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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ROMANTIC BALLET IN ITS SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT IN PARIS AND LONDON, 1830 TO 1850

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: An Investigation of the Romantic ballet in its sociocultural context in Paris and London, 1830 to 1850

Keywords: Revolution bourgeoisie Romanticism synaesthesia duality ballerina woman

Historians have made a considerable contribution to the study of the Romantic ballet in terms of chronological development, the Romantic movement in the arts and the contribution of specific dancers and choreographers; very little research has been attempted to date on the interrelationship between the dance form and the wide range of human experience of the period. This holistic approach provides insight into form, content and stagecraft; political, economic and social influences; the prevailing artistic aesthetic and cultural climate; sex, gender and class issues; and the priorities, value system and nuances of the times. Recent work by historians and social scientists (eg Brinson 1981, Adshead 1983, Spencer 1985, Hanna 1988, Garafola 1989) advocates a recognition of the role of social and cultural systems in the evaluation of dance. This approach further ackowledges the equal status of all cultures, and has opened up areas of African performing dance in cultural systems outside the west. My parallel investigation of the gumboot dance in its South African context, which appears in Appendix B, provides an example.

The first half of the nineteenth century was characterized by the disruptive beginnings of the emergent industrial world, centred in Paris and London; and the Romantic ballet tradition reached its greatest heights at this time. Chapter One establishes the political, economic, social and artistic environment, and identifies middle class dominance as a key factor. Chapters Two and Three focus primarily on the three great ballets of the age, *La Sylphide*, 1832, *Giselle*, 1841, and *Pas de Quatre*, 1845, as expressions of the essential duality of the times, and of Romantic synaesthesia in the arts,

which enabled them to transcend the pedestrian bourgeois materialism of faciliatators and audience. Chapter Four examines the images of the idealized ballerina and the 'Victorian' middle class woman in relation to bourgeois male attitudes to female sexuality, gender and class. The Conclusion sums up the themes of duality, middle class influence, and the Romantic aesthetic, and discusses the prevalent notion that this period was identified as a 'golden age' of the Romantic ballet.

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INTRODUCTION

Theatre dance is an immediate and ephemeral art form that exists in space and time and uses the human body as its medium; it is autonomous and influential within the development of its own genre. The choreographer interacts with a specific social and cultural environment, and the interplay between the art form and its multifaceted context provides a reciprocal illumination. This interrelationship between dance and society forms the main thrust of this investigation, which concentrates on a specific space and time categorization, namely Paris and London, 1830 to 1850.

The essentially ephemeral nature of this performing art, that flourishes only at the moment of live theatre, presents specific problems to the dance scholar. Source material, particularly in relation to dance events of the past, is incomplete and often inadequate, and the works themselves usually no longer exist. Here the Romantic ballet is unique. The great ballets of the age, *La Sylphide* (or its derivative *Les Sylphides*) and *Giselle* form a vital and popular part of the repertories of classical ballet companies worldwide today; the researcher has access to several interpretations of these works, and the lifeblood of the performance ethos can be experienced directly. Yet an investigation with hindsight is fraught with potential pitfalls. Works of art can never be treated either as 'data' or as 'case histories', nor can current standards, subjective criteria or personal preferences simply be foisted onto history. An holistic approach to the era that nurtured and impinged on the art form will help to overcome some of these inherent problems, and provide an insight into both the form and the context, and the interaction between them.

Recent dance scholarship amongst social scientists and historians advocates a recognition of the role of social and cultural systems in an evaluation of dance. Ted Polhemus' book, *Social Aspects of the Human Body*, focuses on the human body and the 'social body', the society, and the relationship

between them.[1] This approach forms the basis of the argument presented in Spencer's *Society and the Dance*, an anthropological perspective.

> In a very important sense, society creates the dance, and it is to society that we must turn to understand it.[2]

Joann Kealiinohomoku's study of ballet as a form of ethnic dance, applies the term 'ethnic' to all dance to convey "the idea that all forms of dance reflect the cultural traditions within which they developed".[3] This viewpoint underlines the significance of the interplay between form and context, and the interaction between the individual choreographer and the sociocultural environment. The relevance of this interplay is the basic assumption underlying this investigation. Judith Lynne Hanna identifies dance as always to some extent 'culturally patterned'[4] because a peoples' values, attitudes and beliefs partially determine its concept, style, content and presentation. Dance is also social behaviour because it reflects and influences patterns of social organisation and relationships among groups and individuals.[5] Because dance is an expressive form of thinking and feeling, a detailed study of a particular genre in a specific spacial and temporal context will provide a wealth of information about the society, its value-system, fears and aspirations, and about social roles and relationships, and the mood and texture of the times.

Historians have made a considerable contribution to the study of dance in terms of its chronological development and the contribution of specific choreographers and dancers. However, there has been a tendency in certain western-based dance histories for patriarchal observations in reference to non-western cultures. Any suggestion of out-of-date colonialist or elitist attitudes is

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1 Polhemus 1978, p 21

2 Spencer 1985, p 38

3 Kealiinohomoku in Copeland & Cohen 1983, p 533

4 Hanna in Blacking & Kealiinohomoku 1979, p 17 - 41

5 Hanna 1979, pp 2 - 4

totally unacceptable;[6] academic objectivity is required and all cultures must be accorded equal status and value.

John Blacking notes in Spencer's *Society and the Dance*:

> ... it has become common practice to look at developments in dance in historical contexts as reflections of trends in economic and social life, as well as of the psychology of individual artists.[7]

Very little detailed work has been attempted to date on relating dance to the totality of human experience of an era. Walter Sorell's *Dance in its Time* explores this dynamic relationship between historic and human forces, with dance cast as the leading character. In tracing the development of dance from the twelfth century to the present day he aims "to recreate the sociocultural image of progressing time with which mankind's ingenuity and creative spirit must unfold".[8] This is a fascinating study, but it has the limitations inherent in such a sweeping general approach to the history of dance. I hope to make a contribution in this area of dance research, and I have chosen to focus specifically on a particular time/space span to provide an in-depth analysis. My approach is holistic and the perspective is primarily historical.

All history has a dimension of historical space and a dimension of historical time. The theoretical problem of this thesis investigates the interrelationship between the dance form and its context; this study spotlights a specific theatre dance form, the Romantic ballet, in two capital centres, Paris and London, during two decades of the nineteenth century, 1830 to 1850. The choice of this time and place is not arbitrary; in terms of both context and form it is a particularly interesting period. The predominant progressive idea of early nineteenth century Europe was revolution: political, industrial, social and artistic; and these turbulent and confusing times mark the beginning of the

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6 An example appears in Chapter One, page 23, note 61.

7 Blacking in Spencer 1985, p 68

8 Sorell 1981. p viii This rather sweeping generalisation uses unacceptable sexist terminology.

emerging industrial world. Several keywords, such as revolution, industry, democracy, class, art and culture derived their current usage and identity at this critical period.[9] France was the political leader in Europe and Britain the economic leader at a time when a large part of the world was transforming itself from a Franco-British base. And Paris and London were the two great centres of the Romantic ballet at this vital stage in its evolution. There seems to be an important connection here between the supreme achievements of the art form, and its context in these two capital cities where such momentous changes were taking place. "Paris was the scene of the most important developments in ballet. London's principal role was that of a rich and brilliant mirror."[10] Ballet as a dance form achieved both an identity still recognisable in the twentieth century and the acknowledged status of a 'golden age' at this time.[11]

It becomes apparent that the critical challenge of a wide-ranging study of this nature is the organisation of material to facilitate data interpretation; this implies not only a chronology but an explanation of events and an unravelling of the interconnection between them.[12] The material of this research project may be divided into three categories: firstly, the political, economic, social and cultural factors that form the environment; secondly, the contemporary people involved as facilitators, choreographers, dancers, designers, audience and critics; and thirdly, the dance events in terms both of heritage and actual performance. There is also a working relationship between contemporary comments, current observations either on or relating to past events and their significance, and the writer's opinions and argument. The thesis aims to unravel and interpret the interconnections between these categories of information in order to provide meaningful resolutions to the theoretical problem, which concerns the nature of the interrelationship between the 'golden age' of the Romantic ballet and

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9 The introduction to Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society*, 1959, elaborates on some of these concepts.

10 Dorris & Anderson 1988, p 251

11 Virtually all of the references consulted consider this period, 1830 to 1850, to be the apogee of the Romantic ballet, and the evaluative term 'golden age' is frequently used in twentieth century studies of the period. For example, the following works use the term in chapter headings: Guest 1972, p 46, Guest 1980, p 1, Kraus & Chapman 1981, p61.

12 Adshead 1983, and Leedy 1989, provide useful suggestions on research methodology.

its environment in London and Paris between 1830 and 1850. The remainder of this introduction indicates how the material will be structured in the thesis.

The conceptual basis of the argument is the holistic approach, and the validity and significance of the interaction between the dance product and the society in which it is produced. Chapter One establishes the context of the Romantic ballet during this age of revolution and change. The explosive and far-reaching political and economic circumstances with their horrendous social consequences, which form the background to the period, are examined in some detail; together with the predominant cultural aesthetic of the early nineteenth century. The three key strands of the argument are identified. Firstly, the significance of the emergent middle classes must be evaluated, whose values, fears and aspirations gradually dominated society and profoundly influenced the development of the ballet. Secondly, the dance form will be assessed as an outstanding expression of the spirit and essence of the great artistic movement of Romanticism. The technological innovations of the age and in the theatre itself, as well as developments within the classical ballet tradition immediately prior to 1830, need to be studied in relation to their contributions to the achievements in this particular style of ballet during the succeeding two decades. The chapter ends with a selected chronology that places ballet events in the context of the times.

Chapter Two examines the great ballet of the 1830's, *La Sylphide,* in its sociocultural context in Paris, with two minor ballets providing secondary examples. The role of the Director of the Paris Opera, Dr Louis Véron, and the qualities that he promoted in the ballet to satisfy his wealthy bourgeois patrons is discussed; the primary focus is on the ballets as outstanding examples of the spirit of Romanticism. *La Sylphide*, the prototype Romantic ballet, expressed the duality between the earthly and the supernatural, the flesh and the spirit, which was personified by Marie Taglioni's new poetic and elevated dancing style. Taglioni's modest spirituality was complemented by Fanny Elssler's sensuality, which offered a fantasy tour to foreign lands. These ballets reflected the mood of the 1830's in France, and provided an escape for the bourgeoisie and the Romantics from both boredom and danger and, most significantly, they reflected the essential duality of the times.

Chapter Three extends the investigation into the 1840's in both Paris and London. The most important work of the period and the epitome of the Romantic ballet, *Giselle,* confronts the problems of duality described in the previous chapter, and is discussed in some detail. The crucial contribution of poet, librettist and critic Théophile Gautier is assessed; a second generation French Romantic with bourgeois roots, he advocated *l'art pour l'art*, and escaped from the bourgeois reality around him via the ballet. The chapter ends with an examination of the Romantic ballet in London; and the contribution of shrewd businessman Benjamin Lumley, the Manager of Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket, and of his master choreographer, Jules Perrot.

Chapter Four focuses on the image of the Romantic ballerina, worshipped on her pedestal, and of the Victorian middle class woman, the 'angel in the house'. The discussion spotlights the relationship between these two images, and the implications of what they reveal about the bourgeois male attitudes of the age.

The Conclusion sums up the argument and assesses its relevance. The Afterword considers how this investigation may function as a stimulus for ongoing research about dance in South Africa in the 1990's, and suggests areas to be explored. Appendix A is a ready-reference, providing a chronology of the ballets referred to in Chapters Two and Three, with plot summaries and brief biographical notes on important contributors. This appendix ends with a short review of the classical ballet heritage to place the great age of the Romantic ballet in its dance context. Appendix B is an example of ongoing research in the form of an article, published in the *South African Theatre Journal* Vol. 4 No. 2 in September 1990, entitled "The Gumboot Dance, an historical, socio-economic and cultural perspective: a preliminary investigation of gumboot dancing in its context in South Africa."

