THE MOBILITY OF WOMEN IN TAPERED SHOES:  
A SELF-PROCLAIMED BALLERINA EXAMINES CLASSICAL BALLET  
PERFORMANCE, FEMINIST THEORY AND BESS IMBER’S “A WOMAN:  
ENGLAND, ’942”  

A Thesis  
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ABSTRACT

In the 1980's and 1990's, dance scholars such as Ann. Daly, Christy Adair, Susan Leigh Foster and Elizabeth Dempster began applying feminist theory to the study of classical ballet performance in an attempt to decode the image of the ballerina. The scholars' research revealed that female dancers were the victims of an art form that displayed their bodies without consent and rendered them passive in a movement vocabulary that denied their physical agency as well as their expressive voice.

As the discussion progressed, the focus shifted from how classical ballet performance shapes female artists to how female artists shape classical ballet. My thesis contributes to this continuing research through a close examination of Bess Immer's *A Woman: England, 1942*, a ballet choreographed in 1987 for Dayton Ballet's fiftieth anniversary season.

In this dance, Immer uses the formal elements of classical ballet (e.g., gravity defying, expansive movement vocabulary; the use of theatrical elements including proscenium stage, specialized costuming and stage lighting; frontal presentation of the dancer's body). Immer's choreographic structure allows the performer to demonstrate her physical power and emotional expression despite the perception that classical ballet restricts female artists.
Analyzing this ballet from the point of view of the performer forms the bulk of my research. My first-hand knowledge of the ballet provides a unique opportunity to investigate the physical power of the ballerina in terms of technical skill, stamina and strength. It further enables me to become acquainted with how Imber works with her dancers to create a psychologically complex character through the formal structure of the ballet. Giving voice to the performer within ballet scholarship recognizes the ballerina as a creative artist who, in collaboration with the choreographer, brings dances to the audience.

Imber's *A Woman: England, 1942* demonstrates that the formal structures of classical ballet performance are not an obstacle for female artists in terms of denying them their physical and expressive agency. Rather, ballet is a movement form that offers female choreographers and performers the opportunity to create their own images on the stage.
For Miss Bess
I hope this is only the beginning.
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INTRODUCTION

An Exercise in Self-Preservation

In the spring of 2001, I started thinking about what I would like to perform for my Master of Fine Arts concern, which was at that point still two years away. There was no question. I wanted to perform Bess Imber’s *A Woman in England*, 1942.

*The ballet begins with the performer standing upstage center, almost peering over the edge of the stage, with a long lavender gown held at her side. She stands with her torso slightly inclined toward the dress so that it seems to spill right from her body. The audience at this moment does not have a good view of the dress, but as she pulls it to her and fans the fabric out in front of her, they catch flashes of rhinestones. The fullness of the skirt contrasts sharply with the stark, body-hugging leotard and tights that the performer is wearing. All of her attention is on the gown as she softly lays it on the floor at her feet and backs away from it, five slow steps reaching hands and toe tips to the somehow living object at the foot of the stage.*

Bess Imber was my first modern teacher when I was twelve years old. My mom signed me up for two weeks of summer courses at Dayton Ballet’s studio since my
neighborhood dance school was on vacation. Imber taught a mixture of movement taken from her years studying with Mary Anthony as well as her experiences with Limón technique and classes at the School of American Ballet. Her own dance teachers, Josephine and Hermene Schwarz who founded Dayton Ballet and its school in the 1930’s, had studied with Mary Wigman, Rosalie Chladek, Doris Humphrey and Charles Wiedman, and danced with Ruth Page. While I did not know it then, my dance education with Imber encompassed the finest of the fine through her very own individual lens.

When I was thirteen, I left the dance studio in my suburb and started traveling downtown for ballet and modern classes with Miss Bess and other teachers at The Dayton Ballet Dance Center. During those years, I developed the great love for dance in general and ballet in particular that has been the driving force in my life to this point. I anticipate it always will be.

All of this action happens before the music starts, giving the performer ample time to examine the dress before she relinquishes it. When the music actually begins, it almost catches her by surprise as she looks around her. The space in front of her opens up and the dress seems to charge the entire atmosphere. Ghosts play around her and she begins a little dialogue with the dress consisting of coy relevés, her pointes playing lightly with the floor. The conversation at center stage quickly turns into a confrontation with all the corners of the room. It is as if the gown is calling images to mind that are pulling her in different directions. She faces each direction with entrechat tournés that turn her half way around then half again. Getting more and more frantic, she takes off. Quick pirouettes from fifth catapult her across to the opposite diagonal while a series of relevés boxes her
in. Pacing madly, she throws her body, alternately closing her ears and opening her chest to the bombarding images.

Imber, in her soft voice that would only occasionally fill the studio, squeezed her students until our scalps shows, through our bodies. When we improvised, we became rocks, wind and rivers. In her ballets, we became complex entities with worlds of experience well beyond our meager fifteen years of life. With the utmost care, she groomed us to be poets and exacting forms in space. By the time I graduated from high school, I knew my body as an expressive instrument that efficiently utilized the formal technical systems of ballet and modern dance in the studio and on the stage.

When it seems that she cannot possibly run and jump anymore, she pinpoints the source of her turmoil. She grabs the dress, tosses and catches it, pulling it to her heart and falling to the floor. Both gown and dancer lie crumpled at the edge of the stage. She is exhausted, but it is still calling to her.

It sings to her softly as she rises in its voice. In response, she sways and billows at its side rolling from détt a to full pointe in wide first positions, this time reacting to the woman she was when she wore it. She was adored, caressed and protected. Spurred by the memories of that life, she pulls the dress over her head and immerses herself in the softness of that woman.
Imber choreographed *A Woman: England, 1942* for Dayton Ballet's fiftieth anniversary season in 1987 for ballerina Barbara Pontecorvo. I saw every performance in those days and immediately fell in love with the ballet. I was already enamored with Pontecorvo whom I had been watching for several years. Seeing her dance Imber's powerful solo telling the story of a woman struggling to survive during World War II took my breath away.

*However, what comes to her is the gown is not the ease of her femininity, but a harsh reminder of its captivity. The dress burns instead of comfort. The images that raged around her in the beginning climb onto her body and she fights to pull them off. Flames burn behind her eyes. She runs and stops, almost consumed, but continues to leap and turn in a long diagonal across the stage. She grabs the skirt, spins to the center and finishes with a series of sissones de côté, beating her legs together furiously.*

There was nothing I wanted to dance more. For me, the piece represented the ultimate physical and expressive challenge for a ballet dancer and I knew it was something that was within my reach as a performer. Imber generously put the piece in my hands and gave it to my body. For almost two years it has been my obsession and has become a vehicle for me to explore what it means to be a female artist who has chosen to use ballet as a means of expression.

*As if in direct confrontation with the gown and the ghosts it resurrects, she steps sharply and drops the skirt. Whirling around to face the audience, she stops someone at her side*
with an outreached hand. Pacing back and forth, she pulls the skirt close to her and examines the bodice with her fingers. She is slowly becoming one with the life it is bringing back to her. She remembers how she lived in it. The ghosts step grabbing at her as one steps forward to take her hand. It is someone she knows and loves, someone who loved her in that dress. She dances with her chest thrown open in a swirl of color and fabric. In a series of sustained relevés in arabesque, she floats effortlessly on the tip of one shoe finishing with an explosive relevé effacé devant. The gown's stranglehold has been broken.

I began my research with Imber and those that formed her as a female artist in ballet. I read about the Schwarz sisters, Mary Anthony, Antony Tudor, Frederick Ashton and George Balanchine. I did not find any real answers to my questions or any connections to my experiences until I encountered the feminist debate on ballet. In rereading Elizabeth Dempster's article "Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances," I found myself shouting emphatic "Yes's" and "No's" at the pages in an attempt to inject my personal opinions into Dempster's writings. Dempster led me to Ann Daly, Ann Cooper Albright, Alexandra Carter, Christy Adair, Sally Banas and others who raised the same issues and offered other solutions to the growing discourse on women and ballet. In their writings I found what I was looking for: a context for my questions and a means to find the answers.

At this point in the ballet a male dancer joins her on the stage. He enters from the downstage right wing ready to meet her when she runs along the diagonal. It is when she
Feels him touch her face that she sees him. His body is torn apart and she is covered in his blood. There is nothing to do but back away. This is not what she wanted, this is not what she expected. In desperation, she resumes her fight with the gown, pulling the skirt up over her knees as she stabs at the floor with her pointe shoes. She goes to him but he falls at her feet in a mess. She backs away not knowing how to reassemble him or if she has enough courage to do so. Finally, forgetting about him, she drinks alone. The alcohol loosens her body and her attitude, as he stands by shocked and disappointed. With outstretched arms and a long tendu derrière, she screams at him for leaving her and grabs at his body to try to make him stay. He breaks away from her embrace and disappears in the mist around her. She stands alone center stage fighting to stand still.

Feminist scholarship on ballet seems to be just one more bump in the road on ballet’s long journey to being recognized as a viable art and means of emotional and cultural expression. In my imagination, Michel Fokine and Gelsey Kirkland bantered back and forth, discussing the expressive possibilities of Marius Petipa’s choreography.

Fokine found very little in the way of “art” in Petipa’s ballets as they were being performed at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Everything led me to conclude that the ballet lacked its most essential element: presentation to the spectator of an artistically created image. […] There was no transformation, no creation of an image. Instead, self-exhibition. There was no interpretation on the stage. Instead […] the desire to please the public in the effort to gain its approval. There was no unity of action. The action would be interrupted so as to make it possible for the ballerina to thank the public for demonstrating its greetings, and, with her bows, to prolong the applause. There was no unity in the means of expression […] There was no unity in the style of costumes. (Fokine 49, 51)
For Fokine, dancing in these ballets was an endless frustration, and not just because he was often waiting in the wings while other dancers with polrícial connections danced the choice roles. There was a general feeling about ballet and being a ballet dancer: "If you can jump high and spin well, more power to you! In anything else, we have little interest except on reaching the retirement-pension age" (Fokine 45).

In a moment of east and fresh air, she senses him again and lets his spirit move her body in a small conversation of piqué arabesques. She smiles and touches his face, saying goodbye. He supports her body in a long arching balance, she crawls out of his embrace and he fades from her sight, literally leaving her space.

Kirkland offers a far different look at Petipa's ballets, especially The Sleeping Beauty. Even though it has all of the elements Fokine found fault with, Kirkland is able to transform Aurora and her world into an artistic statement that allows for emotional expression. Where Fokine saw character as "not included" in the "requirements" of the classical dancer (Fokine 49), Kirkland makes character the foundation of the movement.  

As I never made any separation between the steps and story, I was amazed by those who were able to put them into different compartments, as if mind and body could somehow work apart from each other. Unless I had a reason to move, I would be totally paralyzed; Princess Aurora might never take her first step, and neither of us might ever make it onto the stage. (Kirkland, The Shape of Love 210)

In trying to decode the emotional motivation behind the Rose Adagio, Kirkland wrote:

Aurora enters like a gentle stream of light. Is she skittish? Nervous? Why is she late? Where is she coming from? Does she know what to expect? Does she
bevitch us with her outer beauty...or do we see something of her inner spirit? (Kirkland, Shape of Love 210)

What this debate revealed to me in addition to the genius of Petipa's work was the expressive potential of classical movement and the integral role of the performer in bringing the dance to life. The dancers in Fokine's Imperial Ballet were, according to him, not interested in creating "art." For them, ballet was a means of entertainment, a flashy night at the theater featuring beautiful costumes and spectacular dancing. For Kirkland on the other hand, ballet was an art. She infused her dancing with emotional drive. For her, the movement was a means to an end, not an end unto itself.

She slides out of the dress and returns it to its place downstage center. What follows is a series of high-energy steps and combinations with the legs flung away from the center of the body. Some of the quick pirouettes and changes in direction from the beginning of the ballet are repeated but with a much less anguished dynamic. Her pattern of movement is more loose and thrown as opposed to the directed movements of the first section.

The possibility of classical movement to communicate to audiences is the crux of my interest in the feminist discourse on ballet. The question is whether ballet can dispose of the baggage some scholars found it was carrying and still function as a valid means of artistic expression for women, even if they are wearing pink tights and pointe shoes.

What feminist scholars proposed in their first wave of criticism is that ballet consciously displays an idealized icon of femininity cooked up by the powers of Western patriarchy. The early arguments of Ann Daly, Susan Leigh Fosler and Christy Adair used
the historical record and Laura Mulvey's "male gaze theory" to equate classical ballet with the explicitation of women on the proscenium stage. If this is the case, then classical ballet can not be an effective means of artistic expression for women because female artists have no control over how they are presented and therefore, have no control over what is communicated to the audience. It relates to Fokine's own questions about ballet, as a means of display (particularly of the ballerina) for the distinct purpose of entertaining, or pleasing, the audience.

As time and scholarship progressed, the tone of the conversation turned from one of condemnation to exploration, with scholars recognizing holes in the historical record, investigating the very movement of classical dance and questioning gaze theory. This shift has opened up a new realm of study into classical ballet that allows for the power of the ballerina in the already established patriarchal structure. She not only has wiggle room, but the ability to take down walls and become an active participant in her own making.

This thesis is not meant to be a comprehensive examination of women in ballet. Neither is it meant as a rereading of the classical ballet canon as Sally Banes and Christy Adair have done in their books. Rather it explores the main themes that surface in early and more recent feminist writings dealing with how women create—or are prohibited from creating—their own images on the ballet stage. I have chosen to contribute to this research by including my performance of Limber's ballet. In my role as dancer, I am able to directly contribute to discourse on the ballerina's ability to communicate to audiences through her physical power and emotional expression. As someone who has seen the
ballet several times, I can also articulate the kinesthetic response and speak to the expressive reach of Imber's choreography from an audience member's point of view.

In my first chapter, I pinpoint some of the main ideas explored by scholars such as Banes, Adair, Daly, Foster, Carter, Albright and Marianne Goldberg, describing how those ideas surface and evolve through their writings. The second closely examines the structure of Imber's ballet and seeks to discover how her dancer communicates with the audience through the choreography. The third chapter investigates the idea that classical ballet, as a movement form, so privileges geometry over expressive content that the possibility for expression is lost. I use my experience as a dancer to decode the relevance of Imber's dynamic choices in an effort to build a dramatic framework for her ballet. The fourth chapter focuses on my personal journey with this dance from the beginnings of rehearsal to the final performance. I have included Jane O'Dea's writings on music performance and Sondra Hutton Fraleigh's book Dance and the Lived Body as they had a major impact on my process towards finding my own voice as a performer.

Because I have seen this ballet from all sides, writing about it has been a challenge. The audience member informs the performer, the performer whispers to the scholar, and the scholar pokes the audience member. In addition, there is the character to contend with. As I worked with this ballet, the line between performer and character blurred. It became unclear when the performer was making decisions to access the character and when the character's momentum took charge of the performance. I am making an attempt in this paper to give each aspect of the performance situation a voice: the performer, the character and the audience. My last chapter asks the question, "What did you see?" and seeks to determine how my audience, over three performances in
February, received this ballet. In looking at actual audience reactions to the ballet I make an effort to understand how performer and character conquer the distance.

At the very end of the dance, she tosses the dress above her head, but instead of falling to the floor she walks backwards allowing the dress to fall down her body. The light fades out on dancer and gown as she continues to back away, chest thrown back and arms reaching up to the heavens.

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1 Rising, or springing up on pointe or demi-pointe; see Appendix C.
2 The tips of the dancer's toes in pointe shoes
3 See appendix C.
4 See appendix C.
5 One of the five positions of the feet in classical ballet in which the legs are turned out and crossed so that the front foot meets the back, heels to toes.
6 One of the five positions of the feet in which the legs are turned out and the heel is tucked together while the toes of each foot are open away from each other.
7 See appendix C.
8 See appendix C.
9 See appendix C.
10 A position in which the "working" leg (or the leg that is not supporting the body at the moment) is positioned to the front of the body and in such a way so that, if the whole body is facing the diagonal, the legs are not crossed to the audience. See appendix C.
11 With the tip of the toes maintaining contact with the floor, the leg is stretched straight to the back. See appendix C.
12 Stepping into an arabesque en pointe with a piqué as opposed to a releve; See appendix C.
13 Of course the real question is, what was Petipa's intention. As a choreographer, how did he see the delicate interplay of technical skill and emotional expression? While this question is beyond the scope of my current research, I do believe, as does Sally Banes, that there are expressive elements built into his ballet and that it would be a mistake to write his ballets off as mere technical display. However, this is not Kirkland's main concern. The following quotations indicate that she brought her own artistry to the choreography as opposed to what was already there. In the end, her testimony speaks to the "potential" for expression in Petipa's ballet as opposed to its certainty.
CHAPTER 1

The Other Side

I have started wondering over the past several years, why classical ballet is so thrilling for me. I have been known to come alive before a video screen, screaming at it like a crazed sports fanatic in the middle of any one of the masterpieces of the classical canon. Despite my desire to embrace alternative movement aesthetics and training styles, I always come back sooner or later, championing Petipa and pointe shoes. "Why?" I keep asking myself, "Why, why, why?" Ballet is hard, painful and often unpleasant. Then it happened again...I watched the dancing.

