corinne exemplifies the greatness of a woman artist and genius, yet, because of her genius and devotion to participating in the public sphere, she cannot efface herself and become dependent on a man. Expelling emotions and imaginative stirrings, her tarantella accentuates her exceptionality as both a myth and a malady. Corinne can no longer save herself once she vanquishes her desire to perform and give the gift of grace to a crowd offering nothing in return.

**Sand as a Reader of Staël**

Staël’s *Corinne* marked world literature as it inspired writers such as Honoré de Balzac, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Henrik Ibsen, George Eliot, and George Sand. To conclude this chapter, I study two works by Sand, *Lavinia* (1833) and *La Daniella* (1857), in which the heroines’ dances bring to mind the glory and grace of Staël’s

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1. See Linda M. Lewis’s *Germain de Staël, George Sand, and the Victorian Woman Artist* and Toril Moi’s *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy.*

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novelesque ballets.¹ According to Isabelle Hoog Naginski, Sand read Sainte-Beuve’s reedition of Corinne in 1837. Nevertheless, Lavinia, published four years earlier, reflects the love of glory and autonomy described in Corinne.² My goal here is not to establish a genealogy between the two novels but rather to examine what dance scenes do in texts about exceptional women.

Lavinia is a novella about a woman who mistrusts men.³ She rejects marriage offers from a handsome Count and Lionel, her former lover who abandoned her for a singer ten years earlier. Embodying the North and the South, Lady Lavinia Blake is the widow of an Englishman and the daughter of a Jewish Portuguese banker. She writes to Lionel requesting her love letters to him after her cousin has informed her of Lionel’s upcoming marriage. Lionel declares his love to her after hearing the Count’s marriage proposal. She tells both men to wait and later writes them asserting her desire to remain free.⁴

¹ Also evocative of Corinne, Sand’s unfinished epistolary novel Albine Fiori, which could have become her only Künstlerroman about a dancer, describes a tarantella. The Italian ballerina Albine Fiori, loosely modeled after Marie Taglioni, was discovered while dancing “une espèce de tarentelle” (439). Sand presents Albine’s ability to dance the tarantella as a consequence of innate knowledge given that Sand stresses the ballerina’s illiteracy and lack of experience in her “état sauvage” (439). Dancing the tarantella, she transforms into an otherworldly sight: “un sujet exceptionnel, un être aérien, une merveille, un trésor” (439).
² Corinne influenced Sand’s 1843 Künstlerroman Consuelo. I have not been able to identify when Sand read Delphine.
³ The novella was first published under the title Une vieille histoire and then Lavinia, an old story. Comparing the novella to Corinne, Damien Zanone argues that Sand pays a tribute to the old story “légueée par le roman sentimental féminin pour mieux continuer son chemin, identifier sa voie d’invention, libérer son discours” (343).
⁴ In Leyla Ezdinli’s reading of the ending, Lavinia becomes a “Juive errante” leaving behind all forms of social commerce and national identity (32).
As in *Corinne*, a woman’s glory repels the admiration of an egotistical man. Resilient and independent, Lavinia cultivates glory despite having been embarrassingly abandoned. Lionel arrives at a ball where everyone talks of her talents and beauty (a situation like Oswald’s at the coronation and the ball). Unable to see her, Lionel hears a stranger cry, “C’est la belle juive Lavinia Blake qui va danser. On dit que c’est la femme de toute l’Europe qui danse le mieux” (*L* 291). The effusive praise for Lavinia, but not so much the fact that she will dance with the Count, offends Lionel. Like a sulky Oswald, Lionel suffers to see her triumph unfettered by his ascendancy:

Lionel souffrait amèrement de voir celle qui fut longtemps dominée et emprisonnée dans son amour, celle qui jadis n’était qu’à lui, et que le monde n’eût osé venir réclamer dans ses bras, *libre et fière maintenant*, environnée d’hommages et trouvant dans chaque regard une vengeance ou réparation du passé. (310, my emphasis)

Whereas Corinne never regains her former fame, Lavinia resiliently obtains glory after Lionel forsook her. Glory on the dance floor is an act of grace insofar as dance allows women to transgress patriarchal laws by affirming their bodily presence, active subjectivity, and autonomy.