A final comment must be made on the importance of primary sources in research of this nature. In his chapter on "The Historical Method" Paul Leedy stresses how primary source data enables the researcher to get close to the original events, and reconstruct as nearly as possible the

contemporary scene, in order to appraise accurately the meaning and relationship of events.[13] With the assistance of funds provided by the Dean of Research at Rhodes University, I was able to spend time overseas in search of primary source data. Detective work in journal, newspaper and museum archives proved to be both fascinating and productive. However excellent the secondary source material, it is only by re-searching for oneself that one can experience an authentic sense of the texture and nuances of the period, and uncover the often subtle and dynamic interaction between the dance form and its multifaceted environment. Dance scholarship is considered to be in its infancy in both Britain and America; it has scarcely even been conceived in South Africa.[14] Yet, in the western world, it is steadily on its way to becoming a fully acknowledged and accredited humanist pursuit, and this vast field is wide open to researchers.[15]

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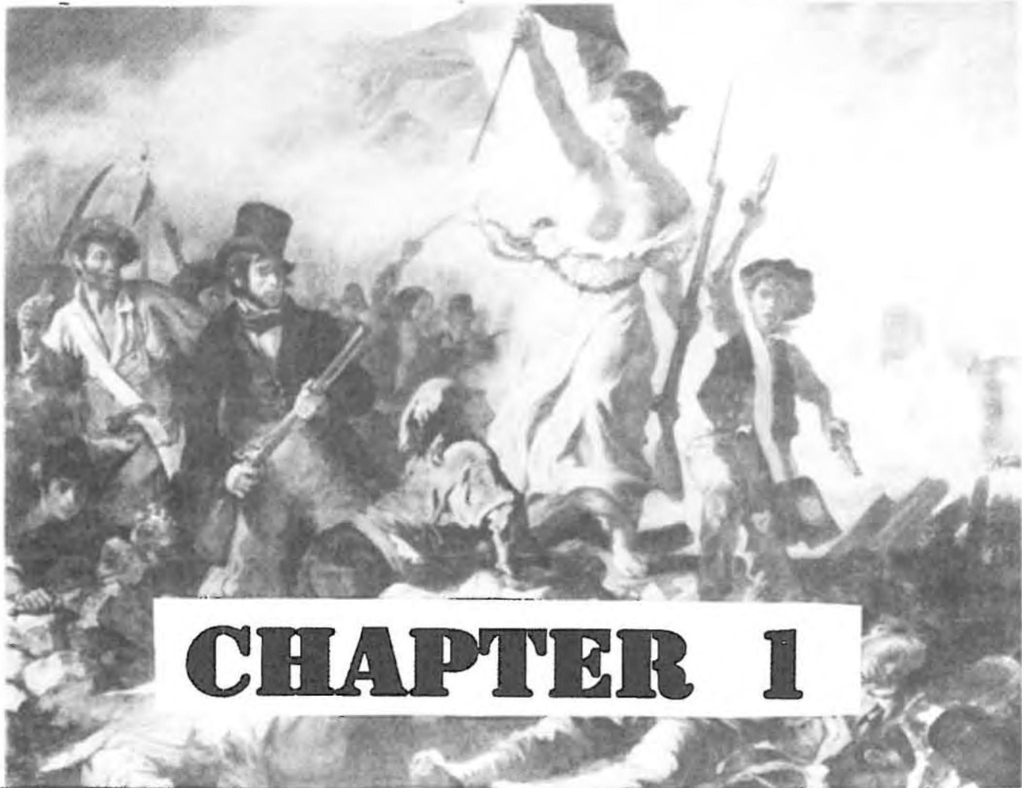
[13] Leedy 1989, pp 125 & 126

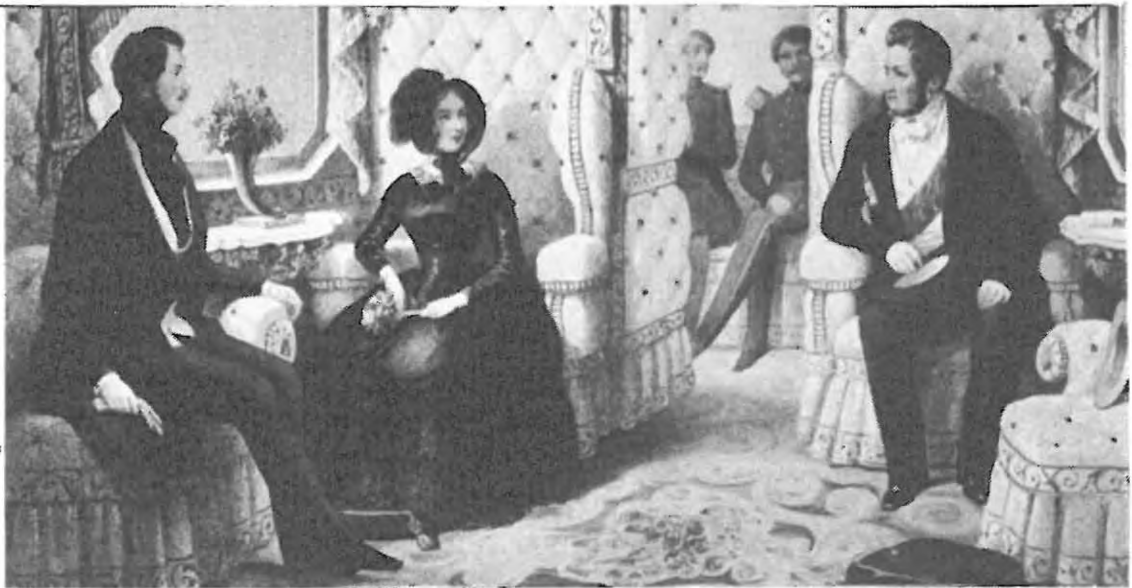
[14] There are, of course, well-established courses offered at U.C.T. and Pretoria Technikon that are mainly concerned with performance of classical dance, and dance studies has emerged in drama and theatre departments and human movement studies at university level; but there are no autonomous departments in dance studies concentrating on the full range of dance practice and scholarship.

[15] Pierpont in the *New Yorker* 1990, p 82 The discussion in this introduction is also indebted to McMahon in *Dance Theatre Journal*, 1990 pp 38 - 39



CHAPTER 1

Paris and London: Revolution and the Bourgeoisie



This chapter aims to establish the political and economic environment in Paris and London, in which the Romantic ballet flourished during the twenty years from 1830 to 1850, and to provide a sense of the social and artistic climate of the times.

1830 is regarded as a turning point in European history: political discontent exploded into revolution on the Continent, and the first awareness of industrialism and its consequences as a fact of life dawned in Britain. The succeeding twenty years of political, economic and social insecurity ended with further political disruption in 1848, which inaugurated the Second Republic in France; and the Great Exhibition of 1851, which celebrated Britain's economic achievements and heralded the prosperous and stable middle years of Queen Victoria's reign. Hobsbawn characterises this era in Europe as an all-embracing and highly influential extended revolution:

> The great revolution of 1789 to 1848 was a triumph of *capitalist* industry; ...of *middle class* or *bourgeois liberal* society; ... of economies and states in particular geographic regions of the world whose centre was the neighbouring and rival states of Great Britain and France. The transformation of 1789 to 1848 is essentially the twin upheaval which took place in those two countries, and was propagated thence across the entire world.[17]

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[16] **<u>Chapter One title page: Key Images</u>**

Top: (repeat of no. 2): Political Revolution. *Liberty leading the People*, Delacroix's famous painting of the revolution of 28 July 1830 in Paris.

Centre: A popular colour print of 1844 showing the two rather bourgeois monarchs, Queen Victoria of England, with Prince Albert, and King Louis-Philippe of France, in the luxury coaches of the Royal Train; evidence of Britain's spreading railway network and economic growth. (Print by E. Pingret in Benson 1987, between pp. 40 & 41)

Bottom: Industrial Revolution. An ugly smog-choked urban industrial environment; the negative side of this unique development in human history. (*The Mind Alive Encyclopaedia of World History* 1974, p.149)

[17] Hobsbawm 1988, pp. 13 & 14

1

1. A Romantic engraving of eighteen year old Queen Victoria in her coronation robes, 1837; after a painting by A.E. Chalon, who became famous for his delicate lithographs of Romantic ballerinas.

In his footnote to the English edition of the Communist Manifesto, 1848, Engels writes "generally speaking, for the economical development of the bourgeoisie, England is taken as a typical country; for its political development, France."[18] I have chosen to use the same emphasis in this chapter, with a prominent focus on the social consequences of the economic upheaval in both countries.[19]

Any consideration of the political fabric of the age must begin with the French Revolution of 1789, which provided the pattern of all subsequent revolutions in terms of concept and ideology, vocabulary and organisation. In the words of a contemporary Greek patriot, it "opened the eyes of the world".[20] The word 'revolution', which had previously denoted a mere turning upon itself like a revolving wheel, now acquired its current associations of novelty and fundamental change, of the whole restructuring of human society.[21] For "virtually two hundred years the French Revolution has been regarded as an epochal event, a symbolic point at which, like the Fall of Rome or the atomic bomb at Hiroshima, the range of human possibilities is redefined."[22] To people of all political affiliations, the French Revolution had shown how much human force and will could modify and destroy.

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18 Engels in Kumar 1983, p 112

19 There were obviously some subtle national variations in reaction to the extreme political and economic conditions of the period, which one must be aware of in a study that examines a sociocultural context with a specific time/space categorization. The differences were a matter of degree: the political revolutions in Paris were echoed by the constant threat of revolution in London; Britain was the first country to experience the economic boom and attendant social problems of the industrial revolution, but these conditions spread very rapidly to France and other countries. The middle classes emerged as political, economic and social leaders in both countries, and they reacted to threats to their status in very similar ways. Throughout this thesis I used 'middle class' and 'bourgeois' as synonyms. It will become apparent that for the purposes of this investigation the similarities are far more significant than any minor national differences of degree or emphasis. It must also be remembered that the Romantic ballet in London was an imported art, so that many of the factors that affected developments in Paris were equally applicable in both centres.

20 Hobsbawm 1988, p 117, and Chapter 3 for more details

21 Kumar 1983, p 20. Further discussion on this and other keywords of the period can be found in Williams, 1958.

22 Christiansen 1988, pp 19 & 20

To the upheaval of the French Revolution must be added the disruption of the Napoleonic Wars which dominated Britain and Europe until 1815. Napoleon was a combination of revolutionary and enlightened despot, upheld by a broad base of popular support and dedicated to military glory, who made effective use of his personality cult and a carefully controlled press; "the absolute monarchs who re-established themselves after his fall, learned from Napoleon's techniques and in so doing helped to lay the groundwork of modern totalitarian rule."[23] During the reactionary post-Napoleonic era the French experimented, unsuccessfully, with constitutional monarchies: 1814 to 1830 saw the Restoration of the Bourbons, as the two brothers of the executed Louis XVI reigned successively in the out-of-date style of *Ancien Regime*. After the 1830 revolution, Louis-Philippe of the junior Orleans branch was elected King of the French. This period, which saw the flowering of the ballet at the Opéra, was an anticlimax: a time of dull stagnation, political disillusion and economic crisis. "During a period of social progress he (Louis-Philippe) remained shackled by narrow conservatism ... By refusing to fall in with the masses, he forgot the very principle of his salvation."[24]

Reactionary conservatism was a feature of the age, for revolution embodies an element of danger for existing norms and institutions; as Karl Marx has stated, "force is the midwife to the old society pregnant with the new."[25] Throughout the period under discussion, two great forces pulled in dynamic opposition to each other: the influence of revolutionary ideals, and reaction against those ideals. The sparks of nationalism and political liberty that the French armies carried all over Europe burst into flame in the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. "In 1831 Victor Hugo had written that he already heard 'the dull sound of revolution, still deep down in the earth, pushing out under every kingdom in Europe its subterranean galleries from the central shaft of the mine which is Paris'. In 1847 the sound was loud and close. In 1848 the explosion burst."[26] This revolution, which occurs towards the end

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23 Latey in Lee 1987, p 25

24 Castries 1979, p 260

25 Marx in Kumar 1983, p 20

26 Hobsbawm 1988, p 371

2

3

2. *The 28th July: Liberty leading the People.* Delacroix's famous painting of the 1830 revolution in Paris reinforces the view that the middle classes built their fortune on the misery of the majority.