One afternoon, I sat down in front of American Ballet Theatre in Ohio State's music and dance library. For me, the highlight of ABT's concert video titled "Variety and Virtuosity" was the grand pas de deux from Don Quixote danced by Paloma Herrera and Angel Corella. Anyone who has seen this particular divertissement from Marius Petipa's Spanish inspired ballet, knows it to be a stowpiece complete with over-the-head lifts and the infamous thirty-two fouettés. While these individual moments were beautifully performed, they are not what I remember.

In the first section of the grand pas de deux, there is a movement sequence in which Herrera, after completing a sustained promenade with Corella, releases his hand
and balances in *attitude derrière* without his aid. There she is, poised on the tip of one *pointe* shoe, confidence suspending her almost in midair. Corella is not far away so that when her balance falters, or when the music dictates, he is there to offer his hand and move her into the next sequence of movements. The first balance goes off without a hitch: Corella withdraws and reoffers his hand as Herrera executes a beautiful *attitude* balance. In the middle of the second balance, Herrera shows no signs of falling so Corella offers his hand at the appropriate point in the music to move her into the next combination. Instead of taking it, Herrera stretches her balance to the furthest possible point in the music, and walks past her partner, ignoring his outstretched hand, and takes her place for the next bit of choreography on her own. Seeing that she needs no assistance out of her *attitude*, Corella moves in time to strike a lovely *tendu* behind her.

I nearly screamed aloud when Herrera did not take her partner’s hand. To me it was the answer to what I had been reading for so long and trying so hard to sort out. How does one articulate the physical and expressive power of the ballerina? I was sure that the answer was in Herrera’s decision to walk past Corella’s outstretched hand.

After watching this sequence several more times, I am not sure whether this moment was a choreographic one or if it was simply one of those freak balances that occasionally surprises dancers in the middle of a performance. Either way, the effect created by Herrera’s not taking Corella’s hand is significant because in a very obvious way, she is taking control of her position on the stage in relation to him. When I watched the video at home, I glared at the piles of books and papers around my apartment and yelled, “Did you SEE that?”
When scholars began applying feminist theory to ballet, the emphasis was on the ways classical ballet performance—"defined and redefined bodies," as well as discovering the "relationship between [those] images and the role and the status of women in society" (Dempster 23, Carter, *Man as Creative Master, Woman as Responsive Muse* 34). What it did not do was investigate how women functioned within ballet performance and how they shaped it through their contributions. As a result of scholars' theories, female ballet dancers were at an immediate disadvantage in the discourse.

Ballet became immobilized by its discourse, trapped as a product of patriarchy. The ballerina stood, *en pointe*, body facing front, a motionless object transfixed in and by the voyeuristic gaze of the audience. (Carter, *Dying Swans or Sitting Ducks* 92)

Herrera stands no chance with Ann Daly, Christy Adair, Susaa Leigh Foster and Elizabeth Dempster who focus in their articles and books on the ballerina as an object of sexual desire and a manipulated ornament. Despite her physical presence, these scholars argue that the ballerina is muted by the very fact that she is participating in an art form developed and codified by European patriarchy.4 Ironically, is an art form populated mostly by female artists "the expression of women's experience [...] is not evident" (Adair, Briginshaw and Lynn 30). The ballerina has no control, no opinion and no voice.

These same scholars, and others among them such as Ann Cooper Albright, Sally Baees and Marianne Goldberg, have found strength in women's performing ballet by challenging the theories on which her weakness is built. Although it is impossible to ignore the sexual politics of woman as displayed object, scholars are broadening their inquiries to include the performer's role in her own making.
One of the key elements of classical ballet performance is frontal presentation of the body. Dancers perform on a prosceunium stage that literally frames the action for the audience and the movement is choreographed so that whoever is sitting in the theater has the best view of the geometric shapes and patterns the dancers make with their bodies. Additionally, classical ballet's movement vocabulary is designed to open the body as much as possible with legs and arms rotating outward from the center. Oftentimes, especially in the ballets of Marius Petipa, the choreography is physically demanding and noticeably athletic, drawing even more attention to the body and what it can accomplish. Because women are the primary and most numerous dancers in classical ballet, their participation in an art form that unabashedly displays the body is problematic and complicated. What could be thought of as a specific nineteenth-century European aesthetic and genre of art making, takes on the complexities of twentieth and twenty-first century sexual politics. While I agree that the presentation of women on the ballet stage is not entirely benign, sexual politics need not obscure ballet, completely shutting it off as a means of expression for contemporary female artists.

A number of scholars have adopted “male gaze” theory to define female ballet artists as objects of sexual desire. In beginning to look critically at women in ballet, Foster, Daly, Adair, Albright and Derapster began applying Laura Mulvey's research in film to live performance and used it to explain the ballerina's position as an object of desire.

She, like a divining, rod, trembling, erect, responsive, which he handles, also channels the energy of all the eyes focused upon her, yet even as she commands the audience’s gaze, she achieves no tangible or enduring identity. Her personhood is eclipsed by the attention she receives, by the need for her to dance
in front of everyone. [...] She is attraction itself which he presents for all the world to see. (Foster, The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe 2)

In Adair's reading of the male gaze, the fact that the dancer is there in the theater with the audience instead of being represented on film makes the gaze even more potent:

Dance provides an ideal opportunity for the voyeur. Sitting in the dark of the auditorium the spectator is offered the body endlessly displayed to gratify the desire of the looker. The woman is not as remote as she might appear on the screen. She is there in the flesh constantly exposed. (Adair 79)

Gaze theory positioned the ballerina as a "spectacle, as an object to be admired, as a vision of beauty, and as a site of pleasure," effectively killing the two-way relationship between audience and performer (Albright 34). It rendered the performer completely passive and silent in the dialogue.

More recently, Daly, along with Carter and Albright, has found reason to question the previous application of gaze theory to dance, citing the inherent differences between live dance performance and film. All three disagree with Adair's assessment and recognize that live performance creates a more active audience, which is directly affected by the presence of living, moving art. Albright goes further in offering Jessica Benjamin's "'intersubjective' model of desire" in which "one can move closer or further away from another without either losing intimacy or risking incorporation" (Albright 39). Applying Benjamin's theory to performance allows for a different relationship between audience and performer in which both can interact in the space that separates them. The relationship is more cooperative and the dancer is not in danger of losing her autonomy in the process.

While everyone is looking at the ballerina, she is performing movements that reflect the qualities of Western "tradition, chivalry and [...] hierarchy of all kinds"
positioning her as “difference” (Daly, *Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference* 58). For the ballerina, the concept of “difference” in relation to the male dancer means that she is “grace incarnate” while her partner is the epitome of “strength/action” (Daly, *Discourse of Difference* 59). Her movement vocabulary as well as her relationship with her male partner is dictated by this classification. In her solo work, she is quick, long and elegant, perching on the tips of her toes with apparent ease. When dancing with her partner, she is lifted, turned and presented, appearing so light and airy that she might simply slip right through his fingers. “She is so insubstantial yet so resilient” (Foster, *Phallic Pointe* 13).

The classical *pas de deux* is the element of classical ballet that most obviously reflects the concept of “difference” between male and female ballet dancers. With the ballerina in *pointe* shoes being supported by her male partner, the *pas de deux* emphasizes her lofty ethereality, widening the gap between his activity and her passivity. He is placed firmly on the ground while she is literally removed from it.

Both Daly and Foster have analyzed the choreographic structure of the classical *pas de deux* at length. They have concluded that this performance situation puts the ballerina at a great disadvantage, as her male partner is seemingly in control of her body at all times. In the third movement of George Balanchine’s *The Four Temperaments* “[t]he danseur puts the ballerina through an extraordinary sequence of precarious moves and off-kilter positions that render her totally vulnerable to his control” (Daly, *The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers* 10). Daly makes it clear that in watching the *pas de deux* the overwhelming message is that the ballerina is not in control of her own body. Reading her account is almost scary, as it calls to mind a
woman being so displaced spatially that she has to trust her partner completely to save
her from falling. He comes across as not only strong, but also ruthless and bullying.

In Foster's analysis of the classical pas de deux structure, the emphasis is much
more on the sexual implications of a man who repeatedly approaches, touches and
manipulates; and the woman who allows him to do this.

She touches his arms, hands, and shoulders, whereas he touches her arms and
hand; and also her waist, thighs, buttocks, and armpits. (Foster, Phallic Pointe 1)

She is consistently put forward, lifted high and rotated around. He shows her to the
audience at every angle while she properly submits. The male dancer retains all
ownership of her body in his ability to give her away so easily. She has no power because
1) she is so exposed; 2) she does not seem to mind.

Sally Banes points out in her book, Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage,
that there is a danger in studying the pas de deux the way Foster has presented it—as a
choreographic structure that always looks and operates in the same manner no matter
which ballet it is in. According to Banes, the "choreographic distinctions among various
pas de deux that give rise to expressive difference" render a general examination of the
pas de deux in terms of how it presents and represents women on the ballet stage void.

She cites the different narrative situations that surround the grands pas de deux in
classical ballets such as Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty and The Nutcracker. For her,
they are examples of choreography that empower the ballerina by allowing her to
"expand" in terms of the movement she is able to perform, while her partner is "reduced"
to being her prop (Banes 62).
The problem with Banes's argument is that the \textit{pas de deux} she mentions all use the same basic movement vocabulary and set of formal codes present in all classical \textit{pas de deux}. Three of them (the Black Swan \textit{pas de deux} as well as the \textit{grand pas de deux} from \textit{The Sleeping Beauty} and \textit{The Nutcracker}) use Petipa's formula (\textit{adagio}, man's \textit{variation}, woman's \textit{variation}, \textit{coda})\. Structurally they are all very similar. All of the elements Foster and Daly cite to support their hypothesis of female subordination are there. He does lift, manipulate and present her.

The difference is in how each author recognizes the physical contributions of the ballerina to the partnership and how they each read the relationship between man and woman. Banes gives the ballerina agency and a means of asserting herself within the structure of the \textit{pas de deux} while the other two authors do not. Furthermore, Banes's argument allows for the possibility of emotional expression within it. Not only is the ballerina's movement vocabulary expanded by the \textit{pas de deux}, but also within its structure, she has the ability to express emotion and drive the plot of the ballet.

As with \textit{gaze} theory, some proponents of the concept of "difference" have begun questioning its relevance in studying classical ballet and the way women function within it. Its strict binary system locks women into the position of "Other, defined according to the fantasies and power of men" (Daly, \textit{Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis} 2). There is nowhere for her to escape. Carter and Goldberg suggest that this binary system can be made more "fluid" to allow for changing conceptions of what is feminine and what is masculine, since the notion that women are physically and emotionally weak while men are strong and unwavering is constructed socially "rather than on physical or physiological facts" (Goldberg, \textit{Homogenized Ballerinas} 305).

there is no firm (physical) ground on which the concept of “difference” can stand, “difference” can easily be broken down and questioned so that women are not immediately undone by the idea that by being different, they are subordinate.

Ballet is about illusion. In the classical story ballets, audiences are transported to exotic locations where everyone sparkles with jewels. Spells are cast, the peasantry celebrates the kind rulers and order is restored in the end. Furthermore, it is about trained bodies executing movement that exudes harmony, equilibrium and symmetry with the greatest of ease. This is a difficult concept to contend with because the ballerina’s great physical effort is often funneled into characters and movement that emphasizes her role as the passive princess and yielding partner.

One of the most striking paradoxes of the classical ballet genre is that this most athletic, physically demanding of dance forms harnesses the considerable strength, stamina, and will of the female dancer in service of narratives representing female passivity, dependence, and frailty. (Denipster 27)

Indeed, Adair can barely contain herself when writing about the horrible injustice that is Petipa’s The Sleeping Beauty:

When the prince arrives at the castle, his power is evident. He kisses the sleeping princess and immediately she moves. He is so supreme that he can banish one hundred years’ sleep with the touch of his lips. The final scene portrays the good Lilac Fairy blessing the marriage of the united heterosexual couple at her feet. This, we remember, is how it is meant to be. (Adair 105)

The image here is of feminine passivity and acquiescence. Aurora not only literally unconsciously waits for her prince to rescue her, she exercises no personal preference but binds herself to the first man who comes along. Hopefully the Lilac Fairy has good taste in men.

Banes’s Aurora is present, physical and in charge of her space.
[A]though Aurora occasionally allows Prince Desiré to lift her, she more often runs away from him, slipping out of his reach to lose herself in the formation of the corps de ballet. She then dances a solo variation full of high extensions and unsupported, complex turns. It is a metaphor for her artlessness, autonomy, balance, and control, but also for her grief. (Banes 57)

Banes turns to the immediate physical presence of the ballerina and the complex difficult movement she performs. In reading about her "unsupported" exploits, it is easy to envision Aurora as a woman who would grab Desiré's hand and introduce him to the court upon her return to consciousness. She is not one to stare doe-eyed, but one who whips out piroettes and balances long in the grand pas de deux.

As Banes explains in her book, fairy-tales are women-centered systems of teaching social values to both boys and girls, but this is beside the point. Whether or not literary scholars choose to read The Sleeping Beauty as the one that "most drastically endorses female docility and passivity" is not important (Banes 46). What is important is that at the center of the performance structure is a woman who is physically strong, technically skilled and a creative artist. Contrary to what Adair has written about the basic framework of The Sleeping Beauty, "when the story [...] is staged, especially in dance terms—which require action—it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to depict the protagonist as passive and immobile" (Banes 49). The ballerina is physically present and active as a participant in the choreographic structure of the ballet therefore she can never be literally passive as Adair suggests.

Negotiating between the messages of the literary tale and its representation through classical ballet performance is complicated, but necessary to the discussion of how women create their own images on the stage. In studying the ballets from the classical era, it is important to consider the socio-political climate in which the ballets
were performed, as Banes has done in her analysis of Petipa’s *The Sleeping Beauty*. In performing these ballets today, dancers must be aware of that tradition in order to fully understand their role in bringing, what is essentially a historical artifact, to life.

What is even more complicated is the fact that the movement itself, aside from its context within the plot, is constructed to uphold now outmoded concepts of femininity that associate women with lightness, grace and agreeing deference. As I mentioned earlier in my discussion of “difference” and the *pas de deux*, female ballet dancers perform a movement vocabulary that is distinctly different from that of their male counterparts. However, as Foster points out, both male and female dancers expend huge amounts of effort in order to perform their given choreography.

Both *he* and *she* dare to accomplish so much and dare to mask the effort necessary to make their bodily shapings, rhythmic phrasings, and complex exchanges of weight appear so effervescent. *Both* *she* and *he* sweat to make the choreographer’s vision manifest just as they erase their faces of the tension inherent in their exertion and modulate the energy through their limbs so as to render their labor effortless in appearance. Perspiration marks slowly appearing around armpits, groin, abdomen, or backs only make the masking of their effort more miraculously convincing. (Foster, *Phallic Puma* 2)

Physical effort is hidden so that even the most difficult choreography appears simple. For the performer, this means that movement is executed with a consistently smooth ease that accentuates the body’s verticality. A great ballerina will make the most difficult movements seem smooth and silent no matter how much physical effort is going into her performance. She skims the floor with the tips of her toes and jumps without the pull of gravity. The ballerina’s consistent effortless appearance is absolute. Whether the character she is dancing is angry, joyous or going insane, the aesthetic demands that her easy verticality remain central to her performance.
But why is a channel swimmer required for the part of hummingbird, fitly or otherwise? (Daly, *Hummingbirds* 14)

Why are physically powerful bodies used to portray lightness, grace and acquiescence? The question for me is why don’t more scholars see the strength and power of the ballerina’s movement? Aurora dances a variation in Act I and, as Banes sees it...

She takes pure, unself-conscious physical pleasure in her powers; she is self-celebratory, proud in the positive, Greek sense. (Banes 56)

Why then is the illusion of lightness and ease the point of inquiry instead of the reality of the ballerina’s physical effort and power?

Scholars do see the strength and power of the ballerina. They unapologetically admit to enjoying the ballet despite their guilt at momentarily ignoring the politics of it all. It is what Carter refers to as “the tingle factor” (*Dying Swans* 92).

The ballerina is, after all, gulp, magnetically magical. An object of revulsion while under feminist scrutiny, she nonetheless enchants us.” (Foster, *Phallic Pointe* 3)

I have no argument with the fact that classical ballet unapologetically displays the bodies of its female participants. Neither do I argue with the fact that classical ballet is founded on the concept of gender “difference” assigning a different dynamic quality to men than it does to women. And yes... *pointe* shoes do often lead to bloody toes.

Presentation, gender difference and physical discomfort are all parts of classical ballet performance, but rather than silencing female artists, they offer performers another language with which to express themselves. Far from being muted, female ballet dancers are loud in their physical language, bridging the gap between audience and performer, actively pulling patrons into their environments.

23
After first giving up on her as lost to the shackles of Western patriarchy, dance scholars have continued digging into the ballerina's image, questioning her existence from different angles that have given her more depth and greater autonomy.

How is representation created? Whose point of view does it embody? What role does it have in the spectator's construction of everyday realities? [...] How can women represent themselves on stage without being co-opted by the conventions and expectations of the male gaze? Is it possible for women to reconstruct their own standards of beauty that need not depend on becoming the object of male desire? (Daly, *Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis*)

Daly, Albright, Goldberg and Carter have offered varied answers that range from a rereading of the historical record to reconsidering the binary structures of classical ballet and toying with the idea of a sort of "indifference." Each of them goes on to offer new ways of answering their budding questions that utilize the methodologies employed by feminist scholars in a variety of disciplines. Applying new methodologies to the study of ballet from a feminist point of view will broaden the way scholars and audiences read classical performance that includes the physical experience and power of the female performer.