The male characters in *Lavinia* struggle to transform the ballroom into an arena for parading their authority. Henry, Lionel’s friend and Lavinia’s cousin, attempts to reestablish masculine law by reinterpreting the events at the ball to suggest that Lionel dominated Lavinia on the dance floor: “Quand nous sommes entrés au bal, Lavinia était triste et dansait d’un air distrait; dès qu’elle vous a vu, son œil s’est animé, son front s’est
éclairci. Elle était rayonnante à la valse quand vous l’enleviez comme une plume à travers la foule” (311). Henry not only reduces the heroine’s sentimental state to a reaction to her former lover but also transforms her into a moved object instead of a mover by making her glory depend on Lionel. In this interpretation of the ball, Lavinia becomes as light as the sylphlike Indiana, “légère sans vivacité, sans plaisir” (I 80). This account of Lionel’s feats of seduction contradicts the rest of the novel representing Lavinia’s triumph as she frees herself from masculine domination. The male characters attempt to stage their authority by reducing the heroine to an object easy to transport through space, yet, in the end, she leaves them by her own initiative.1 Whereas Corinne remains sovereign when she falls to her knees during the tarantella but loses her freedom when she bows before her beloved, Lavinia preserves her autonomy off the dance floor.

In Corinne and Lavinia, the half-English, half-Mediterranean heroines glean aspects of each culture to propose a form of feminine being that embodies Christian values of modesty without suppressing their sensuality. Lavinia’s Jewish ethnicity Orientalizes and sexualizes her. French Jews gained civil rights during the first half of the nineteenth century, but the figure of the Jew became “un objet de consommation pour le public romantique” as literature and the arts vilified Jewish men and eroticized Jewish

1 As Yvon Le Scanff explains, the theatricality of Lavinia reveals “la vanité sociale du genre masculin pris dans la fascination spéculaire de la représentation de soi” (625).
women (Ezdinli 29). Lavinia, like Corinne, never danced while she was in England, where she first met Lionel:

Lionel ne l’avait jamais vue danser. Lorsqu’elle était venue en Angleterre, elle ne connaissait que le boléro, et elle ne s’était jamais permise de la danser sous le ciel austère de la Grande-Bretagne. Depuis, elle avait appris nos contredanses, et elle y portait la grâce voluptueuse des Espagnoles jointe à je ne sais quel reflet de pruderie anglaise qui en modérait l’essor. On montait sur les banquettes pour la voir danser. (L 309-10, my emphasis)

As is also the case in Delphine and Malvina, the dancer’s grace creates an awe inciting spectators to transgress rules of good behavior to witness the dance. While England is the nation of the contradance, sensual Mediterranean dances belong to the warm climates of the South. Conflating Spanish and Portuguese cultures, the bolero emphasizes the heroine’s exotica with little attention to the cultural significance of the dance. Lavinia’s grâce voluptueuse mixed with English reserve and Corinne’s volupté modeste demonstrate a tempered sexuality that coincides with a concept of grace celebrating instead of denying the dancer’s corporeal presence. Such graceful inclinations, never restricted to a static definition, are born out of a cultural hybridity.

To propose graceful and sensual female characters, Sand and Staël resorted to cultural otherness to represent the alterity that is the female body. The mysterious grace

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1 See also Julie Kalman’s Orientalizing the Jew: Religion, Culture, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century France.
2 The fandango, a dance related to the bolero, was popular in Portugal.
of these heroines exposed to both Northern and Southern values reveals the limitations created by dichotomies of reason and emotions, chastity and sexuality, nonchalance and passion. These hybrid characters suggest alternative forms of being. Hybridity, as Homi Bhabha defines it, is the space “in-between the designations of identity” that “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4). Hybridity allows for the je ne sais quoi of graceful dancing that explores forms of being beyond existing stereotypes or archetypes.

In another novel featuring a hybrid heroine, La Daniella, the French artist Jean Valreg, the first-person narrator, travels to Italy hoping to find inspiration. In Rome, he meets Medora, a haughty half-British, half-Greek heiress who wishes to marry him, but he is more attracted to her maid Daniella. Medora’s static beauty, artifice, and vanity repel Valreg: “elle me semble étrange, trop occupée d’elle-même, trop poseuse de courage martial et de goût raphaëlesque” (LD 159). In contrast, Daniella’s expressivity and natural beauty charm him. Disappointed by the corruption and squalor of Rome, he settles in Frascati where he reunites with Daniella.¹ After watching her dance, Valreg sleeps with her, and they begin a complicated amorous adventure. In the conclusion, Daniella is pregnant with his child.