3 A medallion portrait of Louis- Philippe, elected King of the French, 1830 to 1848, whose pedestrian reign began and ended in revolution.

of the decade, was the swan-song of the Bourbon dynasty in France. A Bonaparte became President of the Second Republic and then, for a brief period, Napoleon III.

Hugo's 'mine' is an apt image, for Britain's revolution was an economic one. It was the French who, by analogy with their own Revolution of 1789, were the first to hail the economic changes in Britain as an 'Industrial Revolution'. They made the influential bracketing of the two as "a single all-embracing, world-historical phenomenon."[27] In his *History of Britain*, 1789 to 1983, Kenneth Morgan sums up the impact and significance of this new development in human endeavour:

> Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Britain was swept up in a revolutionary experience without precedent in human history. It became the first industrial nation, with dramatic consequences for its culture, society and political fabric. Coal, iron and textiles formed the basis of a massive advance in manufacturing and productive capacity, backed up by a new transport infrastructure of canals, roads and, most novel of all, railways ... The continuous strains of the process of industrial change meant repeated challenges to the political and social order ... Industrial progress was accompanied by a huge rise in the population, much of it concentrated in new manufacturing towns with intense problems of poverty, disease and social exploitation resulting.[28]

Historian Asa Briggs graphically describes these traumatic changes as "the sense of a leap forward".[29] The first urban and industrial society appeared in the smoke of factory chimneys, trains and steamships which burnt coal on which the energy revolution was built. In his *Ascent of Man* scientist Bronowski identifies the great discovery of the age as power - wind, water, steam and coal - the concept of nature as the carrier of energy fascinated Romantic painters and poets. "Energy" wrote

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27 Kumar 1983, p 46. In his book *Prophecy and Progress*, on the sociology of industrial and post-industrial society, Kumar elaborates in some detail on the complicated consequences of industrialization. "Industrialization meant ... the transformation of the productive forces of society through the application of a machine technology and the factory system; but it also meant urbanization, secularization, the 'rationalization' of thought, institution and behaviour, the individualization of consciousness and conduct, and a host of other changes in family life, politics and culture." Kumar 1983, p 55

28 Morgan 1985, p ix

29 Briggs 1983, p 186

4

4. The Rocket, George Stephenson's winning locomotive in the eight-day Liverpool and Manchester Railroad Competition in 1829.
5. Third-class railway carriages were neither cushioned, ventilated, lighted nor carpeted. This seat, intended for five passengers only, shows the discomforts of travelling on the cheap.

5

Blake, "is eternal delight".[30] During the whole of the long reign of Queen Victoria (1837 - 1901) industrialism was creating wealth and transforming the face of Britain. In 1844, seven years after the accession of Queen Victoria, a crude woodcut shows us a London under the impressive shadow of industrial development. The gracious Georgian city seems to have become a place of drab, barrack-like buildings and grimy rooftops. Smoke pours from factory chimneys, the funnels of paddle steamers and from trains on the viaducts which stretch tentacles across the last remaining green fields.[31]

The social consequences of these developments were horrendous. As has been noted, this period was characterized by a demographic explosion and a marked increase in urbanization. The towns and cities soaked up armies of migrant people. There was constant drift into London and the industrial cities and towns, and the slums multiplied like the people who had to live in them. In 1801 Britain's population had been ten and a half million; by 1851 it was twenty million. The most powerful and influential group was the rising middle class, who steadily consolidated their position throughout the century. "Early Victorians talked a lot about the middle classes ... They seemed to be a more important section of the community than ever before."[32] It was the time of the parvenu, the self-made man; Carlyle wrote about "'cash payment as the sole nexus' between man and man".[33] In France after 1830 the hard-headed bourgeoisie were all-powerful; the society was bourgeois in its structure and values. Delacroix's famous painting of the 1830 revolution, *Liberty leading the People*, reinforces the view that the middle classes built their fortune on the misery of the majority. "Implicit in the work was an unpleasant reminder, the Revolution that benefited the bourgeoisie was fought by a less fortunate class."[34]

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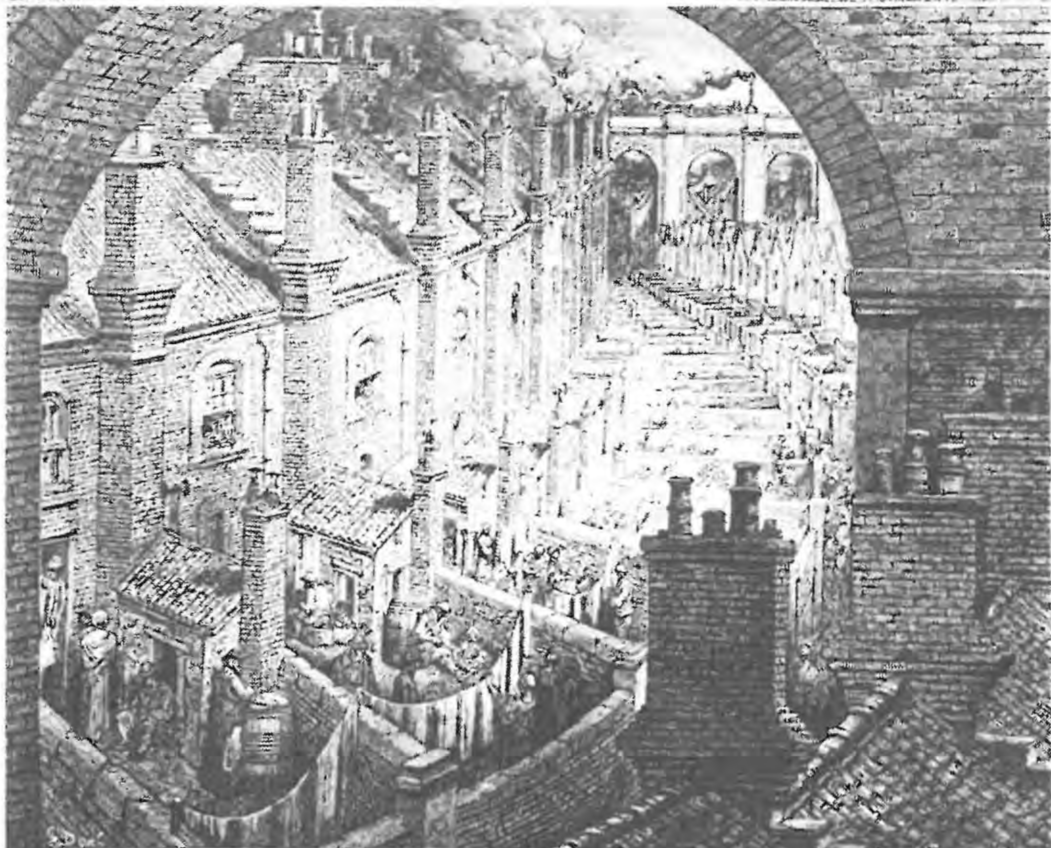
30 Bronowski 1975, p 282

31 Barker & Jackson 1987, p 262 (Plate No 7 shows part of this woodcut)

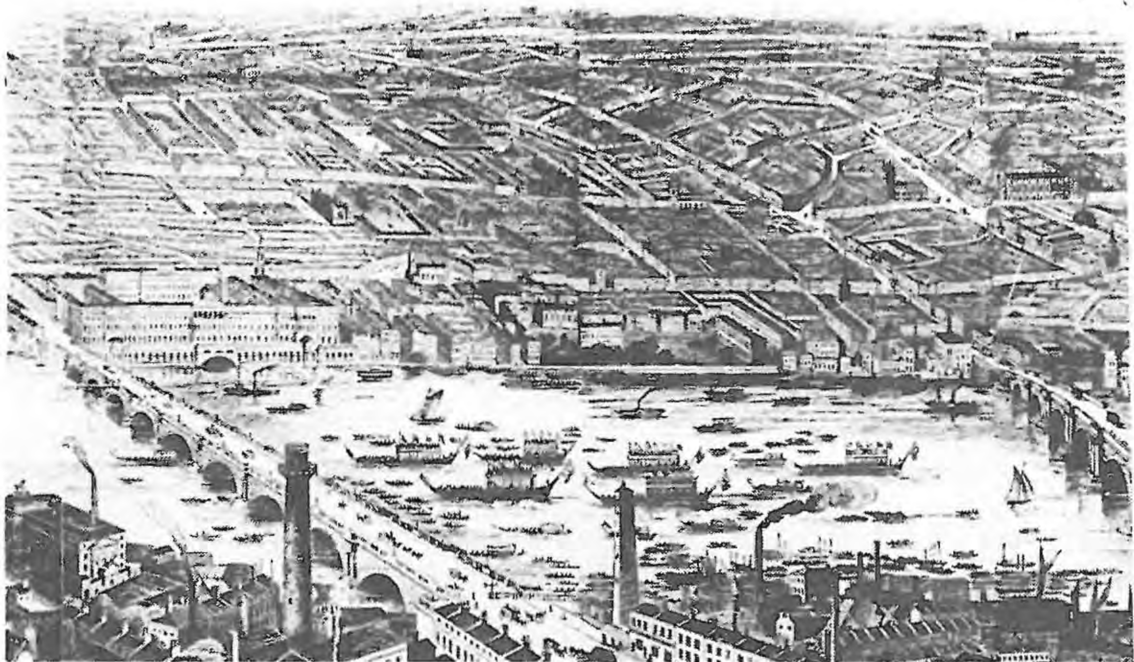
32 Harrison 1988, p 103

33 Williams 1958, p 76

34 Vaughan 1988, p 251



6. Dore's woodcut of London slums showing rows of desolate terrace houses crowded under railway arches.
7. A woodcut of London in 1844, under the oppressive shadow of industrial development.



Although the triumphant bourgeoisie was the dominant class in both Britain and France, it was greatly outnumbered by the vast hordes of what contemporary writers describe as the 'labouring poor'. In the midst of ever-increasing prosperity there was terrible poverty and disease; typhus and smallpox killed thousands each year in the overcrowded tenements and slums. In London the problems of water supply were acute. "All the sewage of two million people emptied into the Thames, to move, black and foul-smelling, up and down the river on every tide."[35] The Thames also provided the main source of drinking water. "Writing to his wife in 1849, Charles Kingsley said of Bermondsey, '... oh God! What I saw! People having no water to drink - hundreds of them - but the water of the common sewer which stagnates full of ... dead fish, cats and dogs, under their windows.'"[36] A large part of Karl Marx's *Capital,* Volume One, is devoted to the consequences of industrialism for the working class. He identifies London as the worst extreme in terms of overcrowded habitation absolutely unfit for human beings; he quotes from a mid-century Public Health Report by a Dr Hunter, who says: "It is not too much to say that life in parts of London ... is infernal."[37] The factory system and the massing of workers in city slums are the dominant negative images of the emergent machine age. The evil that made the factory ghastly was the domination of men by the pace of machines. Marx cites many instances of the exploitation of women and children. A very few examples serve to emphasize the terrible suffering in human terms. Women were employed doing heavy labour underground in the mines until 1862, and the hours of labour of children in the mines were not regulated until 1872. In the lace-making industry children of two and two-and-a-half years were employed. The Children's Employment Commission (Fifth Report, page 22), published in the 1860's, notes: "In spite of legislation, the number of boys sold in Great Britain by their parents to act as live chimney-sweeping machines (although there exist plenty of machines to replace them) exceeds 2000."[38] Blake wrote his famous poem on this social outrage of the day, beginning:

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35 Barker & Jackson 1987, p 278

36 Walvin 1988, p 54

37 Marx 1938, pp 675 & 676

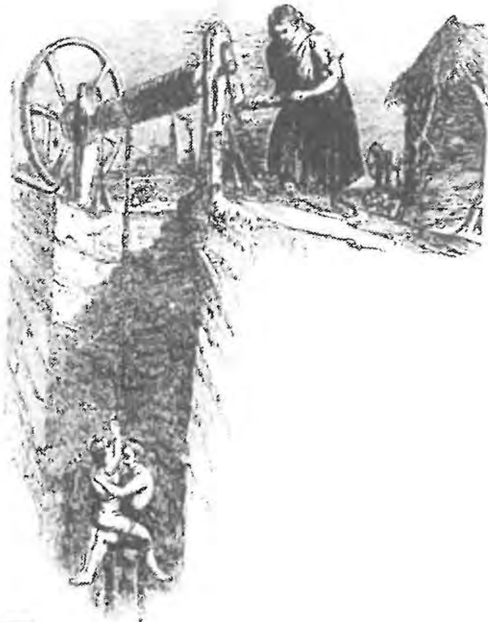
38 Marx 1939, pp 505, 472 & 394

British middle class public opinion was horrified when illustrations such as these appeared in Government reports:

8. Letting children down a coal mine, 1842.

9. Hauling a cart in a mine pit-passage, 1842.

10. *Cholera: the silent highwayman.* 1831 saw the start of the cholera epidemics in Britain and France: by 1832, thiry-one thousand people had died of cholera in Britain, and by 1837, there were eighteen thousand cholera victims in Paris alone, mainly from the poorer classes.