One of the most important things scholars can do to further investigate how classical ballet performance shapes women and vice versa, is to recognize the dancer's role as interpreter. Instead of focusing on the classically trained body as a machine and mere clay for choreographers, scholars can explore how the dancer takes an active part in her making. In order to fully understand the role of the performer in the creation of live dance performance, scholars must recognize the active role of the dancer and her skill to interpret, through her "lived body" (to borrow a phrase from Sondra Horton Fraleigh), the
movement imparted to her by the choreographer. This interpretation does not render her less “real” or less “human,” but names her “translator,” “interpreter” and “artist.” 11

In Dying Swans, Carter has pointed out that studying the dancer as interpreter also gives scholars a way into the classical canon that has been so derided by past feminist readings. “[C]umulative nuances of interpretation by the performer will offer the possibility of nuances of interpretation by the viewer,” further educating audiences on the complexities of ballet performance. When viewers see something different, they will come to understand the dancing, and the dancer, in a new way. In addressing the perceived passivity of the Balanchine ballerina in the third movement of The Four Temperaments, Daly also mentions the audience. While Daly was charging the audience to look past the seemingly innocuous shapes and rhythms created by the couple to “recognize ballet as a cultural institution that represents and thus inscribes gender behavior in everyday life,” her suggestion that audiences look past and through the immediate images is important (Daly, Hummingbirds 19). Such careful looking and “reading,” in combination with further research in movement analysis and the historical record, will undoubtedly lead to the ballerina’s emancipation from early feminist readings.

No source is clearer than the autobiographies and memoirs of ballerinas in discovering their roles as interpreters of ballets. In Holding on to Air, Suzanne Farrell gives a more complete picture of Balanchine’s choreography than Bernard Taper does in his biography. Farrell has been in it, faced its challenges and was challenged to make decisions about how her body acted and reacted to its elements. Gelsey Kirkland’s second memoir, The Shape of Love, describing her time dancing with The Royal Ballet, and
recounts her personal preparation for, and performance of, her roles as Juliet and Aurora. Her description of each character’s complexity, and her exploration of how to express their lives through the classical vocabulary offers insight into how the “mechanical” movement of ballet can be infused with emotional expression.

The woman’s ability to create illusion is a position of power. She can make the audience see past the “natural” human condition into metaphor and “man” made artistic expression. She has the power to travel where others can not and to illuminate the world on the other side. She is why we watch.

When Corella offered his hand and Herrera purposefully refused it, it was (as Bebe Miller put it in her conversation with William Forsythe) “the gift of watching someone think, in public.” Yes, when they danced together, my eyes were glued to Herrera. I didn’t offer much attention to Corella’s tendus and clean terre à terre positions when her body was fully extended to the farthest reaches of my television monitor. However, their partnership was a living, breathing organism in which their characters teased and chased each other. Maybe it is because I am in love with classical ballet’s aesthetics that I find so much power in Petipa’s women. Maybe because classical partnering was a technique I never mastered that I am aware of the skill both dancers possess in order to present the ballerina to the audience. What I do know is that Corella offered his hand and his partner did not take it. She finished on her own terms, walked right past him and joined him again when the choreography dictated. What a woman. I am sure Petipa was applauding in his grave.
1 This refers to the *pas de deux* performed by the principle dancers in the ballet, usually near the end of the ballet. Oftentimes, it is in the context of a wedding.

2 See appendix C (*fouetté rond de jambe en tournant*).

3 Here, "Corella" supports Herrera while he walks around her, slowly turning her body around itself.

4 *Attitude* performed to the back. See appendix C.

5 See appendix B.

6 These points about ballet's foundation in European patricracy and the historical record that recognizes the creative efforts of male artists and neglects many women are very important in the discussion of how women create their own images. Although I do mention it here, I do not go into detail. There is simply not enough room to discuss Lambe's work in terms of ballet's historical tradition. However, it is important to note that she is a female choreographer working in a form that is dominated aristocratically by men—at least in the current historical record. A further investigation of her work in this light would contribute to scholars' efforts to add more women's names to ballet's history.

7 See appendix C.

8 This is a structure in which the dancers perform an opening *pas de deux* followed by solos for each of them and a grand finale in which they each perform highly technical, impressive steps from the classical vocabulary. See appendix C.

9 What I am referring to here is the idea I mentioned earlier—that the line that separates man from woman in ballet can be "fluid" to allow for alternative meanings of what it means to be feminine and what it means to be masculine. Instead of looking at the sexes as being inherently different and owning a specific set of dynamic characteristics, we can recognize that these ideas are based on cultural codes that can be rewritten to accommodate new ways of art making.

10 Both Carter and Daly point out that "[r]ather than being defined by any particular methodology, feminist analysis is distinguished by its point of view" (Daly, *Unlimited Partnership* 2).

11 In her article, *The Politics of Method*, choreographer Stephanie Skurs makes the point that oftentimes when dancers learn movement from a choreographer, something is lost in the translation. "Watching a choreographer teaching is like watching a dabbed movie" (Skurs 185). In performing the movement of another artist, the dancer ends up looking like a poor facsimile, separating her from what is genuinely human. This is an interesting concept in talking about classical ballet in which dancers not only learn choreography from the person running rehearsal, but are often learning movement that has been passed down through generations. Recognizing the artistry and creativity inherent in performing movement that is so far removed from the source or original inspiration not only empowers the ballerina, but also benefits the choreography that could become stale after so many translations.

12 At a recent event at The Wexner Center for the Arts (November 2002), William Forrythe spoke with Bette Miller in front of an audience of dance enthusiasts. She made fun comments in response to a discussion revolving around improvisational structures in performance.

13 Movement that is close to the ground. See appendix C.
CHAPTER 2

Form and Formula

The Dad

Imber’s performer appears before the audience first in nothing but a lavender leotard, pink tights, pointe shoes and a spotlight. A situation that my father later remarked on after one of my performances,…

...the costume is too skimpy. I wonder what the feminists would think. This may be fostering the male gaze theory.¹

My dad has a point. There are display mechanisms at work in this ballet just as there are in other ballets with classical foundations. Furthermore, the concept of “difference” is firmly embedded in the choreography. However, unlike Ann Daly, Susan Leigh Foster and Cristy Adair who equate display with passivity and “difference” with dominance, I do not view these elements as immediately limiting. In these structures is the possibility for action and expression.

The female performer in Bess Imber’s A Woman: England, 1942 executes steps straight out of the ballet dictionary in her tights and leotard. Her pointe shoes elongate her legs making them draw clear lines in space as she balances and turns with apparent ease. She even stands firmly on one toe tip while her partner supports her by the hand. Imber
manipulates these elements—the movement and the man—to create a different image of woman than the one cited by scholars such as Daly, Foster and Adair. Given her expansive movement language, it is all but impossible to find in Imber's dancer the dominated ballerina.

No one is more aware of the physical action and emotional rending of this ballet than those of us who have performed it. It is impossible to ignore a pounding heart and the force of momentum. For ten minutes, you slip into someone else's skin and under the crush of stage lights, expose her to faces you can not see. You lay her bare because her life is worth watching, her story worth telling, and you—as the performer—are in charge. All roads lead to the power of the female ballet dancer and her ability to lead the audience where she wants them to go. The first thing to determine is whether or not the audience can be led.

The Tingle

Scholars admit to a strong physical connection between audience and performer.

Cynthia Novack describes watching a performance featuring New York City Ballet ballerina Merrill Ashley:

A short time into the dance, I found myself gasping audibly at Ashley's particularly subtle phrasing. Inexorably, it seemed, Ashley brought me into the ballet with her simultaneous appearance of natural ease and deliberate control. The uniqueness of her presence, her awkward, Amazonian race, invited my attention to the particular qualities of other dancers on stage as well, while the clarity of her movement repeatedly illuminated the choreography. All the performers seemed to me inspired, intelligent and very human. (44)

While they own this sometimes incomprehensible joy in watching ballet, scholars are quick to toss it aside in order to accommodate sexual politics and the evils of gender
stereotyping as if their first gut reaction was sadly misinformed. As I mentioned in the last chapter, many discussions revolving around women and ballet focus on her passivity as opposed to her activity. I object to the idea that the formal elements of classical ballet serve only to display and objectify women. With scholars’ accusations, the possibility for artistic expression for women within this formal structure is lost.

Acknowledging and naming the “tingle factor” as Alexandra Carter has done does two things (Dying Swans or Sitting Ducks 92). First, it recognizes the presence of an audience member’s kinesesthetic response, or their immediate bodily reaction to the performer’s movement. In every case, this response is overwhelmingly positive. Foster, Adair, Novack and Carter are reacting to what is immediately evident: the physical presence and power of the ballerina. It is only after these scholars stop and think about the societal implications of the ballerina in relation to all of the cultural and sexual connotations of her dancing that they question their positive response. All discussions of psychoanalytic theory aside, if the writing of these scholars can be a gauge, ballet audiences relate positively to the ballerina. Sure, many young girls want to be the princess, but they want to be the active princess, the one that even in sleep stretches her legs and goes out into the forest to seek out her prince.

Secondly, opening up the discussion to include the kinesesthetic response of the audience drastically changes the relationship it has with the performer. Acknowledging that the audience positively reacts as a result of what the performer is doing is proof that the dancer is not completely passive as in the case of gaze theory. As she says in her description of Ashley’s dancing, “it was Ashley who ‘brought’ Novack ‘into the ballet with her simultaneous appearance of natural ease and deliberate control’ and ‘invited’
Novack's "attention to the particular qualities of other dancers on stage as well." Instead of being an object at the mercy of the audience's gaze, the ballerina actively communicates with people in the darkened theater. Imber's ballet plays off this idea that the performer has the power to lead the audience into a world of her own making.

The Dress

The first moments on stage were conceived to immediately pull the audience into the character's world. In silence, the performer pulls the dress to her, examining it carefully inch by inch until she is ready to lay it at the foot of the stage. The more she attends to the gown as opposed to the position and attitude of her body, the more the audience senses the importance of what she holds in her hands. From the beginning of the ballet then, the choreographer has moved the focus—despite the leotard and tights—from the ballerina's body to the gown, immediately upsetting what is traditionally expected from classical ballet.

The gown is also important because it directs the performer's attention away from the audience. Instead of consistently projecting her energy and her focus out, into the auditorium, her eyes do not penetrate the walls that hold her. This is especially important given where the first interaction with the dress takes place. In the ballet of the classical era, the ballerina would typically occupy the center of the stage while her eyes focused out to the audience. Her costume and smile would shine past the fourth wall and into the waiting embrace of audience members. Imber's dancer does the exact opposite. While the performer places herself physically as close to the audience as possible, on the very downstage edge of the stage, her eyes do not launch her further into patrons' space.
Instead she brings her focus into the gown, drawing the audience with her. With audience members drawn into her space, she can guide their eyes, shifting the focus from her body to the texture of her environment, showing them what is crucial to her character's story. She is no longer a framed icon but a kind of bizarre tour guide in another realm.

The Difference

Imber's choice of vocabulary is significant. First of all, the movement, with few exceptions, is taken from classical ballet as opposed to movement Imber developed out of her own investigations. Imber's choreography quotes directly from classical ballet vocabulary in terms of the steps she uses (pirouettes, cabriole, développé, grand jeté, arabesque, pas de bourrée) as well as adhering to the traditional placement of the body so that important action happens center stage and everything is shaped so the audience has the best view of the dancer's body. For example the first movement combination of the piece begins with a piqué fouetté to arabesque. While she adds George Balanchine's more neo-classical arms (stretched elbows and flexed wrists) the movement is easily recognizable as part of the classical vocabulary.

The piqué fouetté is also easily recognized as part of the female vocabulary because of its emphasis on the sustained "up" that finishes the movement and its long, open position. With few exceptions, all of the steps Imber has pulled from the classical tradition are those that are considered within feminine codes of movement. When she does use steps usually reserved for men (tour en l'air or brisé volé) she tones them down from their athletic extremities. When her performer executes a tour en l'air it is a single, where men usually do doubles, and the brisé volé occurs once instead of several
times in a row.11 Thus, Imber stays within the “confines” of “female” ballet movement even though she builds on it to create a different image of the performer within it.

Daly, Adair and Foster have attacked this idea of “difference” in classical ballet because it is built on outmoded conceptions of femininity vs. masculinity. Since the vocabulary usually assigned to women in classical ballet emphasizes lightness and ethereality scholars have linked this to weakness. Even without this link, any “difference” equals dominance because it sets up women as the “other” in opposition to what is “natural.”12 However, as Imber shows in her ballet, the use of female vocabulary does not automatically mean that the character is weak and/or passive. On the contrary, this kind of movement has many possibilities and a huge expressive range.

The long penché13 balance that happens in the first few minutes of the ballet is a fine example of a movement that is typically named “female” because of its attention to flexibility, balance and sustained lightness. It is an ordinary movement especially within the context of the classical pas de deux, but here it is done without the aid of a male partner and on a flat foot as opposed to en pointe. The performer stands on her left leg with her right bent behind her (attitude derrière). After turning herself half way around with small movements of her left heel, she tips forward from her hip, arching her back and stretching her right thigh farther and farther to the ceiling. The desired effect is to split the legs far apart while the stemmus descends to the floor, all while maintaining a sense of the vertical.

Despite the fact that Imber uses movement taken directly from the vocabulary reserved for women in ballet, the quality of the movement is not always what is thought of as being “feminine.” The performer does not always “float” and “waft.” She also
“stabs,” “thrusts,” “kicks,” “falls” and “casapots” her body throughout space. She can go from a light, skittering pas de bourrée one moment to a grounded run across the stage the next. Not only does the movement become more “active” with this aggressive approach to gravity signaling a physically stronger body, but also the change from one dynamic quality to the other communicates a complex character to the audience.

While examples of this run throughout the piece, it is very noticeable at the conclusion of the penché I mentioned above. Typically, the ballerina would sustain going down into the penché and straighten back up on her standing leg with the same quality, seamlessly moving into the next series of movements. In this ballet, the performer recovers from the penché at the bottom, at the point where her upper body is closest to the floor. Instead of maintaining the sustained quality she used when bending over her hip, she jerks herself into a tendu devant that seems to go through the floor instead of float over it. This tendu launches her into a series of running jumps that move her forward in space. Therefore, the penché, instead of emphasizing the verticality and lightness of the performer reads more as a gathering of energy before an explosion.

The Shoes

The dancer on pointe is the classic expression of the academic dancer. As a result, she cannot be anything else but perfect, free and convincing. (Cecchetti 49)

Pointe shoes first play into the gender differences in classical ballet performance since female dancers are trained to perform in them and men are not. While Banes disagrees, the most damning criticism of the pointe shoe is that within it lies the expectation that women are delicate, ethereal and soft, while men are grounded, strong
and of this world. Female classical variations are often choreographed to highlight the ballerina's skill in the shoes by including a variety of relevés, turns, balances and jumps on pointe to the exclusion of higher jumps and multiple turns that are left for the man. Furthermore, as cited by Foster and Daly, the pointe shoe makes the ballerina look less sure of herself and therefore more dependent on her male partner in the classical pas de deux structure.

The argument that male choreographers are still creating ballets that position the female dancer as the lighter, more ethereal partner to her grounded male counterpart is one that can be made. However, Imber stands as an example of a choreographer who is able to look past the historical implications of pointe shoes and use them to show a woman who is much more complex, grounded and stronger than she has been perceived.

There is something very clear that happens because of Imber's decision to use pointe shoes and traditionally female movement: an audience who is familiar with these symbols is alerted to the "femaleness" of the character. Imber uses the symbols of the patriarchy as constructed through classical ballet to give the audience an idea of who this woman is and what type of world she exists in. Considering some scholars' criticism of ballet's history, that it is an art form developed and monitored by the Western patriarchy, it can be said that Imber's placing a solo woman in this movement style directly parallels her character's situation in 1940's Europe. Both performer and character are forced to exist within a world constructed by European men. In this way, classical ballet's connection with Western patriarchy serves the piece instead of sabotaging it.

Regardless of the role of the patriarchy (perceived or otherwise), in this ballet and classical ballet in general, Imber's use of pointe work creates a look of strength and
stability rather than precariousness or passivity. In one section of the piece, the performer executes a single tour en l’air and finishes en pointe with one leg bent and the other stretched to the side. On the tips of her toes, she paddles herself around, her focus down at the floor. Her focus and the effort of pushing herself around in a circle, creates the effect of pulling her body closer to the earth while making her look like she is trying to escape it. In another series Imber uses quick piroettes from fifth en pointe directly after an assemble\(^\text{18}\) that enables the ballerina to change directions quickly. Because she runs into and out of the piroette, this particular movement with its clear attention to the floor makes her appear more manic than ethereal. Imber couples the jumps and turns with a free torso that curves at the top of relevés and allows arms to swing and flail. The active, seemingly out-of-control upper body emphasizes the strength and stability of the lower body supported by feet in pointe shoes. Also in this section of the ballet, relevés are deliberately done so that there is clear energy shooting down instead of the typical emphasis on the “up.” I call to mind scholars who use Bronislava Nijinska’s Les Noces as an example of innovative “stabbing” pointe werk. While Nijinska’s pointes do indeed stab, Imber’s pointes thrust and tear without giving up their ability to sail.\(^\text{19}\)

In one of the softest moments of the ballet, the performer executes a series of relevés in arabesque that slowly turn her en dehors.\(^\text{20}\) It is the familiar moment of the ballerina wafting effortlessly in space. It is soft. It is ethereal. It is gravity defying. It is a point when the character is lost in a moment of reverie, and although it doesn’t last, standing next to the whirling and crazed movement from before, it serves to emphasize the power of the woman on stage.
The Man

Yes, there is a man in this ballet.