The novel does not describe Daniella’s first dance beyond the effects of her voluptuous grace on Valreg. After seeing her dance for the first time, he remarks her

¹ Written after Sand’s 1834 and 1855 sojourns in Italy, the novel criticizes the Roman Papacy and paints a portrait of Italian poverty. Approaching a Romantic grotesque, Italian decadence simultaneously seduces and appalls the protagonist. As Martine Ried points out, La Daniella takes a different direction than Corinne with regards to Sand’s disinterest in the Roman ruins.
gracefulness and vivacity yet does not seem bewitched by her performance: “Elle est vive, adroite, et m’a paru danser avec grâce” (160). Like Corinne and Lavinia, Daniella simultaneously displays Northern European reserve and Southern passions: “Quoique civilisée par un voyage en France et en Angleterre […], elle a conservé je ne sais quoi de hautain dans le sourire et de sauvage dans le geste” (160, my emphasis). An instinctive sensuality and imperious audacity mark her movements as liberated from the fridity of Northern European culture without overly transgressing standards of propriety.

Dancing celebrates cultural identity and reinforces community relationships. Like Lavinia and Corinne, Daniella’s dancing attracts crowds and glory.¹ After work, Daniella and her colleagues organize a “bal improvisé” in the quarters where they iron clothes and linen (340). Daniella, “folle de la danse” and “la plus belle danseuse du pays,” imposes this moment of dancing as if a day without dancing would signify a day without existing (341). After performing “une sort de valse effrénée,” Daniella and the other women dance the “fraschetana” (341). No documentation on this regional dance exists. The novel describes it as “la gavotte de Frascati” (341). The gavotte is a French circle dance in which individuals take turns performing solos or duets at the center of the group.

In most literary dance scenes, only young women dance. In La Daniella, young and old women dance together as they celebrate their choreographic cultural memory: “Toutes s’arrêtèrent et firent cercle pour voir Daniella ouvrir cette danse avec une vieille femme de campagne, qui passe pour avoir gardé la véritable tradition” (341). The

¹ Before she left to work for Medora, her renown drew people to Frascati just to watch her dance: “Dans le temps, on venait de Gensano, et de plus loin encore, pour la voir au bal” (341).
intergenerational transmission of dance takes center stage as Daniella and the older woman represent the two “grands modèles de l’art chorégraphique indigène” in which the other young women become absorbed (341). Nevertheless, the old woman appears aberrant as she dances surrounded by youth: “La vieille matrone, à figure austère, se livrant à ces chatteries d’enfant, était d’un comique achevé, qui ne faisait pourtant rire personne et qui ne déconcertait nullement Daniella” (341). This acceptance of the matron’s anomalous inclusion attests to the role of dance in creating community cohesion.

Appearing sacred and exotic as if originating in a hallucination, the fraschetana diverges from Valreg’s French notions of dance and tactful grace. The heroine’s grace shines through her generosity when she refuses to monopolize the dancing encounter: 

Je ne vous dirai pas que sa danse est de l’art et de la grâce: c’est de l’inspiration et du délice, mais un délice sacré comme celui qu’éprouverait une sibylle; c’est une verve et une énergie à faire trembler; c’est un regard qui brûle, un sourire qui éblouit, et, tout à coup, des langueurs qui énervent. Quand elle eut dansé dix minutes, elle céda généreusement la place. (342)

The dancer enchants her foreign spectator through the discrete gestures revealing her regard for others and ability to express indescribable ideas.

In Daniella, music and dance inspire each other as the dancers take turns marking the beat with a tambourine. When Daniella sounds the tambourine, the power of her rhythm creates an impetus to dance passionately so that “la plus médiocre danseuse prend
de l’élan et comme de la fureur” (342). With the music, the dancers support each other as they prioritize a cohesive performance over individual success.

Like tarantism, the dance transforms proletarian women into graceful artists despite their lack of training. Daniella’s extraordinary talent lies not in her knowledge but in her passion and vigor: “Elle dit avoir été si passionnée pour la danse, avant de quitter Frascati, qu’elle dansait six heures de suite sans respirer, et s’en allait, en sortant du bal, se mettre à l’ouvrage au point du jour, sans qu’il lui en coûtât le moindre effort” (358). The novel links this physical endurance to her moral strength enabling her to persevere with grace and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, historical and anthropological texts linking Southern people’s penchant for dancing to their unrestrained passions underlie this hyperbolic account of unrelenting energy.