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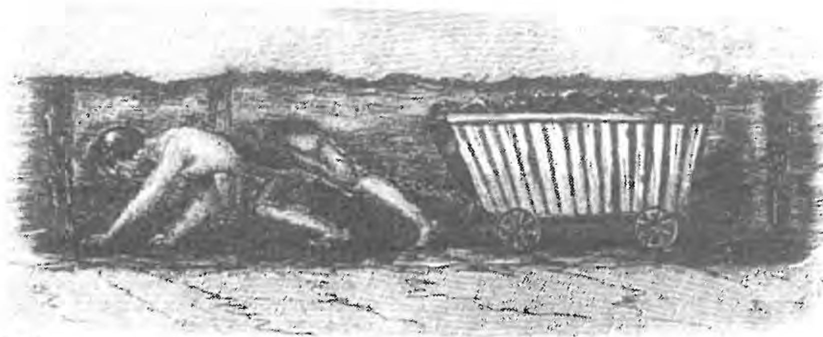

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When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me whilst yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry 'weep weep weep weep,'
So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep.[39]

The value-system which allows working class women and children to be treated in this way and places middle class and aristocratic women on pedestals will be examined in some detail later in the argument.

Paris too, gave the impression of a city sunk in poverty and crime, and there were frequent strikes as workers flexed their strength. The plight of the overwhelming numbers of the labouring poor was a constant threat to the security of the heavily outnumbered bourgeoisie. In the great industrial centres the average expectation of life was little more than twenty years; it only required a bad harvest for thousands of poor people to die. In the cholera epidemic of 1831 there were 18 000 victims in Paris alone, taking its heaviest toll in the poorer districts. Scrofula, rickets and tuberculosis, drunkenness, prostitution, beggars and vagabonds were disturbing elements that gave the big towns of this period their abnormal and frightening character. "Physical sickness and moral corruption helped create 'the cadaverous, diabolical appearance' which struck all those who approached 'the dregs of the common people' ... the works of Balzac and Victor Hugo ... bore witness to the danger presented by the lowest strata of society."[40] Conditions were further complicated by bad harvests and periods of acute economic depression in both Britain and France. Dirt, disease and overcrowding led to strikes and unrest, and to devastating epidemics of typhus and cholera.

The wretched existence of the proletariat was to inspire different reactions:

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39 Plowman, Max ed. *William Blake, Poems and Prophecies* London: Everyman's Library, Dent & Sons Ltd. 1959, p 11

40 Droz 1981, p 67

12

11. Throughout most of the nineteenth century small children were expected to work long and dangerous hours in mills, factories and mines.

12. A famous photograph of homeless London street urchins taken on their admission to the first of Dr Bernardo's Homes.

13. An illustration of a working class pub scene from Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1851.

13

> 'A feeling very generally exists', wrote the prophet of the early Victorian age, Thomas Carlyle, in 1839, 'that the condition and disposition of the Working Classes is a rather ominous matter at present, that something ought to be said, something ought to be done, in regard to it.[41]

This 'Condition of England' question began to receive more and more attention. There were numerous studies of poverty and social conditions at this time, the formative years of most of the social sciences, and a Malthusian concern was expressed about the dangers of overpopulation. The dominant social characteristic of the time in England was known as Utilitarianism. Contemporary legislation and public writing reveals a belief in the value of work in relation to individual effort. Raymond Williams, in *The Long Revolution*, clarifies the Utilitarian attitude to the poor:

> The poor are seen as victims of their own failing, and it is strongly held that the best among them will climb out of their class. A punitive Poor Law is necessary in order to stimulate effort; if a man could fall back on relief, without grave hardship in the form of separation from his family, minimum sustenance, and such work as stone-breaking or oakum-picking, he would not make the necessary effort to provide for himself. In this and a wider field, suffering is in one sense ennobling, in that it teaches humility and courage, and leads to the hard dedication to duty. Thrift, sobriety and piety are the principal virtues ... Training to the prevailing virtues must be necessarily severe, but there is an obligation to see that the institutions for such training are strengthened.[42]

These attitudes culminated in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which assigned paupers to gaunt workhouses; the Act aimed to make life so intolerable for rural paupers that they would be forced to move to available jobs.

The creative artists of the day were fully aware of the plight of the poor and were totally committed to the problems associated with the rise of industrialism; "there have been few generations of creative writers more deeply interested and more involved in the study and criticism of the society

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41 Harrison 1988, p 63

42 Williams 1961, p 61

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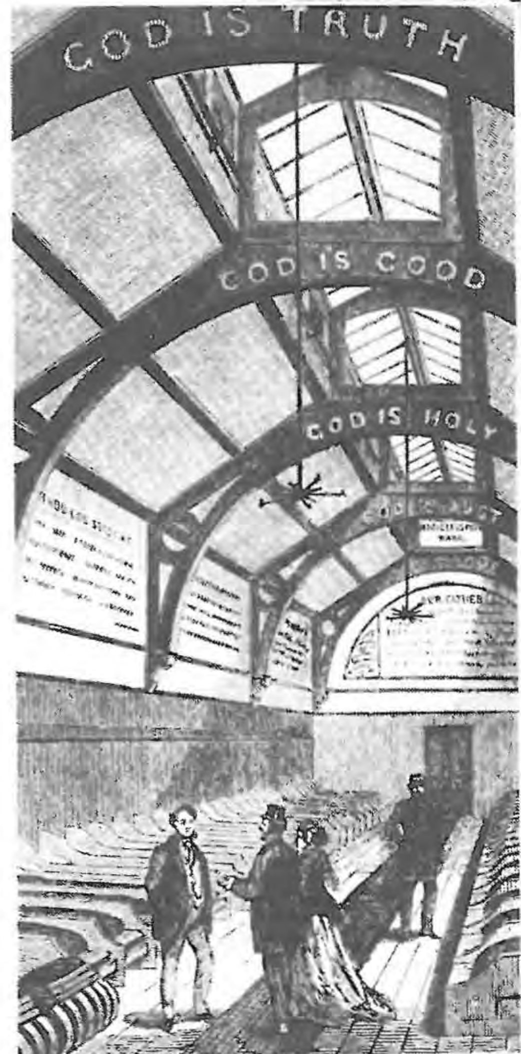

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14. With the aid of a candle, a social worker discovers an ill-clad child sleeping on a bed of straw in the sort of conditions that led to the spread of cholera and other diseases. From a wood engraving.

15. A casual ward in Marylebone.

16. Bible reading to the poor. To the Utilitarians, the poor were seen as victims of their own failings, and a punitive Poor Law was considered necessary in order to stimulate effort. Thrift, sobriety and piety were the principal virtues.

16

PUNCH'S PENCILLINGS.—Nº LXII.

THE "MILK" OF POOR-LAW "KINDNESS."

of their day".[43] Despite the element of poetic licence, they provide potent images of the social earthquake caused by machine and factory:

> And was Jerusalem builded here
> Among these dark satanic mills?[44]

When William Blake asked this famous question he had the new factories in mind, as well as 'mill' in the primary sense of 'grinding', "the repetitive churning and grinding of oppressive philosophies."[45] Dickens uses the image too, in the character of Gradgrind, the Utilitarian Victorian employer who represents an indictment of the ideas that built and maintained Coketown. *Hard Times* "is a thorough-going and creative examination of the dominant philosophy of industrialism."[46] Byron made a speech in defence of the Luddites, and Shelley wrote a poem on the Peterloo Massacre challenging the workers to revolt, which ends:

> Rise like Lions after slumber
> In unvanquishable number -
> Shake your chains to earth like dew
> Which in sleep had fallen on you -
> Ye are many - they are few.[47]

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43 Williams 1958, p 30. This comment was obviously made in a western context. South Africa's political problems have given rise to artists and writers as deeply committed to the struggle for human rights in this country.

44 Gardner, Helen. ed. *The New Oxford Book of English Verse 1250 - 1950*. Great Britain: Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972, p 486

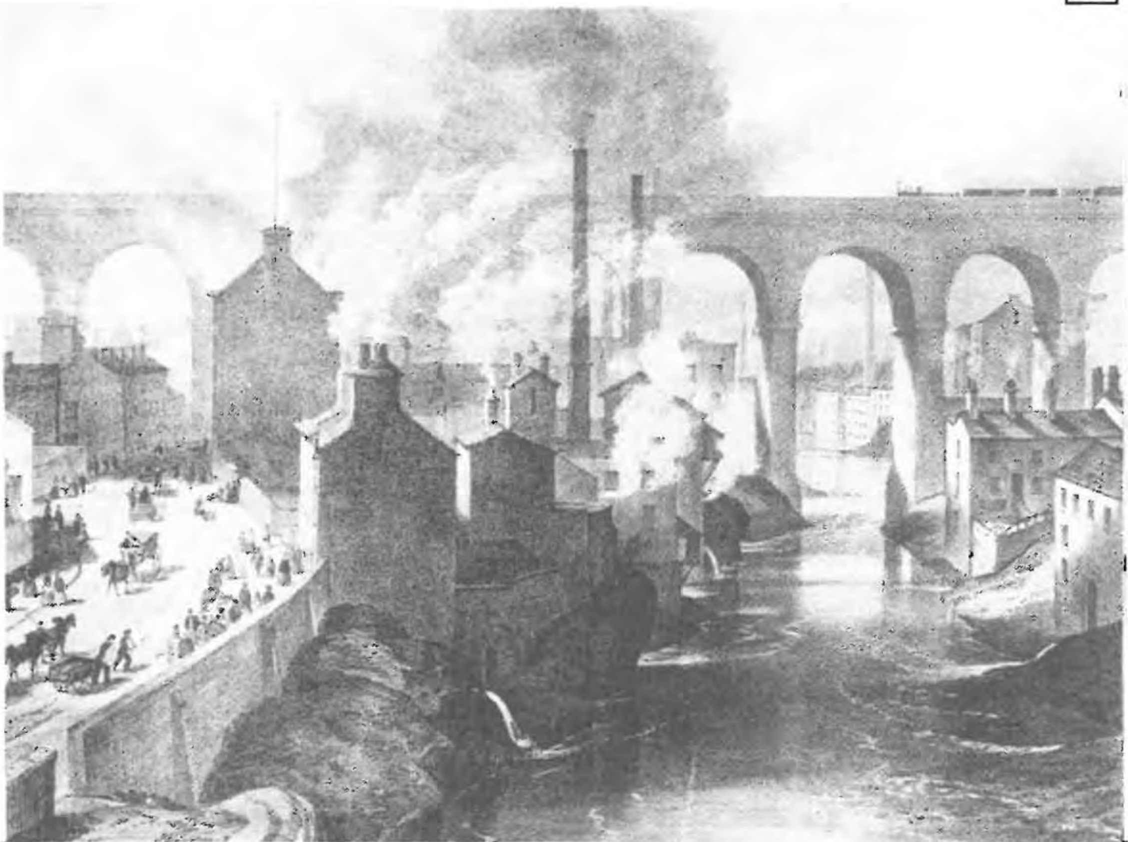
45 Lamont in Rogers 1987, p 277
Blake's wonder at 'energy' and his 'satanic mills' are an expression of the "ambivalent attitude of most observers, expressing admiration at the riches of imperialism and industrialization and horror at the human suffering that they caused." (Vaughan 1988, p 20)

46 Williams 1958, p 93

47 Morgan 1985, p 36
Shelley's poem *The Mask of Anarchy*, written in 1819, was so hostile in tone to the government of the day that no publisher dared to publish it for fear of reprisals. It was finally published in 1832, the year of some measure of reform.