Throughout my paper, I refer to this ballet as a solo for a female dancer, which could be somewhat confusing. For Imber, A Woman was always about the woman and her physical action, with the male dancer providing a point of reference for her character in the middle of the ballet. Like a one-man corps de ballet, he occupies the periphery of the stage, almost never coming to the center, framing the female dancer's action and giving it context. In a way, this is no different from how scholars have chosen to describe the relationship between male and female dancers in more traditional classical performance. However, in A Woman, the female performer remains in constant control of their relationship.

What makes him indispensable is that he is the female character's "reason," for her dance. In his presence, the audience comes to understand the female character and the emotions that drive her. He is the reason why she happily drifts about the stage and why she plummet to earth. What is so physically peripheral is the core of Imber's character's emotional state. When he leaves the stage, we still sense him because now we know her a bit better, because we know she sees him in every corner.

The male character is yet another way to explore how the female dancer takes control of this ballet independent of the emotional situation of the character she plays. When the male dancer appears, he does not immediately assume his "active" role as described by Foster. Rather, he takes one that is decidedly passive in comparison to that of the female dancer. First of all, his general movement vocabulary is quite different from hers. While she is executing extremely physical steps and combinations (turns, jumps,
and twisting spine), his movement is more mimetic. His dance is literally more passive as he expends less energy and takes up less space. Instead of reaching for her, taking her hands and manipulating her body, she is the one who routinely reaches for him and actively interacts with his body.

There appear to be some exceptions to this situation in the course of the ballet, but even in those situations when he supports her, she is the one who either breaks the connection or manipulates it to her own advantage. The most telling moment in the ballet is the only time when the two dancers are in a conventional classical partnering position, where the man is standing behind and supporting the woman in a position en pointe. This takes place near the end of the ballet when she walks into fan and uses his hands to support her in a piqué fouetté and a long balance in arabesque. The supported arabesque gives the audience the clue that conventional relationships between men and women still exist within the world of the ballet, but there is something interrupting them. She must continually initiate their interaction in her attempt to be the dutiful partner, standing en pointe and allowing for his support. However, she also shows her independence from, and loathing for, these conventions by choosing when to break that bond and leave him.

The End

In the end, my dad still noticed that I wasn’t wearing much, despite the fact that Imber’s ballet was not designed to showcase my form in a lavender leotard. What blew me away was that he saw other things. The “tingle” got him:

My first thought, as it usually is, I hope she doesn’t screw it up. After a few moments, I was really impressed. You were rock solid […] So after I wasn’t concerned about you falling down or anything like that, I just enjoyed the
performance. [...] you were really good from a technical standpoint, at least as much as I can appreciate that from my perspective. Way to go out in style! [...] the story was really sad. Most of us have a gown, something tangible or in our mind, that represents something great we had at one time and lost, or never had but wanted. At a certain time in our lives we know we can never have it, but we save the reminder, the gown, anyway for hope, but mainly it's a torment. Life is cruel.23

The woman Imber created is a powerhouse. She runs like the wind and can stop on a dime, even in pointe shoes, kicking her legs high and in a lavender leotard. She can embrace her man without feeling like she's selling out and she can question where she is going in that dress—or where it is trying to take her.

We are not strong all the time, and we have to live in the times in which we are born, but we are not slaves to stereotypes. Imber has shown that with her ballet. Formal does not mean stilted, and dancing on one's toes does not mean weak. The audience knows, and they will respond accordingly, even if they are going to go home later and write an article about how ballet subjugates women.

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1 This is an excerpt of an email I received from my dad the day after he saw my performance. The week before he asked for some information on my project so he could answer any questions that my relatives might have. I sent him a draft of the introduction to this paper.

2 "The single factor is acknowledged in feminist critiques, but only in apologia" (Carter Dying Swan 92). "The ballerina is, after all, gulp, magically magical. An object of revulsion while under feminist scrutiny, she nonetheless enchants us" (Foster, The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe 3).

3 "Even when she sleeps, Princess Aurora dreams—and Prince Desiré sees, in an enchanted vision—that she dances.” (Banes 49) Even when she is technically asleep, the ballerina, as Aurora, appears to the prince in a dream-like vision, leading him to the castle with the help of the Lilac Fairy.

4 Choreographer Lisa C. Arkin solved the problem of how women are represented through established dance forms such as ballet by developing movement based on improvisations guided by themes of what it means to be a woman. Arkin, in her article Dancing the Body: Women and Dance Performance, describes a process "called 'dancing the body' that generated dance movement and meaning from the corporeality of the female body and the perceptions sought to it" in an attempt to get away from "the iconographic quality of women's anatomy" present in Western theatrical dance (Arkin 36). In her clear choice to use classical ballet vocabulary and the performance structures associated with it, Imber challenges the notion that the female body is merely an "icon of beauty" in Western theatrical dance (Arkin 36). Instead she calls attention to the fact that even in ballet, the female body can be "a source for creative energy" (Arkin 36).
1 A jump in which the dancer’s legs split apart in the air as she throws her body up and forward into space. See appendix C.

2 See appendix C.

3 The dancer steps on pointe throwing one leg forward and whipping her body around to finish in an arabesque. See appendix C.

4 See introduction.

5 Feuer describes the differing movement vocabularies for both men and women and connects it with the developing technique in the Romantic era: “The Romantic ballet celebrated the principle of distinct vocabularies for male and female dancers—the daintiness and complex footwork, the développé of the leg and extended balances for women and the high leaps, jumps with beats, and multiple pirouettes for men. It rationalized the new technique of pointe work, which added a uterine precariousness to the female dancer’s performance. And it encouraged new conventions of partnering that incorporated new codes for touching, for support, and for the achievement of pleasing configurations. [. . .] By the time of the Romantic ballet partnering included sections of sustained, slowly evolving shapes where “male and female dancers constructed intricate designs, always with the male dancer supporting, guiding, and manipulating the female dancer as she balanced deftly and expertly in fully extended shapes” (Phallic Pointe 4).

6 See appendix C.

7 Because these steps are done in multiple succession, they are often linked to athleticism and masculinity. Not performing them in the way they do avoids confusion as to which realm the performer occupies in this ballet. In terms of classical ballet, the performer is still firmly entrenched in the feminine sphere.

8 In Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference Ann Daly makes the point that the “underlying assumption” of dance writing that focuses on the separation of the sexes in classical ballet movement “is of female difference/male dominance” (59). In a later article, Unlinked Partnership: Dance and Feminism Analysis, Daly examines the problems of the concept of “difference” as it sets up a situation in which women are always defined as “Other” in comparison with men. While she is talking about the fact that “the earlier generation of feminists embraced and found empowerment in the notion of their fundamental difference from men,” this idea can be carried over into ballet scholarship that found the imposed-physical difference in classical dance harmful to women’s autonomy (2). According to Daly, nothing can be gained by setting up the any sort of male/female dichotomy.

9 See appendix C

10 Frei, Leigh. “Perhaps nothing better symbolizes ballet’s removal from the primal earth principle and resistance to gravity than the strapping of the female foot into virginal pink and heaven-bound toe shoes” (Frei, Leigh 14). Banes’s argument throughout her discussion of classical ballet is that the women are physically strong and powerful in their dancing. Pointe shoes are a key component of this strength. Her description of Carolee Schneer’s dancing is one example: “She was one of a new breed of Italian ballerinas who brought to the American stage an innovative ‘steely-soft’ technique which stressed physical strength, speed, and grace. This bravura technique was terre-à-terre rather than aerial, and it emphasized physicality rather than otherworldliness. It enabled virtuoso feats—including executing off-tiptoe turns and difficult balances, all on pointe” (49).

11 Pointe work “added a strenuous precariouslyness” (Frei, Leigh 4). “Pointe work often frays the ballerina’s need of her partner’s help” (Daly, The Ballerina Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers 16).
16 "Ballet is one of our culture's most powerful models of patriarchical ceremony" (Daly, Balanchine Woman 16). "The classical body is a highly disciplined, highly regulated one, and the female dancer enjoys a very limited degree of autonomy with respect to the deployment and representation of her body in performance. A transition into a position of greater independence, such as that offered in choreographic work, is rare for the female dancer in this tradition. Indeed, orthodox ballet training tends to suppress precisely those qualities of independent judgement and self-definition considered essential to choreographical development and innovation" (Dempster 27).

17 Imber and I talked several times about how she made the decision to put the ballet on pointe as opposed to soft technique slippers. She has always choreographed dances on pointe even when her director, Josephine Schwarz, encouraged her not to. When I began rehearsing for this ballet, Imber offered to take it off pointe writing: "I always thought [not working on pointe] was such a come-down until towards the end [of my career] I realized the more expressive upper body and the quiet, quiet flight across the stage, was beautiful." I find it interesting given the extremely mobile upper body in a Woman that she equates soft shoes with a "more expressive upper body." As a dancer who has worked with her extensively, I have never found a huge change in her use of the torso no matter what has been on my feet. By the end of the process, Imber had changed her opinion about soft shoes and this ballet. In a telephone conversation in January of 2003, Imber explained that the simple act of standing up is a powerful message. With pointe shoes, the female dancer stands taller and prouder. Imber concluded that this accentuated verticality was essential to the ballet.

18 See appendix C.

19 Bronislava Nijinska, one of the greatest twentieth-century choreographers, transformed balletic pointe work into thrusting movements of the legs. In her versions of a wedding dance, La Noces, her female dancers pounded out syncopated rhythms and pierced through space with their toe shoes" (Goldberg, Homogenized Ballerina 316).

20 See appendix C.

21 This term refers to the large group of seemingly identical female dancers that frame the lead ballerina and dance in symmetrical formations.

22 "But if these two dancing bodies share a dedication to artisinal perfection, they do not enjoy equal visibility. [...] He fades away behind or beneath her in their duets, becoming an indispensable assistant, the necessary backdrop against which she sparkles. And even though he assures a compelling presence in his solos when the full power of his aerial dexterity is revealed, in the end, even in their bows, he remains upstage, orchestrating, enabling her performance, but also channeling all attention towards her" (Foster, Phallic Pointe 2)

23 This is a continuation of the same email that appears at the beginning of this chapter.
CHAPTER 3

Express Yourself

[Isadora] Duncan reminded us: *Do not forget that beauty and expressiveness are of the greatest importance.* The new Russian ballet answered: *Do not forget that a rich technique will create natural grace and expressiveness, through the really great art form.* (Fokine 256)

One day I asked Bess Immer about her choice to use classical ballet vocabulary, thinking that I wanted to get to the bottom of her emotional link with the aesthetic. She simply explained to me the nuances of the *tendu* and how different dynamic approaches to stretching one's foot along the floor to a long *pont* could say volumes about a character and her situation. Immer allows for the possibility that there is room in classical vocabulary for the subtleties of emotion so that a *tendu* is not simply a *tendu* and a *grand jeté* is not merely a *grand jeté*, but the movement comes out of the core of the character. For her, movement speaks, whether it is in the turn of a wrist or a long * développé* to the side.

There has been some debate among the scholars mentioned in the previous chapters regarding the expressive possibilities of the classical movement vocabulary because ballet is often associated with a dancer's conforming to abstract shapes and lines as opposed to privileging the "natural" human form. My goal with this chapter is to
pinpoint how Imber manipulates the classical movement vocabulary to her own expressive advantage in her ballet, *A Woman: England, 1942*. Through her choreography, Imber has shown that this specialized movement style with its strict, formal codes is not a barrier to emotional expression.

Elizabeth Dempster, Susan Leigh Foster, Christy Adair and Sally Banes are four authors that directly address the issue of emotional expression within classical ballet. Their personal views align directly with their modes of inquiry into ballet in general. Because the first three authors focus primarily on the objectified ballet body, expression is not an option. However, Banes’s dancer-centered methodology allows her to explore the role of emotional expression in creating the ballerina’s image onstage.

One of the ways Dempster, Foster and Adair explore the relationship emotional expression has with classical ballet is to set up a comparison with early twentieth century modern dance. This argument focuses on the ballet body as one that is an object to be shaped while the modern dance body speaks to what is “natural” and “human.”

The classical ballet posits an ideal and idealized world, and it is an overly synthetic construct, utilizing a system of precisely coded, highly patterned abstract movement and incorporating the stylized gesture and deportment of the sixteenth-century French court. [...] “modern dance” is a conception of the body as a medium and vehicle for the expression of inner forces. (Dempster 36, 28)

The ideal body [for classical ballet]—light, quick, precise, strong—designates the linear shapes, the rhythm, of phrases, even the pantomimed gestures, all with lyrical effortlessness. [...] Descriptions of movements and corrections are phrased so as to ask parts of the body to conform to abstract shapes; they place the pelvis or head in specific locations, or extend the limbs along imaginary lines in space. [...] For Martha Graham, the dancing body must provide the strength, flexibility, and endurance necessary to provide the expressive self with a fully responsive instrument. (Foster, *Dancing Bodies* 243, 246)
Unpartnered and refusing to realize any choreographic vision other than their own, early modern dancers' denoted the classical stage and its sexual politics. Earthbound, preoccupied with flow from core to peripheral body and back, rather than from body out into space, they claimed 'natural' physical processes rather than rational aesthetic tradition as inspiration for their movement choices. Yes, they were gazed upon, but they did not die at the end of their dances. Instead, arms plunging upwards and legs shooting down into the ground, they stood proudly. (Foster, *The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe* 15)

For these scholars, ballet's emphasis is on the aesthetic of the body posed or in motion, while modern dance builds its ideal around what the shape and momentum of the body says about the human spirit within it. European-bred ballet and American-made modern dance are different in many ways including how each relates to the female body and its agency. What makes the above conversation problematic is that discussions that center on the "sanitized geometry" of ballet and its homage to tradition, seem to disqualify it as an expressive art form, especially for women (Foster, *Phallic Pointe* 2).

Another discussion centers on the role of technique in classical ballet.

The central aim of a technique is to improve bodily skill for a performance. [...] The dominance of technique in training may result in the training becoming an end in itself. Technique, as one of the major means of dance production, helps to determine the look of the dance but it can also be a barrier to the expression of the dance. (Adair 83)

In writing about ballet technique and the training system that imposes it, scholars like Dempster define it as a means of disciplining and regulating the body in service to the classical tradition (26). This argument not only reduces the dancer's body to something that needs to be controlled, but locks the ballerina into an already established set of artistic values that leave no room for her personal creativity.¹

The rise of "virtuoso" dancing in the nineteenth century ballets reached a climax in the work of Marius Petipa. Dancers were able to accomplish more physically than ever
before. Foster claims that “[i]his quest for virtuosity [in the nineteenth century] signaled a body that functioned less as a medium for communication than as a showcase for accomplishments” (Foster, Phallic Pointe 5). However, Sally Banes is not convinced, maintaining that even in this time of great technical advancement, there was always room for expression.

Banes not only credits the choreographer’s craft with creating an opportunity for expression but also emphasizes that the dancer, in her position as interpreter, plays an important role in communicating emotional content to the audience. For Banes, in the classical *pas de deux*, there is a direct correlation between the choreography and the characters that are expressed with it. Although in Petipa’s Swan Lake (1895) the ballerina dances complex movement combinations pulled directly from the classical vocabulary, the way the steps are arranged and how they are inflected gives rise to either the soft caresses of the white swan or the commanding pims of the black (Banes 62). Likewise in solo variations, such as Aurora’s in Act II of The Sleeping Beauty (1890), the ballerina can communicate her “astonomy” as well as her “grief” within the regulated technical structure (Banes 57).

Imber believes in the potential for expression within the structure of classical ballet and has used it many times to create work that blends both the technical and expressive into an artistic whole. In partnership with her dancer, Imber builds on a classical foundation and further experiments with the way gravity plays on the performer’s body and how space expands and collapses around her. Imber also sets up a strong bond between movement and music, and between the character and the dress, which the dancer must learn to negotiate.
Imber enhances the dynamic range of traditional ballet performance by shifting the performer’s relationship with gravity. Whereas the classical ballerina is associated with a gravity-defying lightness that is accentuated by her pointe shoes, Imber experiments with allowing gravity to pull the dancer into, and even onto, the floor. Additionally, instead of always relying on an elongated body that is ever extending outward, Imber’s performer occasionally moves in on herself, drawing her body into—as opposed to “out of”—her center. Emphasizing the “down” and the “in” of certain movements also draws attention to the performer’s physical effort, effectively destroying part of the illusion of effortlessness. The audience has a better sense of the physical strength and power of the dancer—and of the character—when it sees her struggling against forces that everyone struggles against.

There is no expectation in this ballet that to be on pointe means lightness or that a fall to the floor has to be controlled. Imber gives her performer full use of the range of gravitational pulls on her body in order to communicate changes in the character’s state of mind. When she is frightened or angry, her energy is shot through the floor emphasizing the “down” of every relevé. On the other hand, when she is joyous and relaxed, she dances with a lighter, more sustained air.