Part of the charm comes from the exclusively feminine group of dancers. Grace and playfulness prevail.¹ Without the intrusion of other male pretenders, Valreg enjoys a certain dominance as the only man to possess Daniella’s dancing body as an object of his gaze:

En regardant celle-ci, je ne sais quel frisson de jalousie me passa dans tout le sang. Je crois que, s’il y avait eu là quelque autre homme que moi, je lui aurais cherché querelle. Je ne sais pas si je pourrai jamais me résoudre à la voir danser ailleurs que dans son cénacle de petites filles. (341-42)

¹ “Cette danse est charmante: les femmes tiennent leur tablier, et le balancent gracieusement devant elles en minaudant vis-à-vis l’une de l’autre” (341).
Although only women execute the fraschetana, the dance still possesses a sexual valence as it seduces the single male observer. As in Lavinia, Sand shows that eroticism can be compatible with grace. Daniella’s grace lies in her mixture of sensuality and childlike innocence. Described as “un trésor de voluptés” possessing “le génie de l’amour,” she seduces Valreg without artifice.1 An aspect of her grace comes from her subjectivity. Valreg knows her carnally but cannot possess her intellectually: “elle est encore pour moi tout surprise et tout mystère. Je la possède tout entière sans la connaître entièrement” (355). Like grace, she appears as an attractive but indecipherable je ne sais quoi. Her actions unveil her grace and passion, yet she does not abandon herself to love another. The combination of her respect for others and for herself constitutes the foundation of her graceful inclinations.

Exuberant and passionate Mediterranean dancers in the works of Sand and Staël exert their lived presence. The heroines in these novels express an innate love of freedom and assume their sexuality. Graceful inclinations reveal a desire to love oneself and humanity without sacrificing either for the love of a single individual. Instead of simply creating illusions of social harmony, these heroines inspire collective enthusiasm to celebrate communal life. However, onlookers who refuse to open themselves to the experience of grace interpret exciting dances as vulgar displays of sexuality or vanity. Even if a dancer’s grace can move a crowd, it is powerless when confronting a

1 “[…] parmi des préjugés, des enfantillages et des inconséquences qui tiennent à son éducation, à sa race et à son milieu, elle élève tout à coup son sentiment aux plus sublimes régions que l’âme humaine puisse aborder” (354).
recalcitrant observer determined to establish his sovereignty over her body and his dignity through her submission.
Conclusion

Dance scenes demonstrate how novelists imagined social, artistic, and moral actors in relation to the multifaceted possibilities of grace. Dancing offers an opportunity to perform graceful inclinations demonstrating better ways of existing with other movers. Dance scenes likewise expose the stakes of ideologies valuing rectitude over free movement. The constellation of dance scenes assembled in this project reveals some, but certainly not all, of the ways in which nineteenth-century women writers presented grace as an esthetic and moral concept as well as a political tool. Dance allows us to analyze the meaning and manifestation of grace. The notion of grace also offers a perspective for examining how dance creates communities, calls for change, and defines human relationships.

Descriptions of contradances in novels by Sophie Cottin, Germaine de Staël, Claire de Duras, and George Sand highlight how dances create illusions of social harmony, love, or idealized femininity. In Staël’s Delphine, utopian dance scenes hint at the possibility of unaffected love. Despite being a target of scorn, Malvina dances with composed grace suggesting that dancing creates a haven. Staël’s Corrine and Sand’s Indiana point out the inherent sexism in certain interpretations of grace as dehumanized floating beauty. In Duras’s Edouard and Sand’s Le Compagnon du Tour de France, contradances momentarily destabilize social hierarchies, yet when the dances end, class prejudices remain intact. These novelists used contradances either to propose ideal social relations or to contest the limitations created by idealizations of submissive femininity. The illusions created on the dance floor deviate from the realities of the narratives.
Graceful inclinations indicate better ways of being, yet concrete actions must follow for change to take place.