18. A revolutionary crowd of labouring poor chant 'Mourir pour la Patrie'.

19. This urban, industrial area painted in the 1850's could be Dickens' Coketown, "a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves forever and ever, and never got uncoiled." (Dickens)



Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* examines the plight of the victims of society and Dickens' *Oliver Twist* explores the repercussions of the severe new Poor Law of 1834. Kumar points out that these novelists were defining their society: "The force and appeal of Dickens and Balzac to their contemporaries was precisely that they projected the image of the city - London, Paris - as the representation of the new social system *as a whole*, its dilemmas, costs and opportunities."[48] In his book *Romantic Affinities*, Rupert Christiansen describes these works as "poetry and prose written so intensely out of the pressures of individual lives and dilemmas, by men and women whose antennae were flaringly sensitive to the shocks of history and the culture of their society ... angry, passionate, beautiful, truthful literature."[49]

The result of the perception of these conditions was a series of reform bills and health and labour acts in both countries, and the power of the working class in England expressed itself in the Chartist Movement, led by Robert Owen. The rise of socialism was an inevitable consequence of the rise of industrialism, and reached its climax in the publication of the *Peoples' Charter* in 1836 and the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. This period marks the emergence of the working classes as an independent and self-conscious force in politics. The vast numbers of the labouring poor and the appalling conditions under which they lived constituted a very real threat to the middle class establishment. Chartism was perceived as extremely dangerous to the status quo, because the change envisaged was not an improvement but an utter rejection and replacement with a new system. Harrison comments on this threat:

> There were pressures and organisations for change which were not socially approved and which could not so easily be accepted into the social system. They were directed towards changing parts of the social system itself, rather than securing changes for individuals within the system. Such developments were usually felt to be radical and dangerous, since they call into question certain fundamental beliefs and institutions of society. They pose a threat to the established order and demonstrate that the

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48 Kumar 1983, pp 68 & 69

49 Christiansen 1988, p xi This statement is not totally accurate. Kumar comments on the importance of 'poetic licence', as the shocking facts were reworked in fictional form by writers who transmuted themselves into what Williams describes as 'generalizing rhetoricians of human suffering'. (Williams 1958, p 108) (See Kumar 1983, pp 49 & 50 for further details.)

> usual methods of maintaining social discipline are no longer effective. Fears are aroused, security seems threatened, and society reacts strongly to reassert 'law and order'.[50]

In the preface to his *Capital*, Marx defines this conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and the labouring poor as the class struggle.

> With the year 1830 came the decisive crisis. In France and in England the bourgeoisie had conquered political power. Thenceforth, the class struggle, practically as well as theoretically, took on more and more outspoken and threatening forms.[51]

The 1830's and 1840's were frightening times. Even in the early stages of the industrial revolution "it is hard to escape the impression that very large numbers of people in the 1840's were completely bewildered by the environment in which they found themselves."[52] Gericault's

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[50] Harrison 1988, p 148

Chartism was similar to the threat to middle class capitalist society in South Africa by the A.N.C.. I found links with South Africa's recent history of great interest. Although these parallels do not form part of the thesis, they did contribute towards my selection of this particular period in history. The following two quotations, from chapters entitled *Law and Order* and *Educating the People* in Walvin's *Victorian Values* 1988, could have been written about South Africa during my adult lifetime 1960 to 1990.

"... in the years of chartism in the 1830's and 1840's, the gathering of large crowds in towns was a worry ... authorities were concerned about the crowds which gathered for radical or reforming purposes, but also about any large crowds, whether convening by order or spontaneously. The collective cry for the vote was as worrying as that demanding food, or even those voices raised while watching a major popular spectacle. For this reason many traditional forms of popular culture were feared." (p 67 & 68)

"In the early nineteenth century, education for the lower orders was viewed with suspicion; at worst subversive of the social system, at best merely unnecessary ... As the nineteenth century progressed two broad factors worked to encourage the spread of popular literacy and learning. Firstly, the maturing economy demanded basic literacy from more and more people ... Secondly, those in authority came to fear ignorance in the urban masses, where they had once feared learning." (p 81)

[51] Marx (1938 edition) p xxiii

[52] Harrison 1988, p 25

contemporary lithographs of London "show figures persisting in a world that has lost all human scale or relevance".[53] The Victorians were conscious of belonging to a parvenu civilization. They took the brunt of an utterly unique development in human history. The middle classes lived in constant fear of revolution, until the stability and prosperity of the 1850's.

> Victoria came to the throne in the midst of national uncertainties ... The government and propertied orders felt that they were living through times of major crisis, one manifestation of which was a rise in crimes against them and their possessions.[54]

Some people took comfort in the thought that rich and poor, like good and bad, would always exist in the God-given order of the Universe. A later verse of the well-known Victorian hymn "All things bright and beautiful" expresses this concept:

> The rich man in his castle,
> The poor man at his gate,
> God made them, high or lowly,
> And ordered their estate.

But by the 1830's even the most protected members of polite society could hardly ignore the consequences of industrialism. The very real fears and insecurities of the bourgeoisie during this period explain their strong need for escape, which the Romantic ballet would help satisfy. Dance critics agree that there is a strong element of escapism in Romantic ballet. Escapism in the theatre is a frivolous concept; but the terrible confusion and pressures of the time created a very real deep-seated and almost therapeutic need for relief, if only for the duration of a performance. I believe that the escapist aspect of the Romantic ballet fulfilled an important social function. This need for distraction had first become evident in reaction to the French Revolution of 1789:

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53 Vaughan 1988, p 243

54 Walvin 1988, p 69

> According to Vuillier, scarcely was the ruthless execution of great numbers of Parisians (known as the Terror) at an end, than 23 theatres and 1800 dancing schools were open every evening in Paris .. Parisians had much to forget.[54a]

What qualities characterised the all-powerful middle classes, who had won supremacy in England via the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 and the Reform Bill of 1832, and in France in 1789 and 1830?[55] The earlier description of the English Utilitarians provides one perspective. On the whole, being of the 'middle' they tended to avoid extremes, and the main preoccupation of the French bourgeoisie was to maintain bourgeois values and society while avoiding the double danger - Jacobins to the left and supporters of the *Ancien Regime* to the right. Droz provides a French perspective on the bourgeoisie:

> A human type was to appear ... who prided himself on his respectability and good manners, and even , despite his fear of the common people, on a certain humanitarian idealism, yet who has been constantly denounced as hypocritically scrupulous, devoid of all artistic sensibility, and ridiculous in his self-satisfaction ... The great writers who have depicted the bourgeoisie in the first half of the nineteenth century have been struck by the contrast between, on the one hand, that passion for money and that ambition to climb the social ladder which endowed the bourgeoisie with a conquering character, and on the other hand, a ridiculous vanity, a strict, narrow conformity, and a mistrust of anything new which confined it to a sort of mediocrity from which it was powerless to escape.[55a]

The characteristics, values and insecurities of this middle class dominated society and the theatre in both France and Britain during the two decades under discussion.

54a Kraus & Chapman 1981, p 77

> In a recent questionnaire which I sent to her earlier this year, Dr Dulcie Howes, the doyenne of South African ballet, made the following comment: "audiences support and find comfort and solace in the more gentle art forms in times of stress. Call it 'escapism', but this was very evident in both the world wars in England where ballet flourished."

55 A detailed view of English middle class society at this time is provided by Karl Marx in Volume One of *Capital*. Kumar comments: "The conviction remains that the heart of Marx's intellectual legacy will continue to be this superb sociology of the origins, structure and functioning of capitalist society." (Kumar 1983, p 61)

55a Droz 1981, p 37

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21

20. *Thomas and Jane Carlyle at Home*, by R.S. Tait, 1857-8. The 'Sage of Chelsea' in his modest but comfortable house in Cheyne Row. A typical enough middle class interior of the period, though perhaps less cluttered than most.

21. Louis-Philippe, former Jacobin, soldier of the Revolution, and King of the French, drawn by Daumier. A much-maligned monarch, unpopular because he gave France unspectacular middle class government.

A significant factor in the sociocultural context of the Romantic ballet is the reaction of those in power to the threats to their security and value system. Throughout this period censorship and reactionary restrictions in one form or another were in force in both countries to protect the structures of the bourgeoisie. In the *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (1967 edition), Phyllis Hartnoll writes on censorship in Britain: "The wide powers of supervision and control over the stage in this country ... are an elaboration of the function of the Master of the King's Revels in Tudor times ... The Licensing Acts of ... 1737 and 1843 clearly defined the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship".[56] Findlater, in his book *Banned: A Review of Theatre Censorship in Britain*, comments further: "Dramatists have been denied a freedom taken for granted in the other arts ... An official censor began to interfere in the drama around the time that the first professional theatre opened its doors in London in 1576 ... The stage was feared as a political platform and as a religious pulpit."[56a] From about 1824, censorship became stricter than ever before under the new Examiner of Plays, George Colman. There were many other forms of restriction that had nothing to do with the theatre. For example, governments secretly subsidised friendly newspapers and harassed their opponents. The Stamp Act in Britain, reduced in 1836 and repealed in 1855, made newspapers too expensive for the working people. Fears of reprisal could prevent publishers from printing material with an anti-government bias.[57] On the Continent conditions were just as strict, both under Napoleon and under the reactionary regimes that followed him. In France, for example, suspension of the freedom of the Press was one of the factors that led to the 1830 revolution. This censorship limited the effectiveness of challenges to the status quo and ensured that the entertainment industry of Victorian urban industrial

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56 The Licensing Act of 1737 was an act of political censorship by Walpole to prevent playwrights such as Henry Fielding from satirizing the corruption in his government. The absolute power of the Examiner of Plays under this Act prevented dramatists from writing seriously about religion, politics and sex, and in this way their freedom to present social issues was circumscribed. Serious damage was done to the nature and quality of subsequent drama; there were no really great British playwrights between Sheridan and Congreve in the eighteenth century, and Shaw towards the end of the nineteenth century. There was, of course, a rich proliferation in literature and all the other arts during the Romantic period; and perhaps the worship of Shakespeare counteracted the lack of good contemporary dramatists to some extent.

56a Findlater 1967, p 54. This censorship was only discontinued in my lifetime: the American rock musical *Hair* opened in London the day after censorship ended in September 1968.

57 Walvin 1988, p 82 Note 47 provides an example.

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society reflected the perspective of the establishment; the quality of legitimate drama suffered accordingly. The needs and problems, hopes and fears, of the majority of the people were not addressed at all. But, those of the working class who could afford to go to the theatre, were entertained.

Censorship in the legitimate theatre led to the proliferation of a great variety of alternative forms of popular theatre: melodrama, circus, pantomime, farce, musical comedy, burlesque, comic opera and, later in the century, music hall and operetta. Theatre buildings increased in number and size to accommodate the new audiences that the process of urbanization brought to the theatre.

> One effect of the revolution had been to attract more and more people from the poorer classes to the theatre. Filling the cheaper parts of the house in ever-increasing numbers were clerks and shop assistants, soldiers and workers, who lacked artistic pretensions and cultural background ... here a more broadly-based public demanded to be entertained.[58]

The eighteenth century had brought the middle class into the theatres, and in the nineteenth century, the theatre also became an expression of popular culture in a period when the urban population increased rapidly, and improvements in education and transport gradually transformed the potential audience. Theatre was the principal means of entertainment available to literate and illiterate alike. The class distinctions in society were, of course, reflected in the theatre, where the middle classes were lavishly accommodated, but the comfort of those in the cheaper seats was not so carefully provided for. The theatre was almost exclusively commercial and it catered for the tastes of its audience.[59] And so the two crucial factors dictating what forms of entertainment were provided at the time were censorship and the tastes of the middle and lower classes in the audience.

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[58] Guest 1980, p 4

[59] Jackson 1989, pp 1 - 12

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23

22. In this cartoon of 1798, the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Salisbury, and the Bishop of Durham inspect one of the 'French dancers' to decide upon the indecorum of her dress. The Bishop had declared that the French rulers had tried to undermine the morals of British youth by means of touring female dancers, who indulged in alluring 'indecent attitudes' and 'wanton theatrical exhibitions'. Woodward's cartoon encapsulates the scandal.