Two times in the course of A Woman, the dancer ends up lying on the floor. While the fall is still stylized (recognizable to those who have studied or watched a lot of modern dance as a “side fall”), Imber achieves the effect of her character’s giving in completely. The first time, the dancer plunges to the floor from a relevé arabesque, the dress is held high above her at the end of outstretched arms. She has just finished a long series of quick turns, jumps and relevés that carried her from one end of the stage to the
other. At the end, she grabs the dress, throws it above her head and spins madly, ending on top of her toe in a moment of balance. The fall that immediately follows is as low as the relevé was high. As she lies on the floor, downstage center, the audience can see her chest rise and fall through her leotard as she struggles to catch her breath.

Thus, the fall becomes a defeat. She is exhausted. She is beaten down. It is a sign of a woman collapsing in the face of her own hysteric. If it was not for the fact that the music resolves itself and plays softly while she breathes more smoothly, we might think she is beaten. In the next few moments, she picks herself up and lightly rises as if her body had no weight at all.

Just as this rising from the floor is light, a step up to pointe can be heavy and grounded. After donning the gown, the dancer steps to a sharp sou-sous⁴ balance facing directly upstage. She has a bit of the skirt in her right hand. There is no feeling of flight or gravity defying freedom, and when she drops the skirt at her side, the gesture only emphasizes that her energy is going down. When she finally lowers herself off pointe, it is almost as if her body continues being sucked into the earth. She pauses, full footed, back and forth across the stage madly gripping the skirt and pulling it to her torso.

The effect of this pacing not only emphasizes the “down” of the movement, but the “in,” introducing an expanded relationship with space than is typically used in ballet performance. Instead of expanding the body in typical classical fashion, Limber takes this moment of simple gesture to collapse the body in on itself. The audience’s focus is brought in to the center of the dancer’s body as opposed to her extremities. As in the beginning, the focus has shifted from what the dancer is doing with her body to why the
dress is so fascinating to her. In that one moment it seems to have the power to shrink the space around her. She is not confident or proud but frightened and anxious.

Conversely, in one of the more sustained sections of the ballet, the performer rises up onto relevé while her upper body ripples from side to side in a succession of shoulders, elbows and wrists. What the audience sees is the performer at her most open: her legs are turned out with about a foot of space between the heels as her entire upper body climbs upward toward the diagonal. When she rises up onto pointe, the insides of her legs are totally exposed and her ribs literally separate along the side of her body. Instead of pulling in and down, her body opens and extends up even as it ripples sideways. Open, in this case, equals breath and hope. Through her body we see her reveling in life instead of cowering from it.

In addition to forces pulling her in, down, up and open, there is also a separate set of movements and dynamics that move her toward and away from her male partner. The way she relates to him—in terms of movement vocabulary, spatial relationship, and dynamic qualities—defines their relationship. Whether she moves toward or away from him, whether she looks directly at him, through him or averts her gaze entirely, the audience derives a clear picture of their relationship. For example, the woman goes through a range of emotions when she first encounters the man that is communicated with very little movement. She runs to him across the long diagonal, her arms open and chest expanded as if to meet him with her whole soul. He is standing with one arm outstretched, and she reaches out to take his hand in hers and dreamily takes her skirt with the other. (Her stretched and pointed left leg is almost unnoticed.) Slowly, he turns her enraptured face to his and when she opens her eyes she is met with his form,
disfigured in her imagination. She drops both his hand and her skirt in alarm and backs up slowly, not taking her eyes off him at first, then turning abruptly away in horror.

The scene is more fulfilled with the use of these gestures than it would be in classical ballet pantomime with its coded language of hands and fingers. For a moment, the ballerina seems more human despite the pointe shoes. Her surprise and disgust build up in her as she walks back to center stage, once again collapsed into herself. Somehow she finds fifth position and executes a furious tour en l'air... relevé... paddle around to face upstage... tour en l'air... toes stab the floor... fingers pull at fabric... she morphs back into the ballet dancer.

Since "musical meaning is an integral part of our experience of a ballet," it is important to include the accompaniment in this discussion (Jordan 70). Stephanie Jordan, in her book Moving Music: Dialogues with Music in Twentieth-Century Ballet, says that, "The expressiveness in music stems from such characteristics as dynamics, tempo and tonal tension, which have a psychological impact, stimulating the human nervous system" (Jordan 67). Imber takes advantage of the emotional shifts in William Bolcom's Duo Fantasy for violin and piano to mirror the psychological journey of her character. She has said that the movement came directly from the score, almost as if the ballet already existed within it. The ballet follows the basic structure of the music with each change in meter signaling a change in mood. In very simple terms, when the music is loud and angry, so is the dancer; when it is soft and lilting, so is the dancer; when it fades, dying out of one section and building into the next, the dancer is right with it doing the same.
Jordan also makes a case for the violin:

The solo violin has had a particularly important place in ballet instrumentation. This stems perhaps from the nineteenth-century practice of having one or two violins [...] accompany rehearsals. But the violin is also important as an instrument that was considered especially emotionally expressive, close to the human voice in its ability to 'sing.' (Jordan 69-70)

Throughout the composition, the violin lilt and groans, never having the same voice. It reflects the soul of the character as she goes through her life. The performer’s movement rides on its sound as if the character’s inner voice dictated the dancing, rather than some outside force.

The waltz theme in the middle of the piece is what links the woman to her happy memories. When it begins, she cautiously reaches for his face, quietly brushes his cheek and falls into his arms. The tension from the previous dissonance falls away and she embark on a short journey of stereotypical female lightness. Her steps are smooth, her balances sustained and her focus is lifted and confidently searching. Bolcom’s music seems to carry her, until it drops her abruptly downstage right. Her love is standing before her, not as the man who danced with her, but as the wounded soldier, his face half blown away. The music changes to an almost crazed rag in which she alternately denies him and grabs for him. The attitude of her body changes from the lifting vertical to the running horizontal, toes digging and pushing through the floor.

Unlike Petipa’s dancers, Imber’s performer is not assigned the task of dancing constantly with the music. Where Tchaikovsky’s pulse beats out a steady metronome that can easily be followed with carefully counted steps and turns, Imber’s dancer also flows through, anticipates and lags behind the music. This relationship with the music gives the dancer control over when to create and alleviate emotional tension in the ballet.
In every instance, no matter which direction she is pulled or pushed, by gravity, her partner or the music, the gown is a central part of the action. It functions, literally, as another layer of meaning that is central to the narrative and choreographic structure of the ballet. The gown itself is made from silk chiffon and its skirt is constructed out of two full circles of fabric. As a result, once the dancer has pulled the gown on, it shifts and spreads with the slightest movement lending a softness to even the most angular choreography. It has the added effect of covering the body that was so exposed in the beginning of the dance changing the streamlined image of the ballerina into a vision of any woman on her way to a black-tie function. This is the true power of the gown in the ballet. It completely envelops the character in traditional conceptions of femininity by literally dressing the character in society’s expectations. Once she has it on, she becomes a master of poise conversation and behind-the-scenes wife and homemaker. Through it, Imber shows the character’s alternately fighting with and embracing this part of her life as a woman.

The choreography, both the movement itself and the performer’s attitude toward the movement, signals the ever-changing relationship with the gown and the character’s role as a woman. The performer both waltzes in it— as becoming someone in such a dress—and pulls at it angrily, showing not only a bit of ankle, but calf, knee and thigh. The performer grabs the dress and executes series of energetic turns and jumps as if in some crazed fury. As I described earlier, she stops dead center en pointe, holding the skirt at her side, and then drops it. The skirt goes from swirling around her legs one moment to almost locking her into a vertical position when it quietly lies along the length of her legs. The woman seems to instinctively snap to attention in a moment of hysterical panic.
There is no more ease, no more comfort, as the character comes face to face with expectations she is not prepared to meet.

Somewhere between modern dance and the imposition of geometry, Dempster, Adair and Foster took away the ballerina's ability to speak. Her body flew, fluttered and unfolded in a quiet ribbon of sparks but there was no meaning behind her motion. The movement Imber has given her dancer directly links her into the psyche of the character. Because of the choreographic structure, the performer is able to lead the audience through the emotional journey of the woman on the stage. There is possibility for life in this movement even though one can go through and name the steps as they occur with a ballet dictionary in hand.

1 This discussion of technique is interesting because while technique in ballet is often equated with the loss of individual expressive voice, in modern dance it is explained as a means of creating a liberated body. In both Foster's and Dempster's mention of Martha Graham and her technique this is the case: "the function of technique [...] is [... ] to free the socialized body and clear it of any impediment which might obscure its capacity for 'true speech'" (Dempster 29). This is a larger issue than I am ready to tackle in this project, but this idea of technical training and how it pertains to creating expressive bodies, is something I would like to return to at a later date.

2 In Jane O'Dea's book Virtue or Viciousity: Explorations in the Ethics of Musical Performance, the author explores the role of performer as interpreter in relation to the technical and expressive elements of a musical composition. I consider her writings in relation to my own performances in chapter four.

3 I would like to just stop here for a moment and say that I whole-heartedly agree with Banes's assessment of Petipa's choreography. Even though Petipa fills his ballets with small, non-essential (in terms of plot) divertissements, and even though the dancing is of a highly athletic caliber, his movement is expressive. This is obvious in watching different ballerinas dance the same role. Each woman has her own phrasings and her own nuances that make her Odile more frightening, her Aurora more naive or her Sugar Plum Fairy more domineering. As with the technique topic, I would love to explore the expressive movement in Petipa's ballets in greater depth as some point.

5 See appendix C.

4 Taken from correspondence Autumn 2002: "I loved to put on music and see what it made me do and Bolcom's music made the choreography happen!"

5 In saying this, I do not mean to indicate that Petipa's choreography slavishly follows the text of the music—there is no opportunity for a given ballerina's individual phrasing. Instead, I mean to draw attention to the quality of Bolcom's music, which does not always have a clear musical pulse.

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CHAPTER 4

The Road

Timeline:

Spring 2001:
• Write to Deiss Imber to get permission to perform *A Woman: England, 1942* (This first correspondence regarding my project continued throughout the process)
• Receive permission, along with a video tape and cassette recording of music (William Bolcom’s *Duo Fantasy for violin and piano*)
• Begin learning the choreography from the video tape
• Buy a pair of *pouette* shoes, and after 2 1/2 years, start dancing in them again

Summer 2001:
• Begin reading for thesis
• Show the video tape of the ballet to my peers and faculty members in the department of dance
• Begin looking for the music score and/or recording of *Duo Fantasy*
• Continue learning the choreography and rehearsing the piece on my own

Autumn 2001:
• Begin researching and writing for project proposal including looking for prospective committee members among faculty
• December: finalize project committee—Dr. Karen Eliot (Chair/Advisor) and Rosalind Pierson (committee member)
• December: meet with Imber for the first time to talk about the ballet and thesis
• Order score for *Duo Fantasy* through OSU’s music and dance library
• Continue spending time in the studio rehearsing the ballet on my own
• Continue reading for thesis

Winter 2002:
• January: OSU’s music and dance library receives score
• January: submit final project proposal to Graduate Studies Committee for approval
• Continue searching for recording and begin inquiring about musicians

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• Continue rehearsing and reading for thesis

Spring 2002:
• Submit grant proposal to AGGRS; awarded funds to complete project
• Submit grant proposal to Critical Difference For Women for funds to pay musicians; denied
• March: meet with Imber for another informal interview
• Continue to look for musicians who might be interested in playing for my concert
• Continue to rehearse and read for thesis

Summer 2002:
• Begin writing thesis
• Continue to look for musicians who might be interested in playing for my concert
• June: meet with Imber for another informal interview
• July: begin meeting with Nadine Spring regarding costume construction
• July: arrange rehearsals with project committee
• July: find recording of Duo Fantasy in OSU’s music and dance library
• July: travel to Dayton to rehearse with Bess Imber, Barbara Pontecorvo and Rodney Veal; spend time researching Imber and Dayton Ballet at Wright State University
• July 26: first real showing of A Woman for students and parents at Pontecorvo Ballet Studios

Autumn 2002
• October: Rodney Veal travels to Columbus to rehearse
• November: informal showing of the first half of the ballet for Dr. Candace Feck’s Aesthetics and Criticism class; receive written feedback
• November: meet with Natalie Gilbert to clean up sound recording and transfer the music to compact disc
• December: full run through of February concert including work by fellow graduate students Jessica Lindberg, Anne Burnidge and Vanessa Justice; faculty and students are present to offer feedback
• Give up searching for musicians
• Continue to read for thesis and rehearse

Winter 2003
• January: costume construction is completed
• January: informal presentation of works in progress; perform the first section of the ballet
• January: second full run through of February concert; faculty, students and auditionees for OSU’s department of dance are present to offer feedback
• February 20-22: MFA concert, Quatrain: a concert of four dances, is presented at Sullivan Hall. The Ohio State University Department of Dance
• Continue to read for thesis
Spring 2003
- Edit video tape of performance
- Complete thesis
- Graduate
Setting up the world of a dance work poses the problem of how to say the seemingly unsayable, how to speak truly with or through the movement so that the movement may speak— and may open a closed ground. (Fraleigh 91)\(^1\)

At the intersection of technical ability and emotional expression, there is performance. The goal of every performer is to assess her skills, learn the part and make the work come alive for an audience. Okay... sounds easy enough.

All along my process, the writings of Sonda Horon Fraleigh and Jane O’Dea inspired me. While neither of them was speaking specifically about ballet performance, I found their ideas directly connected to my situation as a performer.

Fraleigh’s book, *Dance and the Lived Body* laid out the specifics of performance for me so those things I thought were intuitive and unexplainable were spelled out word for word. Throughout my process, I drew on her concepts of the dancer in performance particularly the performer’s relationship to herself and her audience. My project became about allowing myself to exist within the dance and become a true interpreter of the work.\(^2\)

Jane O’Dea’s writing positions the performer as “interpreter” of the musical score, emphasizing the importance of the piece over the musician’s personal agenda. In the third chapter of her book, *Virtue or Virtuosity: Explorations in the Ethics of Musical Performance*, O’Dea discusses the relationship between technical skill and emotional expression in virtuoso musical performance. According to O’Dea, upsetting the equilibrium between technique and expression can color the way an audience receives the work.

Your task as a performance interpreter is to grasp the particular musical qualities that a work has to offer and to exhibit them to the audience in the most lucid,
telling manner possible. [...] your task is to engage them—draw their attention to
the specific excellences embodied in the work. Thereby enabling them to hear and
enjoy them. (O’Dea 47)

The first thing I found valuable in O’Dea’s writing was the idea of performer as
interpreter. For me, “interpretation” not only indicates a displaying of the work at hand,
but also offers the possibility of expressing the performer’s own point of view.

Isn’t it fascinating how many interpretations there are to the same movement
because of individuals’ coming from different places?”(Imber 2002)

There is something very gratifying in believing in the act of interpretation. It takes away
the notion that there is only one answer, one way of doing things and one body that can
accomplish the task. It asks the question, “What can you do with this dance?” and
promises, “Your way is valuable…and so is hers…and hers…and hers.”

Which interpretation do you choose?

*   *   *   *

O’Dea’s performer assesses which technical skills she needs to perform the piece,
determines the place of emotional expression in the work and figures out how these two
elements play off each other. Successful completion of this formula leads to virtuoso
musical performance. I found a connection between these two texts in that following
O’Dea’s prescription for successful musical performance could lead to the “lived and
complete wholeness” Fraleigh’s performer strives for (Fraleigh 14). In rehearsing and
researching this ballet, I constantly had O’Dea’s map to successful performance in mind.
It is important here to give a brief overview of my performance situation. I performed *A Woman: England, 1942* as part of my Master of Fine Arts degree at The Ohio State University. This meant, first of all, that I was performer, producer, director and ballet mistress all in one. I made the decision to dance the ballet, cast the ballet, arranged for rehearsals, made the appropriate decisions regarding funding, met with production staff and performed the piece. While this is not so unusual for academia or those dancing in smaller contemporary companies, this is not often how ballerinas function within large ballet companies. While ballerinas like Suzanne Farrell and Gelsey Kirkland had the luxury of focusing on their performances and personal maintenance, that was only one part of my day to day activities regarding this project.

Yes, I had a number of commitments during this time, and yes, there were times I felt overworked, overstressed and exhausted. However, in my daily whirlwind of activity, I frequently stopped to thank my lucky stars for The Ohio State University. I had studio time, technical support, and artistic support, access to classes and to some of the top artists in my field. Additionally, thanks to the graduate school, I had funding for costuming, *pointe* shoes and a travel allowance for my second dancer. What a wonderful opportunity I had.

The Department of Dance also assured me an audience, albeit an audience of a certain type. I could count on the fact that it would be mostly made up of dance majors, graduate students, faculty and other dance students within the department. In short, it would be an audience who would be familiar with me, and the kind of dance the department typically presents. Also, it meant that a significant part of the audience would
be well versed in analyzing dance performance in terms of form and content. I could
epect that they would.\footnote{1}

This chapter looks briefly at some of the major events in my process between
spring of 2001 and my graduate concert in February 2003. It was not just a matter of
learning, rehearsing and performing, but also assessing my situation and facing fears.