The abundance of waltz scenes in nineteenth-century novels creates a collective protest against male domination, upper-class frivolity, the silence surrounding feminine sexuality, and the insufficiency of women’s education. Barbara Juliane von Krüdener’s *Valérie*, Sand’s *Leone Leoni*, and Marie d’Agoult’s *Nélida* reproach nonconsensual dance as a form of violence. Critiquing frivolous and unscrupulous individuals, Cottin’s *Malvina* and Duras’s *Mémoires de Sophie* portray waltzing women enjoying heady experiences and actively seducing men. Whereas descriptions of contradances present idealistic alternatives to reality, waltz scenes exaggerate the ugliness of the realities conflicting with the heroines’ moral aspirations. These novels reveal that young women’s gracefulness is futile if their refusals to dance, to enter the embrace of a man, and to lose control are ignored. Graceful inclinations require consent to move and be moved.

Presentational dances allow a dancer to perform as a character. When she is perceived as only a representation and not a performer, the dance effaces her lived presence. In *Valérie*, Duras’s *Ourika*, and Sand’s *La Filleule*, the dancer either is reduced to her body or becomes a bodiless icon. Valérie’s mysterious shawl dance transforms her into a work of art representing virtue and sacred maternity. To dance as a pure woman, her sexual body disappears as her flowing shawl recreates idealized images. When Ourika and Morena dance, their movements are marked by their racial identities which obscure their personhood. Through dance, they discover the difference preventing them from integrating the society of their adoptive families. These three heroines create
graceful motions and poses but are not perceived as the subjective, creative origins of their own movements.

Performing Mediterranean dances, the heroines of Staël’s _Corinne_ and Sand’s _Lavinia_ and _La Daniella_ embody the aerial grace expected in Northern European cultures and the terrestrial grace of alterity. These novels envision graceful inclinations in the interstices. Always in movement, escaping the rigidity of rectitude, grace allows for hybrid identities. Corinne’s tarantella communicates the enthusiasm and independence characterizing her actions off the dance floor, yet scorn for graceful inclinations that lead to glory destroy her love of freedom. Diverging with their contemporaries, Staël and Sand placed dance among the noble arts shaping cultural identities in _Corinne_ and _La Daniella_. In a poignant critique of dignity dependent on another person’s submission, _Lavinia_ and _Corinne_ elucidate the importance of being open to receive grace. Graceful inclinations encompass a manner of moving as well as an ethical manner of observing the movements of others.

Dancing as a graceful, subjective, sexual woman requires a rejection of sexist, classist, and racist ideologies. Graceful dancing, that _je ne sais quoi_, gestures toward the beauty of the unknown and the possibilities of moving human bodies. It is a powerful tool for pointing out social injustices or proposing alternative forms of social being. Nineteenth-century women novelists used dance to grapple with challenges facing women who had limited access to the discourses defining social and political institutions. These dance scenes produce grace in their attempts to promote human progress.
Nineteenth-century women writers not only modified representations of grace but also problematized existing understandings of grace. According to Roland Barthes, the only way to escape a myth is to mythify the myth itself, to parody it as a false reality. The heroines in *Delphine, Malvina, Valérie, Mémoires de Sophie, Indiana,* and *Nélida* appear as ethereal women attracting admiration as they act out an allegory of purity. Mythifying the dehumanizing myth of the idealized woman, these novels present the myth of the floating woman in white as incompatible with the prejudices of her social milieu and the men who pursue her. In *Ourika* and *La Filleule,* the heroines excel in performing femininity but, because of their dark skin and therefore their inability to marry white men, their conformity to idealized notions femininity does not prevent them from becoming pariahs. In *Corinne* and *Lavinia,* the heroines defy patriarchal laws yet, in doing so, must accept that freedom and glory conflict with conjugal love. Revealing the discordance between grace and submissive femininity, these dances scenes forge new paragons of graceful women, amorous relationships, and social cohesion. Yet, as the novels show, the illusions created in graceful dances are not yet possible.

The problems addressed in nineteenth-century dance scenes remain relevant in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In descriptions of dancers and other types of movers, the term *grace* still carries connotations of meek and unintelligent femininity. Opposition between grace and sensuality continues to stimulate recourse to exotic tropes to represent white woman dancing sensually on stage, in literature, and in film. Reconceiving graceful dancing remains pertinent for combatting sexism and racism. Thinking about grace in terms of inclinations avoids the dichotomies opposing grace with dignity, masculinity,
and reason as well as the associations between grace and whiteness. Graceful dancers turn, jump, bend, pose, and scurry to share the gift of dance, the gift of imagining the possibilities of moving bodies.
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