23. A working class audience watching a Pantomime from the cheap seats in the gallery, 1860.

> Every spectacle demands its audience - the nursery performance, with its conscripted parents and friends, no less than the circuses which the Romans were given with their bread. Actors can continue to act and playwrights to be heard only at an audience's pleasure. The history of any theatrical epoch is therefore the history of its audience's wishes, as interpreted by the playwrights, actors and managers of the day. This back-stage collaboration may give an audience something that it does not expect, and so contribute to theatrical evolution; but it can never force on an audience something that it does not want.
>
> In nineteenth century England the audience shaped both the theatre and the drama played within it.[60]

In a holistic approach that stresses the importance of the interaction between context and art form, the role of audience attitudes cannot be overestimated. The Romantic ballet as a theatre dance form was profoundly affected by popular taste. The audience wanted escape and entertainment; the emphasis was on all the lavish spectacle and visual appeal that the new technology could provide. Of all the alternative forms of theatre popular at the time, the Romantic ballet, with its universal appeal, evocative atmosphere, visual spectacle and superb artistry, was probably the most important.

The political, economic and social revolutions and the establishment of a mixed audience with middle class tastes dominating, formed an important part of the setting in which the Romantic ballet flourished. The other vital aspect of its sociocultural context was the contemporary artistic revolution, known as the Romantic movement. Ballet was "to be so completely transformed by Romanticism that it enjoyed a spell of unprecedented popularity not only in Paris but throughout the civilized world."[61]

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60 Powell 1967, p 1. Further detail on contemporary British audiences and their tastes can be found in the following references:

> Richards, Kenneth & Peter Thomson. eds. *Essays on Nineteenth Century British Theatre*. Britain: Methuen, 1971. Chapter One "A Theatre for the People" by Clive Barker.
>
> Powell, George. *The Victorian Theatre: A Survey*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967. Chapter One "The New Theatre".

61 Guest 1972, p II. The out-of-date colonialist and elitist attitudes suggested by the use of the word 'civilized' here are not acceptable; the implication is that any non-Western culture, or culture unknown to the West, must necessarily be savage.

The spirit of Romanticism was a symptom of the world caught in a process of violent change. Romanticism was insurrection: Walter Sorell regards the movement as a reaction to industrial progress.[62] There were "innumerable associations between the strictly cultural movement of Romanticism and the major events of the age."[63] In its early stages, the French Revolution had been Romanticism in action. Wordsworth had written:

> France standing on the top of golden hours
> And human nature seeming born again.[64]

The Age of Reason had rigidly observed form and sets of rules with the artist placed in a pre-defined universe; the Romantics sought liberation from these bonds of classical restraint. Many of these young artists had grown up through the idealism and the instability of war and revolution. Old certainties were undermined and new convictions began to emerge. They wished to let their imagination and their inspiration soar freely into the headiest heights of lyricism, in a revolution against the formal restraints of classicism.

> Working in a fever-pitch of enthusiasm, the Romantics were excitedly aware of the momentous significance of the movement they were initiating. This is how it appeared to Théophile Gautier, one of the most militant of their number. 'It was a movement akin to the Renaissance. A sap of new life circulated impetuously. Everything sprouted, blossomed, burst out all at once. The air was intoxicating. We were mad with lyricism and art. It seemed as if the great lost secret had been discovered, and that was true: we had discovered the lost poetry.[65]

Raymond Williams uses the problematic term 'genius' to explain a major preoccupation of the age, when he describes how "the spontaneous work of genius" now superceded "the formal,

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62 Sorell 1986, p 279

63 Vaughan 1988, p 264

64 Lamont in Rogers 1987, p 175

65 Guest 1980, p 3 (Gautier as quoted in Glinsty *Le Théatre Romantique*.)

imitative work bound by a set of rules".[66] The Romantic movement was led by a few great artists who had an almost divine role. In 1798 Novalis had described the artist as standing "above the human being, like the statue on its pedestal."[67] These 'geniuses', whom Shelley called 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world', owed their position to their creative imaginations, through which they reached a level of understanding that transcended all rational inquiry.[68] Theirs was a subjective world, with the individual's experience, imagination, intuition, and vision providing the only true means of gaining insights. Emotions and emotional integrity were paramount; expressive language described strong feeling. "Poetry", wrote Victor Hugo, "is almost nothing other than feeling".[69] Dare to feel, have the courage of your own intuition, was the motto of Romanticism.

> In philosophy it was a shift from the finite, rational, orderly ... to the vague, atmospheric, warm, remote and infinite. The novels of Sir Walter Scott and Monk Lewes, with their wild and loosely constructed plots, the tortured compositions of the painters Delacroix and Gericault, the verses of Byron and Victor Hugo, the dancing of Taglioni and Elssler on their elevated toe-points, were the facts of this revolution in action.[70]

As the remainder of this thesis will illustrate, ballet was ideally suited to express the ideas of Romanticism, and this era in the ballet reflects parallel tendencies in all the arts and in society, for the art of any period is closely and necessarily related to its environment. The idea of dance as a seismograph of society is expressed by Edward Gordon Craig, intimate of Isadora Duncan, later in the century: "Dance is such a 'sensitive little instrument ... that it can tell you with precision when your nation is going a little bit too much to the right, or a little bit too much to the left.'"[71] The Romantic

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66 Williams 1958, p 36

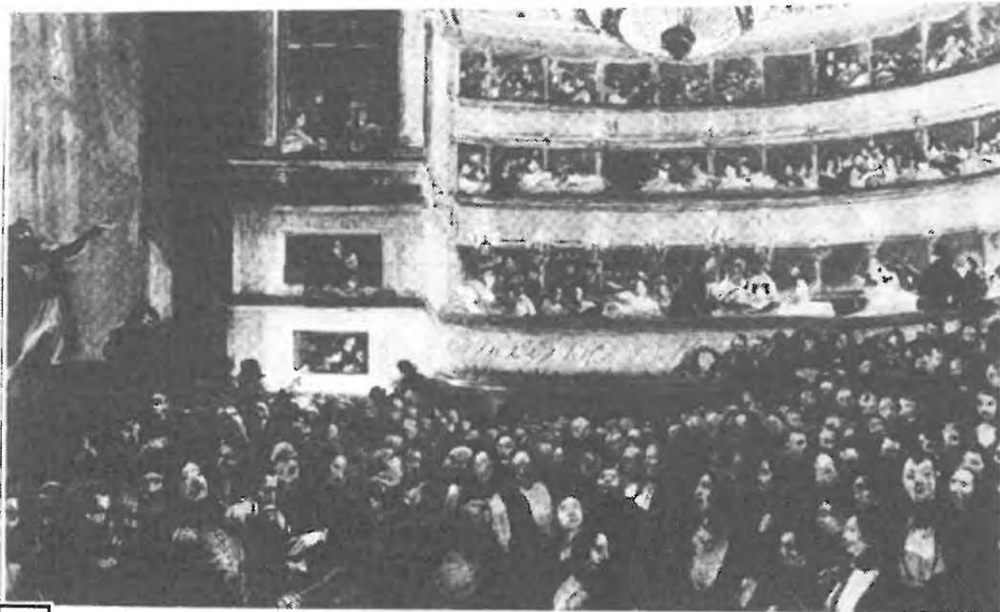
67 Novalis in Furst 1989, p 69

68 Vaughan 1988, p 263

69 Furst 1989, p 77

70 Kirstein in Copeland and Cohen 1983, p 365

71 Craig in Steinberg 1980, p 237



24

Victor Hugo was the great leader of the early Romantic movement in France. His play, *Hernani*, broke all the classical rules and caused a sensation.

24. A painting by Albert Besnard of the uproar in the auditorium of the *Comedie - Francaise* during the opening night of Hugo's *Hernani*, 25 February, 1830.

25. Auguste Rodin's sculpture catches the spirit of *Victor Hugo* proclaiming the message of Romanticism.

25

spirit within the ballet was also crucial in providing the escapism so urgently needed by its audiences, which was discussed earlier in the chapter:

> In a sense Romanticism represented an attempt to escape the realities of life as it was. People had suffered badly during the wars of the previous decade; and the developing industrial revolution, with its mines and factories, was now bringing new suffering and wretchedness to millions of underprivileged throughout Europe. Thus, the Romantic movement, which offered colour, fantasy, fairy tales and folk legends - romance, love and beautiful dreams - offered a protest against the sordid quality of real life.[72]

The Romantic ballet of the 1830's and 1840's was fashionable and newsworthy, and its influence was pervasive. Authors such as Dickens and Thackeray alluded to it in their writings. Dickens gives a detailed description of the ballet of the *Indian Savage and the Maiden* in *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839, and in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, 1847, Becky Sharp, the daughter of a dancer, executes a waltz so well at a ball that "the company ... applauded as wildly as if she had been a Noblet or a Taglioni".[73] Satirical cartoons depicted prominent politicians of the day in the guise of rather ungainly ballerinas; familiarity with the ballet ensured that readers would understand the inferences implied. The figures of ballerinas are peppered throughout the pages of *Punch Magazine, The Illustrated London News* and other journals. The extensive iconography of the Romantic ballet at its height attests to its popularity. Surprisingly, dance features very seldom in modern studies of Romanticism in the arts, except of course in dance books. Perhaps this is because of its transient nature, as well as an increasing tendency towards specialization, and the marginal status of the non-verbal in our society.

The final section in this chapter on the background to the ballet briefly examines the industrial revolution in the theatre, and the state of the art immediately prior to 1830. It will become

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72 Kraus & Chapman 1981, p 79

73 Au 1988, p 56. The French ballerina Lise Noblet is mentioned repeatedly by Thackeray in his writings.

26

THE SHADOW DANCE.

Principal Dancer . . . . Mr. D. O'C——

27

The popularity of the ballet, and their readers' familiarity with famous moments in favourite ballets of the period, provided *Punch Magazine* with wonderful material for political satire, such as 26 and 27, Fanny Cerrito in *Ondine* dancing with her own shadow. No 28 and the following page provide a selection of satiric images from *Punch magazine Library* during the 1840's.

28

PAS DES MIROIRS; OR, THE POWER OF IMITATION.

THE FRIGHTS OF THE BALLET

THE PAS D'EXTASE; OR, MINISTERIAL FASCINATION.

PUNCH

PUNCH'S VALENTINES FOR 1845.

The Political Pirouettist.

SURE there is none but thou could glide
With so much grace from side to side;
Why to so many ways incline,
False, fickle, faithless Valentine!

GENTLEMEN'S FASHIONS FOR THE RACES, 1846.

apparent that the developments in technology, scenic skills and in ballet technique were ready for the Romantic climax in the development of the ballet.

The nineteenth century theatre was devoted to illusion:

> The romantic visionary definition of dramatic poetry demanded a stage that should contrive to lose its identity in the service of this absolute illusion and make the spectators forget - for as much as possible of their time in the theatre - that they knew a world more 'real' than that placed before them on the stage.[74]

Gaslight and the illusion of moonlight were the primary contribution of the industrial revolution to the Romantic ballet. The installation of gaslight meant that all sources of light were controlled from a single gas table in the corner of the stage; the now-darkened auditorium heightened the Romantic illusion. Also significant were the developments in technical resources and complex machinery to handle the spectacular scenery and special effects, through which the illusion was created. Curtains were closed between the scenes to hide set changes, and opened again to reveal the magical effects. Ballet presentation was also influenced by the popular theatre of the day. The populace went to see what was then in vogue on the Parisian stages: the opera, vaudeville, sentimental comedy, and above all, melodrama. The most direct inspiration came from opera and melodrama, which fostered the bourgeois and working class taste for the irrational and often absurd elements in fairy tale romance. The pioneering influence and advances in stagecraft in the popular boulevard theatres in Paris were important because several choreographers, Jules Perrot for example, served their apprenticeship at these theatres.