Typically, a dancer spends anywhere from two to six hours per day, six to seven
days per week for eight to ten years creating a dancing body. During the course of
this travail, the body seems constantly to elude one’s efforts to direct it. The
dancer pursues a certain technique for reforming the body, and the body seems to
conform to the instructions given. Yet suddenly, inexplicably, it diverges from
expectations, reveals new dimensions, and mutely declares its unwillingness or
inability to execute commands. Brief moments of "mastery of the body" or of
"feeling at one with the body" occur, producing a kind of ecstasy that motivates
the dancer to continue. Clear sensations of improvement or progress—the result
of a momentary matching of one’s knowledge and awareness of the body with a
developing physical capacity—also provide encouragement. The prevailing
experience, however, is one of loss, of failing to regulate a mirage-like substance.
Dancers constantly apprehend the discrepancy between what they want to do and
what they can do. (Foster, Dancing Bodies 236-237)

I started by learning the ballet from a videotape Imber sent me immediately after I
asked permission to dance it. It was only the first indication of her generosity that kept
resurfacing. From the beginning, I was beset with a variety of emotions that threatened to
derailed my confidence at any moment. Throughout, I kept going back to Fraligh and
O’Drea for support. Shortly after the concert closed, I wrote:

There are of course, a few problem spots that require the same sort of control that a
classical ballerina masters. Those were the spots that I was extremely nervous about in
the beginning. There is a series of relevés in the waltz section of the dance in which the
performer first steps into a relevé fouetté\footnote{2} that moves from an effacé arabesque to a high
extension in effacé devant. She tombés\footnote{3} out of this is to a grand rond de jamb en l’air
that finishes in two relevés in arabesque as her body turns en dehors. The sequence
ends with a fondue moving the arabesque leg to another long develop to effacé devant.\footnote{4}

Performers sometimes make technical errors […] and they are usually prepared
to overlook a certain amount of these so long as the integrity and import of the
musical work concerned are not completely undermined. (O’Drea 48)
In the past several years, I have settled into a pattern in which I get increasingly nervous and anxious about the more challenging technical elements of dances I perform. By the time opening night arrives, I am so sure that I will be unable to stand on two legs that I completely sabotage my entire performance with fear. This fear can be traced to my illogical, gut feeling that all technical elements in my performances have to be perfect if it is to be a success. It is not a good way to go on stage.

One of the hardest parts of this process was reconciling my life as a graduate student with one of serious performers. My day to day life was so different from the dancers I was reading about.

I was struck by the hours of rehearsal time and personal maintenance dancers like Suzanne Farrell and Gelsey Kirkland spend. There is an ongoing conversation in the feminist literature and in the books mentioned above about how much time one must devote to being a dancer. This includes trips to doctors, massage therapists, personal trainers, sawing pointe shoes, stretching, monitoring eating and exercise habits, taking extra ballet classes and going to extra rehearsals and coaching sessions. It is a 24 hour a day pursuit. I simply didn’t have that much time.

To say that life at OSU, for both graduate and undergraduate students is busy is a major understatement. For much of the time I was preparing to dance this ballet, I was also teaching several hours a week, attending academic classes, rehearsing and performing other student and faculty works. Looking back on it now, it was an ideal way to prepare myself for this performance. One reason for this was that I had so much time, two years to prepare myself to dance this 10-minute piece. Additionally, the different experiences I was having during this time (learning how to be an articulate teacher, dancing vastly different styles, working in large group settings, learning theory that is currently influencing contemporary dance) was both directly and indirectly influencing the way I was considering my approach to the ballet.8

I found myself having to make serious choices concerning training to dance this ballet. Clearly, my life as a graduate student was much different than the lives of dancers who are able to focus exclusively on performing. Figuring out exactly what I needed to dance this ballet, in terms of O’Dea’s theories, was more difficult than I thought. There
were things I had control over, such as showing up to technique class and setting my own rehearsal times. Physically I could build my body so that it could "do" what was required of it, but I kept questioning, "What do I have to look like?"

The moment I put the pointe shoes back on my feet and assigned myself the task of getting back into performance condition, my old eyes came back. These were the eyes that, in the grand tradition of 19th century dance writers, found every flaw and every nuance.

What happens when the form is not there? Does that mean that that body is less expressive in this particular movement style? How is the instrument flawed? Is the instrument flawed?

If I perceive my instrument as flawed, what does that mean for my performance?  

The body understood in its lived totality, is the source of the dance aesthetic. It is not simply the physical instrument of the dance, nor is it an aesthetic object as other objects of art are. (Fraleigh xvi)

In ballet, the body is an aesthetic object unto itself (critics picking apart the ballerinas’ bodies) training manuals that stress the look of the body. Or, it’s not just aesthetics, but the form of the body determines the amount of success that particular body will have with the technique. If the form is not there, injury may result or the body will not progress in the technique and therefore not become a truly expressive instrument.  

When you are your own rehearsal coach, it is easy to get caught up in the image in the mirror, which, of course, is always standing still when you catch it. The real success of this ballet lies in its movement, not in the aesthetic value of the body standing still. It is, after all, a dance.

So much about this piece is about being a woman. In that dress, did she feel beautiful? Of course she did. This dance, this experience is not about turning myself into someone else. It is about connecting with her. I don’t have to chisel away my body to find her; rather she is in the movement. If my body can execute the movement, I can find her.

It took me months to forgive my form and concentrate on the motion it had the capacity to create. One of the things that made this easier was that I was in an atmosphere
that valued the body's movement over its aesthetic value as an object. My rehearsals were always focused on the how my body moved through and filled space as opposed to the shape of my body independent of this specific choreographic situation. Because the Department of Dance at Ohio State focuses on contemporary dance forms, comments from my advisors and peers tended toward those not typically heard in ballet rehearsals. It was seldom that someone corrected my placement, demanded that my legs go higher or to do two piroettes instead of one. Instead, they focused on how I was phrasing certain movement sequences, and (to borrow some terms from Laban) my attitudes toward space, time, weight and flow.

Even in rehearsals with the choreographer, corrections and comments took on a different tone than those I regularly heard in past ballet rehearsals. Imber chose to guide me using images that directly pertained to the emotional state of the character. These images helped me by allowing the psychological state of the character guide how I approached the movement. There were few points in the dance where she wanted the arms just so or the legs placed in an exact position, but these moments were never mentioned without the emotional motivation that was constantly present for the choreographer.

Aesthetic intentionality in dance opens up problems of relations between self and body. (Fraleigh 24)

*The lines are just all wrong. My body just doesn't make the shapes it's supposed to.*

(October 25, 2002)13

I become aware of my body as something to be reckoned with in dance. (Fraleigh 14)
There were times when I desperately wanted someone to make note of my feet or the line of my leg in a certain position, but no one (except me) seemed interested in focusing on my body in that way. Eventually, I learned to trust the eyes around me. They were not going to let me go on stage with my sickled feet and sloppy positions. In fact, there was one instance when the choreographer deliberately changed the movement so that I would be more comfortable.

In the last moment between the man and the woman on stage, she takes his hand and he supports her through a *piqué fouetté* to arabesque. When Barbara Pontecovo and Lee Bell originally performed the dance, Pontecorvo ended the *fouetté* with her back arched and the toe of her outstretched leg climbing to the ceiling. She looked as if she could bend her body in half backwards and inside out if she was asked to. Not having a particularly high extension to the back, I was wary of that *piqué fouetté* and approached Imber one day in rehearsal, asking for an alternative. What we came up with was a low *arabesque* and a sustained backbend. In my version, I was swooning back toward the floor, almost melting through my partner's fingers. In Pontecorvo's version, everything reached up (toe, sternum, throat, and arms). Her body was literally pulling apart and folding in on itself at once in a cry of pain.

Once I had a command of the movement, it was much easier to find the character.

* * *

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[The] body actually strives, acquires skills (of all kinds), and finally experiences freedom through them, lending meaning to the word (Fraleigh 90).

Imber and I kept a running conversation going about the dance and the characters. Rodney Veal and I would be portraying on stage. Since she could not be in rehearsal with me every time, we questioned and answered in letters. At one point, she sent me a detailed account of the first several minutes of the piece with these notes:

- a dress of my mother’s; What is the lesson of her lifetime that lives in you? To suffer and accept love and death with gratitude. To thank God for this. [...] [She is a] sophisticated woman of her time in control of her refined intellect. [...] a woman will always suffer: it is her destiny to be human. (Imber 2002)²

This idea of “suffering” as connected with being a woman surfaced over and over again as she explained and re-explained the character from different angles:

Loving someone meant losing them and love always seems feminine and soft and beautiful and full of surrender. A woman gives her whole life to what she loves, her husband, her children her dance and when she loses them then she has to take off that beautiful dress and she has to become stoic and go on. Sometimes there is anger in that as is in the choreography at the end, but in the end I embrace this dress and all its sorrow...it truly was a gift of life and I would be nothing without it. (Imber 2002)

Imber connected the ballet first with her mother who in examining her wedding gown is forced to face the fate that has been set out for her. It also became the struggles Imber faced as an artist and the losses she suffered as a result of it.

But as I look at the piece I see something of myself superimposed. I had to be so strong and even cold [...] I never laughed then and I was very thin. Everyone I fell in love with vanished...my father, my first husband, little children that grew up, friends... (Imber 2002)

But there is also an amazing amount of hope in the ballet in that the character is not left alone in a vacuum:

I feel A Woman: England, 1942 is my struggle against the supposed abandonment of God or divine Love in the world. All I long to do now is to try and enter into 64
my great gratitude for the physical life I've had and to try and enter more and more spiritually into God/Love. This is possibly how A Woman should end. I have been lost for so long but now I long to cleanse and purify. (Imber 2802)

In writing and talking with Imber, I was able to piece together this woman for the performance. Strangely though, in looking back over rehearsal notes and journals over two years of preparation, very little of it is devoted to researching and discovering the character. Clearly, I was more drawn to the movement as a means of connecting with the character Imber was laying out for me.

I have come to understand her as a young woman who is facing great change in her life, change that she is not quite equipped to handle by herself. She races back and forth between what she knows is expected of her and the fright she feels when faced with the realities of her situation. She deeply loves the man she encounters in the ballet and knows that she is going to lose him. When she finally comes to accept this, it is easier for her to face the rest of her life. There is strength in her, although she does not truthfully want to rely on it. She would much rather lie in his arms where she knows she is safe.

The dress connects her to this safety, for when she wore it last it was with him when everything was manageable and easy. However, it also reminds her that those days are past and that in accepting her place of safety, she was also accepting that it might end. Loving someone is a great risk in that at any time they can be taken from you.

I loved dancing this character because she was complex. It made me super-aware of the difference of having the strength to face challenges, but at the same time, not really welcoming them.

How does the movement tell the story through the dancer’s body? What is felt in the dancer and how does this/can this bring someone closer to the events depicted by the dancer? [...] the dancer twists, grasps at her body and at the dress, her moments of
tenderness are directed toward the man. [...] she is frantic, she paces, she bends and twists [...] at her most serene she Waltzes alone in what approaches bliss, the dress is no longer on fire [...] even when he is on the stage it is more because of the dress she is in than her wish to see him. (August 8, 2002)

[D]ance involves more than just knowing how to do a movement. It also involves knowing how to express the aesthetic intent of the movement and how to create aesthetic movement imagery. (Fraleigh 26)

* * *

[Craft skills] enable [musicians] to shape or subtly sculpt the nuances of sound sensation in such a way that gives to musical structures an aura of emotional expressiveness. (O’Dea 52)

I finally felt some victory in a recent rehearsal. Instead of agonizing over any last thoughts, I just ran the ballet from start to finish by myself in the studio, resolving to accept whatever happened and keep going; to try to find her in my body as I danced. While I have no idea how the run went (it never feels as good physically as I imagine it should) I gained a small victory in that I couldn’t remember having danced it. I knew I had, but the actual dancing time was missing. All that was left was a blank space of lost time. 18

[Put aside all other concerns and dedicate your entire “being” to the task of performance. (O’Dea 58)

GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD! TRUST! FAITH! (January 14, 2003)

One afternoon listening to the news, I found myself thinking about airline pilots and ballet dancers. Pilots learn the technical aspects of flying not just to take off and land, but how to handle storms, cloud-cover and other unexpected situations that may arise mid-flight. My technique, I found, functioned in much the same way. It kept me level for the most part, but in those times when I was a bit off my leg or my momentum got the better of me, I didn’t crumple to the floor, but knew how to live in the moment and carry the piece on. Opening night I was sustaining positions I usually flowed right through. I got caught in my equilibrium and had to fight to catch up with the music. On Saturday, the penché balance was impossible. I improvised something in the corner of the stage to fill the music and tried not to panic as I weighed the importance of the penché within the scope of the entire ballet. 16

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The performance itself was an extraordinary experience. I got over my first wave of severe nerves after dress rehearsal. They came back in time for the last performance when my entire family and several friends were in the audience. It was in the last stages of this long, two-year project that I was finally able to find, and revel in, the spontaneity Fraleigh talks about in her book.

To understand the dancer as the dance is to understand a point of unification, which is a state of being when the dance is lived not as an object but as a pure consciousness. When the dance has become so thoroughly me that I no longer think about it, it becomes my consciousness. I become centered in my action. I do not look back on it or anticipate it. I am spontaneously present in it. (Fraleigh 40)

I felt strong and unstoppable, even when things did not absolutely go my way. It reminded me of how much I love dancing on pointe; when you have command of those shoes, you are invincible.

I felt like I was really able to live in this ballet. I felt like my technique was there to save me every time and that even when things didn’t work technically (like with the penché) the character knows what to do and I know where to go with it. 17

It was an enjoyable challenge, learning how to negotiating the movement and the character. She changed every night, approaching the same movement with a different edge or softness that was totally unexpected and exciting. Each night, after coming to sometime during the last fade to black, I knew her a little bit better.

* * *

In the final analysis performers can only do their best. (O’Dea 59)

Honestly, at the end of the day, I can not say what worked and what did not; which rehearsal methods fell flat and which ones brought rewards. I can only say what I
did and what happened in the end. There is even a problem with evaluating what happened. I can know what I accomplished for myself with this project, and I have the compliments and congratulations from faculty, friends and family. It is time to let go of that and just say that I did it. I performed this ballet. I danced it to the best of my ability.

1 Throughout this chapter I am injecting quotes from both Fraleigh and O'Dea as they pertain to the topic at hand. This is meant to illustrate how I pulled them into my process as I went along.

2 This idea from O'Dea is very important because Imber’s ballet relies heavily on the delicate balance between technical skill and emotional expression. This is part of the reason why I found O'Dea’s work so helpful.

3 Feedback from my peers and advisors at different times played a major role in my decision-making process.

4 Like the piqué fouetté from the previous chapter, but instead of stepping onto pointe, the dancer springs up from a slightly bent knee.

5 See appendix C.

6 See appendix C.

7 See appendix C.

8 Taken from personal writing in reflecting about the concert after it was over. In using these quotes from my writing, which often functioned as decompressing as well as debriefing, I did not change my sentence structure or correct awkward language. It captures a moment in time that was not always concise and understandable.

9 Taken from personal reflections.

10 Taken from personal reflections.

11 Taken from personal reflections.

12 Taken from personal reflections.

13 Selections in italics are taken from a notebook I was keeping throughout the process. It was a way for me to record feedback from my peers and committee as well as ask myself questions and work out answers to constant challenges. I also vented frustration.

14 Throughout the process, Imber and I kept up a running conversation through the mail and on the phone discussing the dance, philosophy, religion and the events of our daily lives. Those letters greatly informed the way I approached this dance. I have included several excerpts from her letters here. The letters I have pulled from were written in 2002.

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15 Taken from personal reflections.
16 Taken from personal reflections.
17 Taken from personal reflections.
CHAPTER 5

The Audience

My performance of *A Woman; England, 1942* took place over three evenings in February 2003, at Sullivant Hall on The Ohio State University’s Columbus campus. In one evening I, and four other Master of Fine Arts candidates from the Department of Dance, premiered two contemporary dance works and presented two restagings, one of Loie Fuller’s 1896 *Fire Dance* as well as *A Woman; England, 1942*. We were a mixed bag of post-modern dance styles and technologies, historical research and contemporary ballet.

Our audience consisted mostly of students, faculty and friends of the Department of Dance as well as our own friends and family that came to support our projects. It was exciting and satisfying to dance in this open atmosphere that accepted our research and almost constant change in performance style. Every night, we finished our dances to the sound of cheers coming from the 300-seat house.

From the beginning, however, I had my concerns. While ballet is part of the technique curriculum in the Department of Dance at OSU, it is not the main focus of the program, and as far as I know, I was the first graduate student to perform a ballet for her MFA concert. Given OSU’s commitment to contemporary dance forms, I was not sure
what sort of reception the piece was going to get from the typical post-modern dance audience that comes to see concerts at Sullivart Hall. What happened was a pleasant surprise. The tradition of embracing new and innovative dance forms and styles that makes OSU’s Department of Dance such an thrilling place to be extended to accepting what would be considered a more traditional and formal style than what is normally our focus. I was met with enthusiasm in the house after opening night both for the piece itself and the performance. I kept hearing the words “strength,” “sadness,” “power” and “stability.” It was what I was tentatively hoping for from my peers: the possibility that ballet could demonstrate the inherent strength and expressiveness of the dancing body.