> The trend towards greater scenic illusion and spectacle which was such a marked feature of the Romantic theatre had first made itself felt outside the Opéra, particularly in the boulevard theatres such as the Port-Saint-Martin, where melodramas were staged with a multiplicity of sets and effects. New techniques of scenery construction, involving greater use of practicables, the invention of the diorama, whereby varying lighting effects were achieved by lighting partly translucent cloths from front and back, the introduction of gas-lighting, which made possible the gradual variation of illumination and did not soil the scenery, enabled designers to

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74 Jackson 1989, p 1

> obtain effects of breathtaking illusion which would have been inconceivable a generation before. Not only was no expense spared on the spectacle at these boulevard theatres, but the melodrama provided designers with countless opportunities to indulge in Romantic fancies. Gothic ruins set in wild, mysterious landscapes, thick forests, storms and heavy seas, faithful reconstructions of distant lands were commonplace on these stages in the eighteen-twenties. At last the Opéra could ignore this trend no longer.[75]

Other technological achievements of the age were equally well timed to contribute to the apogee of the Romantic ballet. Advances in transport facilitated touring by rail and steamship; the great ballerinas of the period travelled as far afield as Russia and the Americas. The invention of lithography and photography coincided with the advent of Romanticism, and they were to provide an extensive visual record of the ballet at this time. The daguerreotype photograph had reached a high standard by 1837, and professional photography dates back to the beginning of the 1840's, a decade in which gift books, albums and souvenir programmes on dance reached a zenith of popularity. Advances in printing technology had increased the circulation of newspapers and journals, which provided a public platform for discussion, speculation and extensive criticism of literature and the arts. Sorell describes the development of journalism as "the most significant sociocultural development between the two revolutions ... A surprisingly great number of newspapers and periodicals were published in the 1830's and, with the decades, became more and more an essential part of the sociocultural aspect of French life."[76] During this period newspapers were a force to be reckoned with and the establishment in France and Britain were justifiably fearful of their influence on people's thinking. Publishing soon became a highly lucrative business. Demand was great partly because a sufficient number of outstanding writers began to contribute to papers and magazines. The first flowering of journalism coincided with the development of dance criticism, most strongly represented by journalist, poet and librettist, Théophile Gautier, whose contribution will be considered later in this study. "Our knowledge of the Romantic ballet would be considerably less colourful without Théophile Gautier's writings ... To read these reviews is to plunge into the period."[77]

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[75] Guest 1980, pp 13 & 14

[76] Sorell 1986, p 255

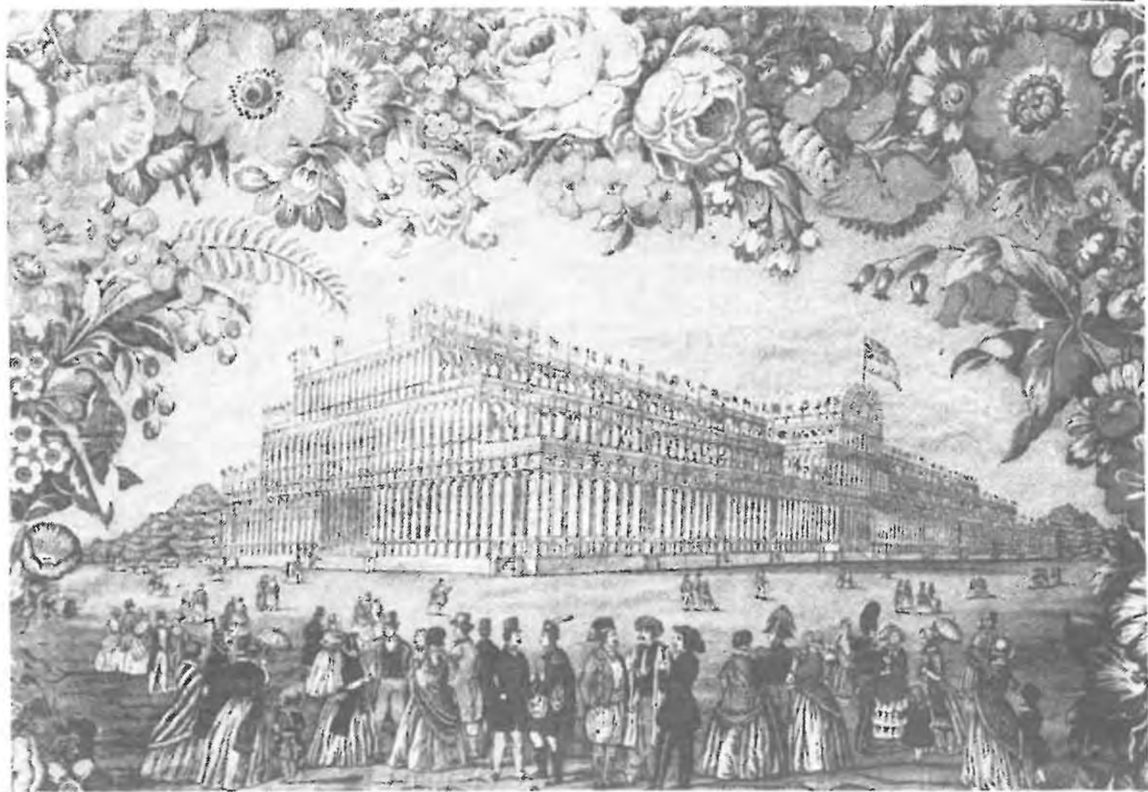
[77] Au in Dorris & Anderson 1988, pp 121 & 124

29. Amongst the important technological achievements of the industrial revolution were the invention of lithography and photography. Professional photography dates back to the beginning of the 1840's. This is the earliest known photograph of Queen Victoria, with her eldest child, the Princess Royal, circa 1844-45.

30. This length of printed cotton was made to commemorate the 1851 Great Exhibition, and shows the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park.

29

30



The Romantic ballet was a culmination of centuries of development in the classical ballet tradition and heritage.[78] It is important to emphasize at this stage that the Romantic ballet was a particular form, a stylistic department of, classical ballet. The influence of the Romantic aesthetic was all-pervading and strongly influenced style and mood, but the underlying dance technique and vocabulary was the *danse d'ecole*, the great classical ballet tradition. Certain developments in this tradition immediately prior to 1830 were of critical importance. In the revolutionary year of 1789, Dauberval's romanticised middle class vision of picturesque peasant life, *La Fille Mal Gardée*, had paved the way for simpler and more natural themes by abandoning eighteenth century heroic conventions. In 1796 in London, Didelot's *Flore et Zéphyre* highlighted *pointework* when aerial travels were made possible by invisible wires attached to the dancers' waists. And so the concept of aerial flight became both attractive and feasible, and Carlo Blasis in his *Code of Terpsichore*, 1820, enabled this ideal to be realised practically by codifying and analyzing a progressive and scientific training programme.

> The exuberance of the Romantic ballet from 1830 to 1850 accelerated enormously the *danse d'élevation*. In Blasis the path is prepared for the greatest possible extension of legs, arms and torso ... With the aid of reinforced shoes, somewhere around 1830, toe-dancing began. It was a final realization of the body's inherent verticality.[79]

The influence of Romanticism on ballet occurred later than on other art forms; this was because the Opéra was under the old-fashioned control of Pierre Gardel for the four decades immediately prior to 1830. He was the darling of the Revolution and approved of by Napoleon, but he used totalitarian techniques to maintain a conservative and out-of-date dance régime. His departure in 1829 was timely for the emergent Romantic ballet.

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78 Appendix A gives brief details on the classical ballet heritage.

79 Kirstein 1977, p 242

31. The State of the Art of ballet prior to the 'golden age'; the grand heroic style and classical themes of the *ballet d'action* is seen in *Jason and Medea*, London, 1782.

32. Auguste Vestris, 1760 to 1842, was *premier danseur* at the Paris Opera for thirty-six years, and in 1791 he was ballet master at the King's Theatre, London. His last appearance was at the age of seventy-five with Taglioni, who was then thirty-one.

33. Fanny Bias in *Flore et Zephire*, teetering momentarily *en pointe*, reinforces Taglioni's achievement in making *pointework* an integral part of her new poetic style.

> No elegance, no taste; frightful pirouettes, horrible efforts of muscle and calf, legs ungracefully stretched, stiff, and raised to the level of the eyes or chin the whole evening long; *tours de force*, the *grand écart*, the perilous leap. All the male dancers were brought up in this school and built on this model, and the female dancers dislocated themselves by imitating these muscular and semaphoric exercises. Then Marie Taglioni appeared and started a revolution ...[80]

And 'revolution' has been the keyword in this opening chapter: political, economic, social and artistic, all reflected either directly or subtly interacting with the Romantic ballet at its height. Politically this was an explosive period, with revolution in Paris in 1830 and 1848, and the constant fear of similar disruptions in Britain. The birth of modern industrial society was blighted by intense problems of poverty, disease and social exploitation. Society was in transition, and the artists and thinkers of the day were acutely aware of the horrors and suffering around them, and cried out passionately in protest. Middle class values and aspirations were increasingly dominant, but threatened; and conservatism and censorship protected the establishment from the violence and demands of the vast hordes of the labouring poor that industrialism had drawn to the cities. It was a time of crisis, but it was also a time of stagnation, as the bourgeoisie entrenched themselves and their middle class mediocrity, eventually overcoming threats from left and right. In France, the mood was one of anticlimax and nostalgia for past glories, and in both countries there was the sense of a bewildered struggle to find solutions to the new economic and social problems.

This context provides the first strand of my argument: To what extent and in what way did this all-powerful middle class influence the development of the Romantic ballet, and what was the correlation between them?

The second strand of the argument explores the interrelationship between the Romantic ballet and the artistic movement known as Romanticism.

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80 Guest 1980, p 1

\- the first public hearing of Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*

1831 - start of the first cholera epidemic in Britain and France
\- Riots in British rural areas against the mechanization of agriculture. The working class movements were extremely strong in Britain during the 1830's and 1840's as the new proletariat became aware of its potential power
\- **Robert le Diable opens, Paris**

1832 - Reform Act enlarges the franchise to include the middle classes
\- cholera epidemic kills 31 thousand people in Britain
\- **La Sylphide opens, Paris and London**

1833 - Abolition of slavery in the British Empire
\- Factory Act: the regulation of childrens' work in factories

1834 - Poor Law Amendment Act: paupers assigned to gaunt workhouses; the act aimed to make life so intolerable for rural paupers that they would be forced to move to available jobs
\- Tolpuddle Martyrs: six farm labourers transported to Australia as a result of demands for higher wages, pardoned in 1836 after national protest

1835 - Municipal Corporations Act aimed to provide a framework to deal with the new urban problems; local government franchise extended to all rate payers

1836 - **Le Diable boiteux opens, Paris**
\- **Bournonville's La Sylphide opens, Copenhagen**
\- The Chartists led by Robert Owen publish *The Peoples' Charter*, its six points demand manhood suffrage, the ballot, equal electorial districts, abolition of property qualification for M.P's, payment of M.P's and annual parliaments

1837 - accession of Queen Victoria
\- by this date cholera had killed 18 000 victims in Paris alone, mainly from the poorer classes
\- London to Birmingham railway opens

1838 - Dickens publishes *Oliver Twist*
\- Ships make the first steam-powered crossings of the Atlantic
\- Chartist agitation 1838 to 1848: Chartism was the main political expression of the social and industrial aspirations of the working people

1839 - Carlyle publishes his essay on Chartism and raises the 'Condition of England' question

1840 - Start of the 'Hungry Forties' in England
\- Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert
\- Penny Post introduced
\- Cunard ship *Britannica* crosses the Atlantic in 14 days

1841 - **Giselle opens, Paris**
\- Laws passed in France to regulate child labour in factories
\- First publication of *Punch Magazine* which often caught the middle class mood, at least in London

1843 - **Giselle opens, London**

1844 - **La Esmeralda opens, London**
\- Engels publishes *The Condition of the Working Class in England*

- Factory Act
- Royal Commission on Health in Towns

1845 - **Pas de Quatre opens, London**
- Workers' Associations legally recognised in France

1846 - Repeal of the Corn Laws, a move towards free trade

1847 - Ten Hour Act improves working conditions
- **Marie Taglioni retires**
- Tennyson publishes *The Princess*; Thackeray publishes *Vanity Fair*

1848 - Revolutions in Europe, the most widespread popular disturbances of the nineteenth century, as economic crises and political discontent coincide
- Karl Marx publishes the *Communist Manifesto*
- Elizabeth Gaskell publishes *Mary Barton*
- Public Health Act

1850 - Ibsen publishes his first play
- Nearly 7000 miles of railway laid in Britain

1851 - Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, marks the beginning of the prosperous and stable middle period of Queen Victoria's reign

1854 - start of Crimean War
- Dickens publishes *Hard Times*

1855 - end of Crimean War
- Elizabeth Gaskell publishes *North and South*

1856 - County and Borough Police Act : all counties and boroughs obliged to establish police forces

1859 - Darwin publishes his *Origin of the Species*

1862 - women cease to be employed underground in mines

1869 - John Stuart Mill publishes *The Subjugation of Women*

1872 - the hours of labour of children in the mines regulated

CHAPTER 2

La Sylphide: Earth and Air

Chapter Two examines the great ballet of the 1830's, *La Sylphide*, 1832, in its sociocultural context in Paris, with two minor works, *Ballet of the Nuns*, 1831, and *La Cachucha*, 1836, providing secondary examples. Particular emphasis is placed on the ballets as a reflection of the spirit of Romanticism,[81] as well as on developments in technology and in the ballet heritage itself. The precise nature of the interaction between the ballets and the middle class facilitators and their values is also an important theme.