Part I: My Experiment

As I read and researched this project, it became very clear to me that there was an important part missing from my inquiries. I became aware that I could make claims about the role of the performer in this ballet and the strength of the female ballet dancer, but without confirmation that the audience was actually reacting to the piece in the way I anticipated, my whole argument was pointless. In an effort to gauge what my audience was seeing and experiencing during this ballet, I decided to provide them with an opportunity to give me written feedback at each of the three performances at Ohio State.

The entire exercise was designed to give audience members an easy, non-threatening way to process any sort of experience or reaction they had to the ballet in writing. Seventeen people took me up on it.

There were a few problems with the experiment, some of which I will address later in the chapter. One I will take care of now is best described by my experience after
Saturday night's performance when I walked toward the feedback table and saw it surrounded by my family and friends. They were writing furiously. I feared that what had started out as an experiment in audience perception and response was turning into Jeannine's fan club.

Despite my fears, there were several surprises. The first was that although I did not know the names on several of the pieces of paper, there were many that I did not recognize. I was pleased to discover that there were members of the audience who were compelled to write down their reactions to the ballet despite the fact that they were not related to me nor did they interact with me on a daily basis. The second surprise was that the comments from my friends and family were well-considered and insightful interpretations of the ballet, not merely congratulations and compliments.

In reading the responses, I got the impression that the audience members were on the receiving end of a material exchange, almost as if they let the ballet "happen to" them and were intrigued by the results.

tense and apprehensive because of the music, sort of a deadly fascination with the dress and its effects on a woman's life, within relationships and self-confidence. The movements that were sharp were a wonderful contrast to the flow of the dress. It was a story of sadness—the price for moments of pleasure. (Amy Long)

There was not only a view into the ballet from the audience's perspective, but also a view into the individual respondent. The small surveys gave some indication as to which elements resonated with certain people and how they chose to verbalize their reactions. Some focused more on the movement, some wrote a detailed narrative and others presented universal themes. Then there were those like the one above that were a combination of kinesthetic response, movement description and interpretation. They all
revisited common themes of a person on an emotional journey. It was a sad story of loss,
desire and pain, but was presented by an obviously strong, obviously feminine woman.

There were detailed descriptions of the characters and their roles in the situation
unfolding on stage. The respondents all recognized the character as a woman going
through a series of changes. She was, for one, a woman going through the stages of life,
from a young girl, to a woman faced with the challenges of adult relationships, to an old
woman reflecting on her past.

Full circle—the younger woman anticipates what life will bring. The older
woman reflects on what has come to pass. The dress embodies both future and past of
the woman. The dress embodies both future and past for the woman (Chuck
Cales).

For another, “the woman was England in 1942” (Adam Diamond) turning her into an
allegorical representation of a war-torn country and the transitions it went through.

There was also a clear description of the male character in relation to the woman
on stage.

I love how insignificant Rodney’s role is. He barely enters compared to you, and
his movement is bland and boring compared to the power and dynamicism that
flows through all of yours. I love that he is in turmoil and emotional crisis over
you, but that he is so far removed from the center of your reasons for existing that
when he crumples to the ground you don’t even go to him. And when he fades
away and is no longer on stage, not a moment of longing for his return is wasted.
He is but a tangent, briefly touching your strong circle of being. He is still while
you fill the space. (Seth Beale)

I imagined that Rodney Veal was the ghost of a dead soldier who the woman once
loved. The dress was a memory she held with her for the love she once had.
(Charles D. Valentin)
In fact, all mention of the Rodney Veal’s character came from male audience members, although not all male respondents mentioned him. The female responses tended toward the more universal. One woman came right out and admitted her bias:

In truth I know my experience of *A Woman: England, 1942* was colored by my own gender. As a female I connected with Jeannine’s dilemmas which seemed to stem from some hope, desire expectation of her feminine heart. Desire=Vulnerability; Desire=Dispair. This is what I saw—this is what I felt—This dichotomy is beautiful. Without such deeply felt yearnings and emotions—What is Life? However tailored this piece was to a time period—it goes beyond—at least to the heart of every woman whoever hoped. (Rebecia Inman)

I honestly do not know what to make of this gender split. What it does tell me is that some audience members saw an emotional situation that moved beyond the female character’s relationship with the man. For those respondents, the female character exists in a plane occupied by all women. Parts of her journey are recognizable and familiar. In those situations, a concern for the linear narrative falls to the wayside.

As was the case with the male respondents and the description of the male character, not all of the women chose to approach the survey the way Inman did. Both male and female audience members wrote about the movement in the ballet. I read about “admiration for the endurance and strength of a pointe solo” (Ashley Steinor), the contrast between sharp movements and the flowing dress (Amy Long), “grace and fluidity” (anonymous) and “precision and control” (Seth Beale). There was also a general theme of sadness that kept resurfacing in the responses.

It was a story of sadness—the price for moments of pleasure. (Amy Long)

I felt a kind of profound sadness at the end. (Mary Caffrey)
No one seemed to find the ballet comforting or reassuring, except in one area.

Some saw God:

Reach to the heavens to a higher authority. (Gary Maret Sr.)

When she removes the dress and holds her hands up to the sky she is praying before bed. (Charles D. Valentia)

This reaction is to the last seconds of the ballet when the dancer, after embracing the dress, reaches her arms up and lets it fall down her body to her feet. It is a moment that Imber directly connects with resignation and reaching out to God.²

Once again, the male respondents introduced an outside “male” factor. Could it be that simple? Of course it is not. It is only evidence of the inherent problems of audience surveys and how to apply them to performance research. In anticipating complications with analyzing the written material, I made the decision to approach the responses as informal feedback as opposed to scientific data. These responses do not represent a comprehensive sampling of the audience. Rather, it was a voluntary exercise in which a very small percentage of the total house actually participated. There was no guarantee that what the participants wrote directly correlated with what they experienced in the theater. I was asking them to respond to a physical and emotional stimulus with mere words, and as my father pointed out, some people were not prepared to respond so readily.³

And of course, there were a few that joined the fan club.

Well, Jeannine—My experience with this dance was...hmmm, what do you mean by experience? It was emotional, melodramatic, wonderful. I love to watch you dance. Beautiful. I'm proud of you. (Laura Opfer)
Part II: The Students

Another type of feedback I received was from a group of students who were enrolled in The History of Ballet and Modern Dance during the time of the February performance. One of the assignments for this course was to attend a live dance concert and write a review that would both describe the movement and theatrical elements of the piece and give a personal interpretation. The instructor specifically prohibited any evaluative language in this particular assignment so that students would discover the roots of their emotional and kinesthetic responses. The students agreed to let me read their papers and include them in my consideration of audience response. I received fourteen papers from the teaching assistant for my consideration.4

Reading these papers taught me much about what got through to the audience in terms of the ballet’s narrative and its overall emotional content. Some students delved into the characters, giving a blow-by-blow account of all the action as it unfolded and offered strict interpretations of the movement. Others dismissed a clear, linear plot altogether and favored describing a few movement sequences that were especially emotionally charged. Overall, the papers gave a clear sense of the interlocking elements of the ballet and how they all worked together to communicate an emotional situation.

One of the things that struck me was the students’ attention to the relationship between the music and emotional drive of the ballet.

The piece begins to discordant, minor [chord] music, immediately setting my teeth on edge. […] When Potter puts the dress on, the music becomes angrier; it seems as if there is no way out of the memory. She is smiling but the music is not happy, so you know something is not right. […] The music softens and Potter’s dancing becomes more […] balletic in style. (Anna Sadurski)
There is a sense of unease and tension in this description that gives a clue to the kinesthetic response the author may have been experiencing in the theater. Additionally, she indicates that the act of putting the dress on has an impact on the feel of the dance: donning the gown is what makes the music change its tone. It also makes a direct connection between a change in the music and a change in the movement quality. In another paper, the same relationship between movement, music and the dress is evident:

She played with the dress, but as if hurt by it, she fell suddenly and violently to the floor. As the music ascended in speed and volume, she grabbed the dress and put it on. The music again became lighter, she moved into playful motions: spinning, and tossing the light material. She leaped and spun on pointe with no trace of the erratic movements prior to putting the dress on. (Sarah Parrott)

It is almost as if there are three distinct minds at work in the ballet. In reading these papers, I got a real sense of how the music, dress and dancer all worked together, each tugging on the others in an attempt to gain the upper hand.

The dress itself had its own personality and own possibilities for interpretation. For Sadurski, the dress had “memories in it” and she felt as if “some significant part of [the character’s] life [was] woven into [its] threads.” For some, this idea of memory became more detailed, harkening back to a life with someone who had been lost or to a time that was without the turmoil of the present. When the character had it on she “believed she actually was the woman of her memory” (Lindsay Mendelson).

Others spoke of the gown as if it was the character’s “feminine” costume. Whenever she had it on, it connected her to her role within the world of men.

It appeared as though she was practicing in order to be what she felt was good enough to wear this magnificent dress with sparkles and a long, flowing skirt. (Nina Ogasawara)
To me the dress was something of constraint, a symbol of the way women were expected to act. (Lauren Valentine)

She longs to have a man who will make her happy. She wants to feel love and to be in love. (Mary Koenig)

The dress connects the woman with the male character who appears briefly in the ballet. For many, he is the memory that the dress invokes, calling to mind a love that was lost.

All of a sudden there was a man on stage in a uniform and they began to dance a little and looked at each other as if there was something between them. Then what seemed like just a moment later he grabbed his heart and fell to the ground and was gone again. She looked terribly torn up and took the dress back off and laid it down on the floor where it was before. I think this selection represented a love affair in which she loved was killed. The dress represented the time they were together, and although she longed to remember that time, the memory of losing him was too terrible to bear. (Sarah Dye)

The dress brings the woman to her memories and makes "her fantasy become real," but it is an uneasy remembering (Mary Koenig). Her joy in reliving the past only reminds her of what she has lost. She is torn between wanting to live in the past and the realization that she is firmly rooted in the present.

[Her] hair was left and she wanted nothing to do with the dress that brought him there. [...] She danced around aimlessly as if [trying] to forget about it, but those initial feelings she once felt brought her back to it once again. She gently swept it up with her hands and held it close to her chest. She decided to keep it anyway and quietly walked off stage. (Stacy Freible)

These papers also brought up an issue that I did not face with my own attempts at eliciting audience response: the glaring errors in their papers. There were discrepancies in the color of the costumes, with my lavender dress turning "maroon" or "burgundy" in a few papers and my lavender leotard changing to "blue." Rodney Veal's costume—which we took great pains reproducing what could have been an army uniform from the
time—was written about as a "brown suit" or just a formal suit. Very few picked up on
the fact that he was in uniform.

What happens then when the audience misses these details that for us, as
performers, were crucial parts of our creative interpretation? In my own personal
narrative running through my brain as I performed the dance, it was very important that
the gown was lavender and that Yeal was in uniform. These were clear choices made by
the choreographer in order to communicate a very specific message. Purple is a color of
repentance, waiting and mourning, and I associated the war with my character's
suffering. Furthermore, Rodney clearly defined his character in terms of his uniform.
The costume helped him access the man who was torn away from his family and suffered
as a result of war.

There were also events that never took place. My favorite example of this was in a
paper that described a burst of applause when I executed a "difficult stretched position"
(Mary Koenig). The author was clearly impressed and maybe felt that applause was in
order. However, there was never a time when my performance was interrupted by
audience enthusiasm.

Despite the differences, what the papers had in common was an understanding
that the woman on stage was going through a difficult period of her life, filled with
changes that were sometimes hard to take. In the words of Koenig, "I did not understand
the actual story inside of the dance, but I did understand her feelings throughout the
movements."

Even though these papers were written in response to a specific assignment for an
academic purpose, they did contain valuable information for me. The class often consisted
of students who are not familiar with dance outside a commercial or studio atmosphere, so the concept of looking at dance as an art is often a foreign one. I had an advantage in that my performance contained many elements that would have been familiar to even those students who have little dance experience: athleticism, pointe shoes, and movement that closely adheres to the tone and tempo of the music. This may have been the reason why there were so many students who chose to write about *A Woman*.

**Part III: Conclusion**

Sometimes the most untainted responses one receives from the audience are the things that are nonverbal. It is impossible to describe trying to carry on a conversation with someone who, after having watched me dance, was still flushed and smiling uncontrollably. No coherent thoughts were leaving his mouth, but I stayed there and basked in it all the same. I remember coming out of performances as a child and being unable to stop myself from skipping and swirling down the street ahead of my mom. I never thought that there might have been dancers smoking outside the stage door, watching me go past.

In thinking about my original idea, I can only say that I was curious and that I wanted to see if what I felt in dancing was somehow being transferred across the dark. My curiosity has been satisfied and I learned a little bit more about what this ballet can mean. It is true that performers can only do so much and the audience brings to and takes from any performance as they see fit. What an interesting and scary position to be in as a performer.
1 Audience members were invited by concert’s host to return to the box office table for the opportunity to give me feedback. I provided four small clipboards with half of a standard 8 1/2 X 11 sheet of paper and pens. A sample, as well as all of the audience responses I received, is listed in appendix D.

2 I mentioned this spiritual connection in chapter 4.

3 In his email, my dad mentioned that he typically needs some time to process information before he is ready to respond. Whereas my uncle met me in the lobby with several sheets of feedback on the entire concert, my dad decided to take his time and email me the next day. I did not extend a formal invitation to the audience as a whole to email me their own feedback because I specifically wanted immediate reactions.

4 The names of these students are listed in appendix D.

5 Originally, Limber imagined the dress as her mother’s wedding dress, but later in the process it changed to a lavender evening gown. The army uniform directly relates to Limber’s uncle who served in Europe in World War II.
CONCLUSION

There’s a Career in Here Somewhere

April 27, 2003; a bit bitter

I recently presented part of this project at an event that showcases the research of
graduate students from all over Ohio State’s Columbus campus. During my eight minutes
of questions, I found myself dancing around the small lecture stage becoming Odette one
minute, Odile the next trying desperately to communicate the expressive challenges
ballerina’s face. Then I thought to myself, “Wait a minute, this is not what my
presentation was about.” I was hoping to pull Imber’s ballet and my experience with it
into the larger discussion I briefly—maybe too briefly—outlined at the beginning of my
talk. Instead I found myself dealing with a truckload of biases that totally obscured my
purpose. The ballerina has so much legend. She has so much baggage. She left me
standing at a roadblock. I was brandishing my teaspoon trying to shovel out from under a
mountain of mythology. When I came to, I heard one of the judges trying to convince me
that pointe shoes, instead of offering more possibilities to female dancers, were limiting
and gave the ballerina no control. “Didn’t she hear anything I just said?” I asked myself.
I thought about the new questions. I thought about the old assumptions. I thought about how I needed to negotiate between the mythology of the ballerina and the one that I am. This thesis was an attempt to do that, to offer my experience as proof that ballet is not an antiquated dance form that sucks the life out of the female artist and displays her empty carcass to a drooling audience. This is not to say that ballet, as an institution does not have an ugly underbelly. There is enough evidence out there in performance to support the idea that ballet glorifies the body over the mind, and athleticism over expression, especially in restagings of the classical canon. It is unfortunate.

What I hoped to achieve with this project is to answer the questions for myself: to find the mind in the body, the power in perceived passivity and the voice in the muted. Through Bess Imber’s ballet *A Woman: England, 1942*, I was able to show that the formal structures of classical ballet can be used by female choreographers to give a voice to female performers. We are not standing, stuck, at the roadblock. We laugh as we clamber over the mountain as passers-by wonder at the mobility of women in tapered shoes.

It is going to take much more elbow grease to dispel the myths and finally (completely) give the ballerina her voice and her body back—if she even had it in the first place. She is not only fighting against gaze theory, destructive training and the load of an incomplete historical record. She is also fighting against ballerina calendars, music boxes, literature and the big three—tiaras, tutus and toe shoes. God help us if we dare to put her on a birthday cake.
I am dead serious. Too many women have worked too hard and created too many important pieces of art to be shuffled to the back of the line. As dance artists, we do not simply have to fold ballet up nicely and store it in the attic.

I should probably be getting back to work...

April 29, 2003: hmmmm...better

_It was an amazing experience._ (Rodney Veal)

He can not stop talking about it. ("It was an amazing experience.") There we were, on the stage together for a few brief minutes, the temporal space between our characters bridged by a few yards of silk chiffon.

When it came right down to it, it did not matter what the scholars said about the meaning behind our relationship on stage or the one we had with our audience. It did not matter that I pulled on _pontine_ shoes, smoothed my leotard snuggly over my skin and stood, exposed, in that bright light before their eyes. What did matter was who I was on that stage: a woman of agency, an artistic collaborator and a choreographic interpreter.

As a young dancer, I stood in the wings watching Pontecorvo tear across the stage and suspend her body as if gravity did not exist. Maybe it was what I needed when I was fourteen in a life of ballerina calendars and greeting cards. I needed to see a "real" woman. Imber showed me one.
As scholars continue to apply feminist methodologies to the study of classical ballet performance, it will be crucial to include artists like Imber who have deliberately chosen classical ballet as an artistic medium because of the opportunities it offers female performers. Bess Imber’s *A Woman: England, 1942* stands as an example of how female ballet artists can create their own images on the ballet stage by taking command of the movement vocabulary and performance situation. She has proven that the formal elements of classical ballet do not inherently make women look weak and powerless. On the contrary, both Imber’s performer and the character she creates are women of agency. They have physical strength, emotional range and a command of the space they inhabit.
APPENDIX A

The Tradition

Throughout my paper, I refer to this ballet as being part of the "classical ballet" tradition in order to distinguish it from varied performance situations artists used in the 20th century. I am using this term broadly to describe the elements A Woman: England, 1942 shares with those traditionally described as classical, namely the ballets of Marius Petipa from late nineteenth century Russia. These elements include:

1. the use of the proscenium stage
2. specialized costuming that does not necessarily reflect the realistic situation of the character
3. pointe shoes worn by the female dancer
4. highly specialized movement, drawing on the tradition of the danse d'école (or the academic dance tradition) that showcases the physical skill of the dancer
5. frontal presentation to the audience
6. the choreography is closely linked with the music
7. movement that emphasizes verticality and extending the limbs away from the center of the body
8. choreography that emphasizes shape of the body through movement
9. movement vocabulary that is split along gender lines particularly in the pas de deux when the male dancer lifts and supports the female dancer.

Some of the scholars I have read in preparation for writing this paper have also discussed the work of George Balanchine in addition to Petipa when talking about the
role of women in ballet. While Balanchine's work is referred to most of the time as being "neo-classical," I am dropping the "neo" when talking about his work since I am concerned with the characteristics of his choreography that adhere to the classical tradition.

Bess Imber does draw directly from Balanchine's work in the first and last sections of the ballet when she dresses the dancer simply in leotard and tights (inspired by Balanchine's costuming several of his ballets in "practice clothes") and in her use of the arms. In the classical tradition, the elbows and wrists work together to extend a long softly curved line from the shoulder. Balanchine sometimes stretched the elbows and flexed the wrists of his dancers creating a sharper, more energized line of the arms. His choreography also allowed for more flexibility in the torso so that hips could sway and the body could be intentionally thrown off balance.¹

Imber's ballet, while it shares many characteristics with the ballets of the classical era, is a contemporary piece choreographed in the 1980's. It can be argued that the styles are too divergent to merit an accurate comparison and that it is impossible to even consider this discussion without addressing historical context of women on the stage during the latter halves of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My discussion is bound by the writings I discuss which address how the ballerina is seen from the audience and my experiences dancing Imber's ballet. Most of these scholars do analyze the historical record at length, either by pointing out its deficiencies or by upholding its conventions. A contribution to this end of the discussion is beyond the scope of this project, however merely naming Imber and giving attention to her ballet adds yet another name to the growing list of female artists that have used ballet as their medium of choice.

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1 I am using my own personal experience dancing and watching ballets. The portions of the arms as well as the off-balance positioning of the ballerina can be seen in Balanchine’s The Four Temperaments. ("The Four Temperaments," Choreography by George Balanchine with members of the New York City Ballet. New York: Noteworthy/Warner Vision Entertainment, 1995.)
APPENDIX B

The Ballerina

The ballerina interpreted a role on the stage—the ballerina, because the ballerina was the most important person in the ballet, and because a dancer who achieved this title was very proud of her position. She wished to be clear to everyone, immediately upon her entrance on the stage, that she was not just a dancer but the ballerina. In the pursuit of acquiring that ballerina look, there evolved a special proud stance: a unique habit of holding the head almost immobile, the stretching of the neck, and a peculiar gait. (Fokine 49)

The word “ballerina” is widely misused and misunderstood. The ballerina is the figure who is traditionally the pinnacle of the ballet—that is, dance in its most refined and elitist form. Yet any girl who wears pointe shoes and hits a headline seems automatically to be described as a ‘ballerina’—a grotesque misuse of the term. To become a ballerina requires a God-given gift, as well as unceasing hard work and a company to provide a framework which will show off the great artist. The entire apparatus of a major classical ballet company is necessary if a ballerina is to be seen in her proper setting. […] The ballerina in her true sense is the apex of a pyramid formed by the traditional ballet company and the traditional repertory. (Corke and Crisp 7)

The sources I draw from use the term “ballerina” in different ways. It is a complicated term that not only alludes to the dancer’s skill, but also to her position within the ballet company and her relationship with her partner. In my own descriptions of A Woman: England, 1942, I am using the term “ballerina” interchangeably with “female dancer.” In doing so, I want to emphasize the specialized skills it takes to dance this
ballet, but at the same time introduce the idea that the role is accessible and not reserved for the ballet elite.

While scholars’ use of “ballerina” could be understood as the examples above, it is primarily used to name the lead female dancer in a classical (or in the case of Balanchine, neo-classical) performance. Often it is the term assigned to the female dancer within the context of the classical pas de deux. Their “ballerina” is the one who commands the language of ballet. Many times scholars choose not to name the “ballerina” directly and instead write about female “performers” or “dancers.”

In her article, *Dying Swans or Sitting Ducks*, Carter broadens the use of the term “ballerina.” Her article places the Clarke/Crisp ballerina in the middle of the discussion, recognizing that scholars’ labels not only apply to the leading female but to all women that occupy the ballet stage. The broad scope of Carter’s article allows the reader to apply the term “ballerina” to all women in ballet with the assumption that they are skilled technicians and performers. It is not merely “any girl who puts on pointe shoes,” rather it is used with respect to refer to women of skill in their profession.

Because Ann Daly, in her article *The Balanchine Woman*, immediately sets up the connection between the “Balanchine ballerina” and “artificial construction,” the term takes on a decidedly negative connotation (9). “Ballerina,” in this case comes to stand for not only the elite, but also the tainted and unnatural. She is not a representation of “women,” but a distorted construct at the mercy of her male partner and the male choreographer.

Foster’s “ballerina-as-phallic” draws attention to the sexual inequalities of the classical pas de deux and, like Daly, seriously questions her agency in the arms of her
man (3). However, in Foster's case, the ballerina is more than an object to be manipulated, but also an object of sexual desire.

Daly and Foster take the Clarke/Crisp "ballerina" and knock her off her pedestal positioning her as a woman without agency instead of one who has come to be the focal point of a large artistic organization. Rather than being a woman who rises above the mortals of her ballet company, she is a pawn of the real authority: the men who control her body through choreography and her dancing.

This paper focuses on the skill, strength and artistry of female ballet dancers, therefore, I never mean "ballerina" to refer to the status of the dancer within the structure of the ballet company. I use it only as a means to reenforce the exceptional skill female ballet performers must gain in order to perform solo work.
APPENDIX C

Glossary

arabesque: “One of the basic poses in ballet” (Grant 2). The dancer stands on one leg while the other leg stretches long and straight behind her.

assemblé: “Assembled or joined together. A step in which the working foot slides well along the ground before being swept into the air. As the foot goes into the air the dancer pushes off the floor with the supporting leg, extending the toes. Both legs come to the ground simultaneously in the fifth position” (5).

attitude: “It is a position on one leg with the other lifted in back, the knee bent at an angle of ninety degrees and well turned out so that the knee is higher than the foot” (9).

brisé volé: “Flying brisé. […] [T]he working foot passes through the first position to the [front or back], the feet are beaten together and on alighting the free leg is extended forward or back with a straight knee” (25).

capriole: “Caper. A step of elevation in which the extended legs is beaten in the air. The working leg is thrust into the air; the underneath leg follows and beats against the first leg, sending it higher. The landing is then made on the underneath leg” (26).

(sur la) demi-pointe: “Indicates that the dancer is to stand high on the balls of the feet and under part of the toes” (36).

derrière: “Behind, back” (37).

devant: “In front” (38).

développé: “Developed. A développé is a movement in which the working leg is drawn up and slowly extended to an open position [in the air] and held there with perfect control” (38).
divertissement: “Diversion, enjoyment. A suite of numbers called ‘entrées,’ inserted into a classical ballet. These short dances are calculated to display the talents of individuals or groups of dancers” (39).

effacé: “Shaded. […] the dancer stands at an oblique angle to the audience so that a part of the body is taken back and almost hidden from view.” (42).

en dehors: “Outward. In steps and exercises the term en dehors indicates that the leg, in a position dierre or en l’air, moves in a circular direction, clockwise” (36).

en pointe: On pointe.

entrecat trois: “Interweaving or braiding. A step of beating in which the dancer jumps into the air and rapidly crosses the legs before and behind and each other” (45). In this entrecat, the legs cross three times and finish with one foot lifted slightly off the floor, held at the ankle of the standing leg.

fondé: “Sinking down. A term used to describe a lowering of the body made by bending the knee of the supporting leg” (51)

fouetté: “Whipped. A term applied to a whipping movement. [T]he sharp whipping around of the body from one direction to another” (51)

fouetté rond de jambe en tournant: “Whipped circle of the leg turning. This is the popular turn in which the dancer executes a series of turns on the supporting leg while being propelled by a whipping movement of the working leg. […] Fouettes are usually done in a series” (53).

grand: “Big, large” (57).

grand rond de jambe en l’air; a movement in which the working leg executes a développé to the front and, while maintaining the height of the leg, moves through the side position and ends in an arabesque.

jeté: “Thrown. A jump from one leg to the other in which the working leg is brushed into the air and appears to be thrown” (59).

pas de bourrée: “Bourrée step” (69). In the case of this ballet, it is a movement in which the dancer, while on pointe, steps back, side, then front. It is often performed quickly, almost skimming across the floor.

pas de deux: “Dance for two” (74). In the case of classical ballet performance, this refers specifically to a dance between a man and woman in which the male dancer supports, lifts and otherwise presents the female dance in a variety of positions and movements.
penché: "Leaning, inclining. [...] [A] high arabesque in which the body leans forward, the head being low and the foot of the raised leg the highest point" (76).

pirouette: "Whirl or spin. A complete turn of the body on one foot either on the pointe or demi-pointe" (79).

piqué: "Pricked, pricking. Executed by stepping directly on the pointe or demi-pointe of the working foot in any desired direction or position with the other foot raised in the air" (77).

(sur la) pointe: "The raising of the body on the tips of the toes" (82).

relevé: "Raised. A raising of the body on [...] pointe or demi-pointe. There are two ways to releve. [...] with a smooth, continuous rise [...] or a little spring" (87).

sissonne de côté: a jump that leaves the floor from both feet and lands on one; this particular sissonne travels to the side.

sous-sus: "Under-over. Sous-sus is a relevé in the fifth position [...] The dancer springs onto the pointe, drawing the legs and feet tightly together with the heels forced forward so that they give the impression of one foot" (104).

tendu: "Stretched" (109). The dancer’s leg is stretched away from the body while maintaining contact with the floor with the tips of the toes on the working (or non-supporting) leg.

terre à terre: “Ground to ground. Term used to indicate that in the execution of a step the feet barely leave the floor” (109).

tombé: “Falling down. Used to indicate that the body falls forward or backward on to the working leg” (109).

tour en l’air: “Turn in the air. This is essentially a male dancer’s step although contemporary choreographers use this tour for girls. It is a turn in the air in which the dancer rises straight into the air from a [small bend in the knees], makes a complete turn and lands in the fifth position with the feet reversed” (110).

variation: A short, solo dance for either a man or a woman. These solos were an important part of the way Petipa structured his ballet.

1 All definitions are taken from Gail Grant’s Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet ed. 2.
APPENDIX D

From the Audience

February 20, 2003

Amy Long: “tense and apprehensive because of the music, sort of a deadly fascination with the dress and its effects on a woman’s life, within relationships and self-confidence. The movements that were sharp were a wonderful contrast to the flow of the dress. It was a story of sadness—the price for moments of pleasure.”

Anonymous: “Beautiful expression. The dress as a prop as well as a costume was great. (If that makes any sense)”

February 21, 2003

Brandi Allen: “Beautiful. Dramatic and emotionally provoking. Knowing/having background information was definitely beneficial (time period, etc.). Though your emotional experience lead us through a heartfelt journey, I was intrigued to know more. Beautifully danced, Fully enjoyed”

Ashley Steiner: “Curiosity about the motivation of the choreographer in relation to the narrative. Admiration for the endurance, strength of a pointe solo”

Charles D. Valentin: “My kinesthetic response to this piece was very stimulating. I imagined that Rodney Veal was the ghost of a dead soldier who the woman once loved. The dress was a memory she held with her for the love she once had. She seemed like she was reminiscing before bed of her lost love and at the end when she removes the dress and holds her hands up to the sky she is praying before bed.”

Rebecca Inman: “In truth I know my experience of A Woman: England, 1942 was colored by my own gender. As a female I connected with Jeannine's dilemma which seemed to stem from some hope, desire expectation of her feminine heart. Desire=Vulnerability; Desire=Dispair. This is what I saw—this is what I felt—This dichotomy is beautiful. Without such deeply felt yearnings and emotion=What is Life?”
However tailored this piece was to a time period—it goes beyond—at least to the heart of every woman whoever hoped.”
February 22, 2003

Gary Maret Sr.: “If I didn’t know what the various movements mean I will make up my own mind as to what they mean. So did your message reach me, maybe maybe not. Reach to the heaven to a higher authority. Fall to the ground in depression and rejection.”

Yvonne Maret: “I appreciate the more traditional ballet movements and how the movement flows with the music.”

Lisa Hertz: “Very gracious and beautiful; much modern dance is obscure, but your combo of ballet, modern dance, and acting told a easy to understand heartache of a story that was displayed so beautifully.”

Laura Opfer: “Well, Jeannine—My experience with this dance was…hmm, what do you mean by experience? It was emotional, melodramatic, wonderful. I love to watch you dance. Beautiful. I’m proud of you.”

Seb Beale: “I was captivated by the gender dynamics of the piece tonight. I love how insignificant Rodney’s role is. He barely onstage compared to you, and his movement is bland and boring compared to the power and dynamicism that flows through all of yours. I love that he is in turmoil and emotional crisis over you, but that he is so far removed from the center of your reasons for existing that when he crumbles to the ground you don’t even go to him. And when he fades away and is no longer on stage, not a moment of longing for his return is wasted. He is but a tangent, briefly touching your strong circle of being. He is still while you fill the space. I loved seeing the precision and control of your movements and turns and the power of your leaps.”

Chuck Cales: “Beautiful. My interpretation: Life of a Woman. The young woman admires the dress as a symbol of adulthood. Then comes the stage in life when she can wear the dress. Next stage is an adult relationship (Rodney) and all that comes with it. Older, the dress is shed. However, it is still admired by the woman. Full circle—the younger woman anticipates what life will bring. The older woman reflects on has come to past. The dress embodies both future and past of the woman. Of course, I could be completely wrong, too!”

Mary Caffrey: “Thank you for sharing this beautiful dance. I felt a kind of profound sadness as the end—but I very much enjoyed the beauty of the dance itself, your movement and emotion. Thanks Jeannine.”

Bram Tucker: “The message point seemed clear—a powerful statement about feminism in the modern era and the hegemony of male-centered gender politics or something like that. One must have amazingly strong feet to deliver such a message.”
Name illegible: "There were lots of emotions. Happiness, longing memories, sadness the transitions were smooth and believable. The grace and fluidity were dreamy and made me feel intoxicated. And I loved the [illegible] there was so much feeling. Thanks!"

Adam Diamond: "My experience with dance, as with much art that is open to interpretation (by which I mean any experience the viewer brings is as crucial as that of the artist to the interpretation) tends to be to fall back on letting my mind lead where my emotion fails. My mind searches for structure, pattern. In watching this piece, the title was large in my mind and viewing process. The title rooted the narrative without rigidly guiding it. I was struck midway through that my initial impression that the piece was depicting a woman living in England in 1942 could also mean that the woman was England in 1942. The part symbolizing the whole."

Elizabeth Moras: "This piece captured an emotional tenderness and a naïve curiosity from a beautiful young woman. Thank you for the sensitive interpretation."

Students from Dance 200: The History of Ballet and Modern Dance who submitted papers for my perusal

Sarah Dye
Christine Evola
Stacy Frable
Shannon Gatsch
Mary Keonig
Thomas Tyler Mason
Lauren Mattox
Lindsay Mendelson
Amanda Newman
Nina Ogawara
Sarah Parrott
Anna Sadurski
Heather Sorber
Lauren Valentine

*In reproducing these responses, I have kept the writer's grammatical structure and spelling.
I am curious…

* A good dance moves the dancer and the audience toward each other.

-- Sondra Horton Fraleigh

"Dance and the Lived Body"

Please take a few minutes to tell me what you saw…

felt…

understood…

after watching my performance of


Observations and comments will be included in my thesis.

Figure 1. Flyer posted with audience evaluations to introduce and explain my asking for feedback.
Comments on "A Woman: England, 1942"
Performed by Jeannine Petier and Rodney Veal

What was your experience with this dance?

Name, please: __________________________

Figure 2. Example of audience response form.
WORKS CITED


Correspondence between Jeannine Potter and Bess Immer 1999-2003

Rehearsal/performance journal, Joannine Potter August 8, 2002-February 24, 2003
BIBLIOGRAPHY


--------- "Dying Swans or Sitting Ducks" *Performance Research* 4.3 (1999): 91-98.


ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Video:


Recordings:

Interviews:


Other Materials:

Dayton Ballet/Schwarz Archive housed at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio
1. Scrapbooks (included newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs, programs) 1920-1955
2. Programs (Experimental Group for Young Dancers, Dayton Civic Ballet, Dayton Ballet) 1938-1990

Bess Imber’s personal archive: newspaper clippings, letters, photographs, programs and schedules 1950-2000.

Correspondence between Jeannine Potter and Bess Imber 1999-2003

Rehearsal/performance journal, Jeannine Potter August 8, 2002-February 24, 2003