> When the golden age came ... ballet acquired a prestige and a dignity which it had not known before; it discovered how to fulfil a public need by revealing the unattainable which people craved as an escape from a world which was grey with their cares and anxieties. Ballet became a potent form of illusion ... an effective expression of the Romantic ideal.[82]

1830 saw political explosions in Europe and economic crisis in Britain, and in the theatre, Victor Hugo's *Hernani* was a turning-point for Romanticism. In the following year the first great

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Chapter Two title page: key images

Top (repeat of No **47**): The duality of the times: an earth-bound male is surrounded by a bevy of dangerously alluring aerial sprites.

Bottom left (repeat of No **40**): Marie Taglioni in *La Sylphide*: an idealized vision of chaste and airy spirituality.

Bottom right (repeat of No **49**): Fanny Elssler in *La Cachucha*: the complementary Romantic quality of voluptuous sensuality and erotic danger.

[81] I have selected the technique of unfolding the conceptualisation of 'Romanticism' during the course of Chapters Two and Three. I felt that this method would support the conceptual basis of my argument by focusing on the interaction between the ballet, Romanticism and the other arts.

[82] Guest 1980, p 7
Appendix A provides a ready-reference in the form of a chronology of ballets mentioned in this study together with some brief biographical information about the key personalities involved.

cholera epidemic began its devastation in Britain and France. In spite of dangers and insecurities, the bourgeoisie had profited from political upheaval and were in the cultural saddle, and were strong enough to take the Romantic bombardment of their senses in their bourgeois stride.

The key facilitators of the ballet during the period 1830 to 1850 were three middle class men whose influence was of considerable importance: Dr Louis Véron, Director of the Paris Opéra,[83] Benjamin Lumley, Manager of Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket, London, and Théophile Gautier, a leading French Romantic with bourgeois roots, who helped to shape public taste and enthusiasm and influenced the entire course of ballet during this period.

Gautier is an ideal guide to the ballet of the time; he was the only major literary figure to write both on dance as a critic, and for dance as a librettist and collaborator in the making of ballets. He loved dance for its own sake, and in true Romantic tradition he had an individual and subjective approach to dance criticism; Gautier's viewpoint echoed Baudelaire's belief that: "To be just, that is, to justify its existence, criticism should be partial, passionate and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view that opens up the widest horizons."[84] An experienced journalist, with a poet's perception and gift of verbal imagery, he had a unique range of qualifications to convey passionately the magic of a performance on the printed page. His writings have contributed extensively to this investigation.

The influence of the other major Paris-based facilitator was to be very different. Shortly after the revolution of 1830, the administration of the Paris Opéra changed from state control to private enterprise. A self-made man and shrewd entrepreneur, Dr Louis Véron the new Director, was the personification of a philistine bourgeois businessman. After only five years as Director he was able

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83 In 1672, during the reign of Louis XIV, Lully took over the leadership of *Académie Royale de Danse* and fused it with the *Académie Royale de Musique*, creating a thoroughly professional institution which formed the basis of the Paris Opéra. This ballet company can therefore claim to be the oldest professional dance company in the western world.

84 Baudelaire in Sorell 1986, p 265

to retire, his fortune made. During his tenure at the Opéra, ballet was to reach its greatest heights of popularity. Véron had no interest whatever in the Romantic revolution in the arts. Lacking both genius and breeding, he hid behind artistic pretention and aesthetic gestures and was a master at keeping control over the customary and intricate Opéra intrigues.[85] He had an excellent nose for a profit and understood perfectly the needs and desires of his audience. They ranged from revolutionary students and members of the working classes, through discontented members of the *petit-bourgeoisie* to the all-important new moneyed leaders of society, whose tastes he catered to and helped form. "La Revolution de Juillet", he wrote, "est le triomphe de la bourgeoisie."[86] These were the inheritors of aristocratic power and position, whose wealth and influence would increase over the years. "This rising class would need to be amused, and where better than at the Opéra, which would also pander to their very human need for self-betterment".[87] Véron had decided views on the factors determining a ballet's success, which he described in his *Memoirs d'un bourgeois de Paris*:

> Dramas and comedies of manners do not come within the choreographer's scope; in a ballet the public demands above all a varied and striking score, new and unusual costumes, a great variety, contrasting sets, surprises, transformation scenes, and a simple plot which is easy to follow and in which the dance develops naturally out of the situations. To all that must be added the charm of a young and beautiful dancer who dances better and differently than those who have preceded her. If one is aiming neither at the intellect nor the heart, one must appeal to the senses and most particularly to the eyes.[88]

The financially successful ballets of this era all satisfied Véron's pedestrian criteria, but there were a few works that were to transcend these ideals of bourgeois fantasy and become transformed by the spirit of Romanticism. This chapter and Chapter Three examine these important ballets in some detail. Before his term began, on 28 February 1831, Véron had the auditorium of the Opéra completely redecorated. He improved on the gaslighting, which had been installed in 1822, by

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85 Sorell 1986, p 225

86 Chapman 1986, p 288

87 Guest 1980, p 106

88 Véron in his *Memoires d'un Bourgeois de Paris* vol. ii p 225

introducing Locatelli astro-lamps which, by means of their reflectors, provided a stronger light on stage and spread it more evenly, giving a softer and more natural effect. This well-timed modernization of the Opéra's lighting system was of particular importance because it allowed for the practical realisation onstage of the illusion of moonlight, the outward symbol of the Romantic atmosphere of poetic mystery.

The first known choreographic triumph of Romanticism was the *Ballet of the Nuns* in Meyerbeer's opera *Robert le Diable*, 1831. The sensational and melodramatic exploits of Robert, Duke of Normandy (the father of William the Conqueror) provided popular material for contemporary theatre. A playbill in the *Royal Opera House* Archives in London, headed **THEATRE ROYAL, COVENT GARDEN** and dated Thursday 4 February 1830, advertises "a New Musical **ROMANCE,** in two acts, called **ROBERT THE DEVIL, DUKE OF NORMANDY**" and ensures the prospective audience that it has "been received throughout with intense interest and rapturous applause."[89]

The ballet sequence in the 1831 production at the Opéra was so unusual as to be almost unprecedented: in a ruined cloister the ghosts of lapsed nuns rose from their tombs to dance by moonlight. Their abbess lured Robert into accepting a fatal talisman, and, their task accomplished, they gradually lost their vitality and sank down into their tombs to the strains of an infernal chorus. The effect of shifting moonbeams, created by suspended gas jets, playing over Gothic ruins and dancing spectres was unforgettably mysterious.

> It was a scenic triumph, with costumes of rare beauty. The entire *corps de ballet* appeared for the first time in ballet history in costumes of such translucent all-white texture and delicate shape as to evoke with every movement an esoteric, ethereal feeling. This unrelieved whiteness and gossamer subtlety gave the onlooker a sensation of total escape ... It was a new theatrical experience, what the vernacular calls a smash hit.[90]

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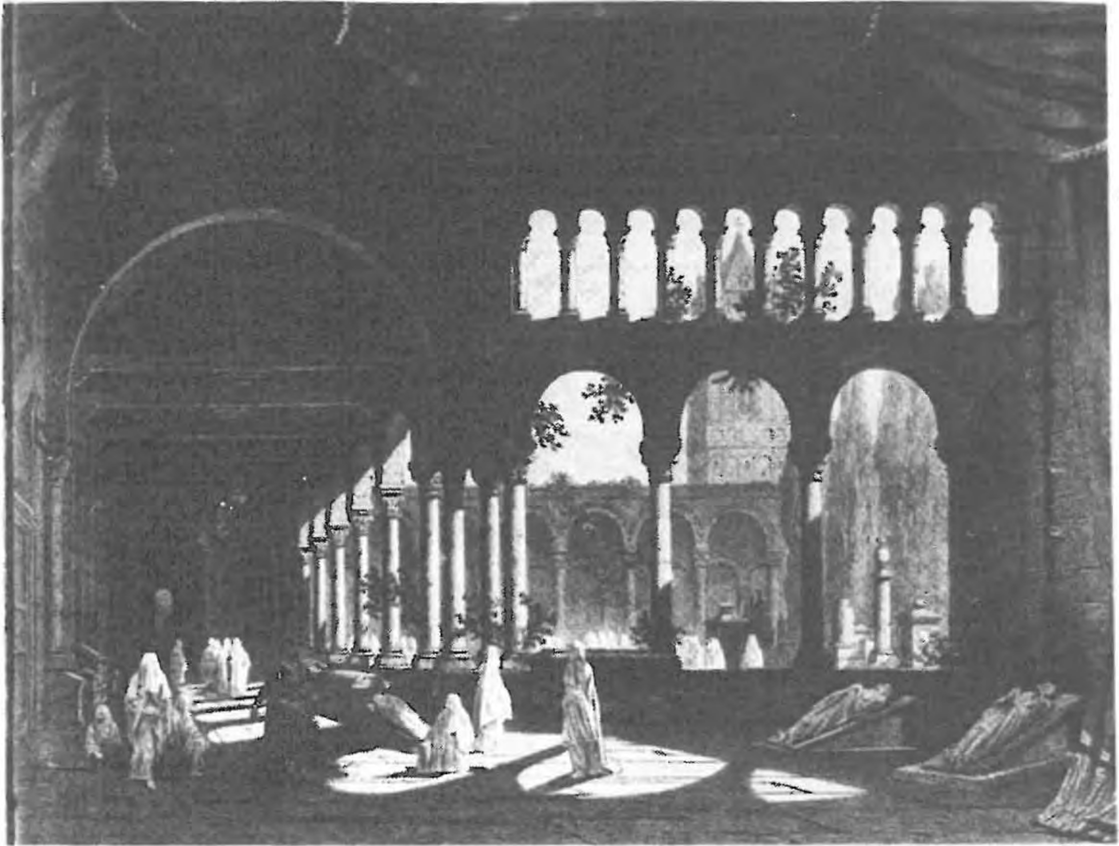
[89] *Royal Opera House* Archives, Covent Garden. Because of their frailty, photocopying of original playbills is seldom permitted, except by established writers. Included in this thesis are direct quotations from several such playbills with original emphasis and punctuation.

[90] Sorell 1986, p 220



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34. The fashionable eerie atmosphere of a moonlit cloister lined with tombs thrilled the viewers of the ballet of dead nuns in the opera *Robert le Diable*, 1831. Marie Taglioni, on the brink of stardom, led the spectral revels, and ballerinas appeared for the first time dressed totally in translucent white.

35. Dr Louis Veron, director of the Paris Opera in the early 1830's; an engraving by Carey from a drawing by J.A. Beauce. *La Sylphide*, 1831, was to transcend his bourgeoise, philistine values to become the great ballet of the decade.

36. *Robert le Diable*, Paris, 1832.

37. *Ballet of the Nuns*, 1872

These two paintings indicate the popularity of this ballet throughout the nineteenth century. The painting below illustrates the size and splendour of the Paris Opera, which is packed with wealthy bourgeois patrons; the cheaper seats are not featured. This is obviously a social occasion as well as a cultural one. The painting on the right is a social comment on the contemporary ballet audience: predominantly male and focussed as much on the auditorium as the stage.

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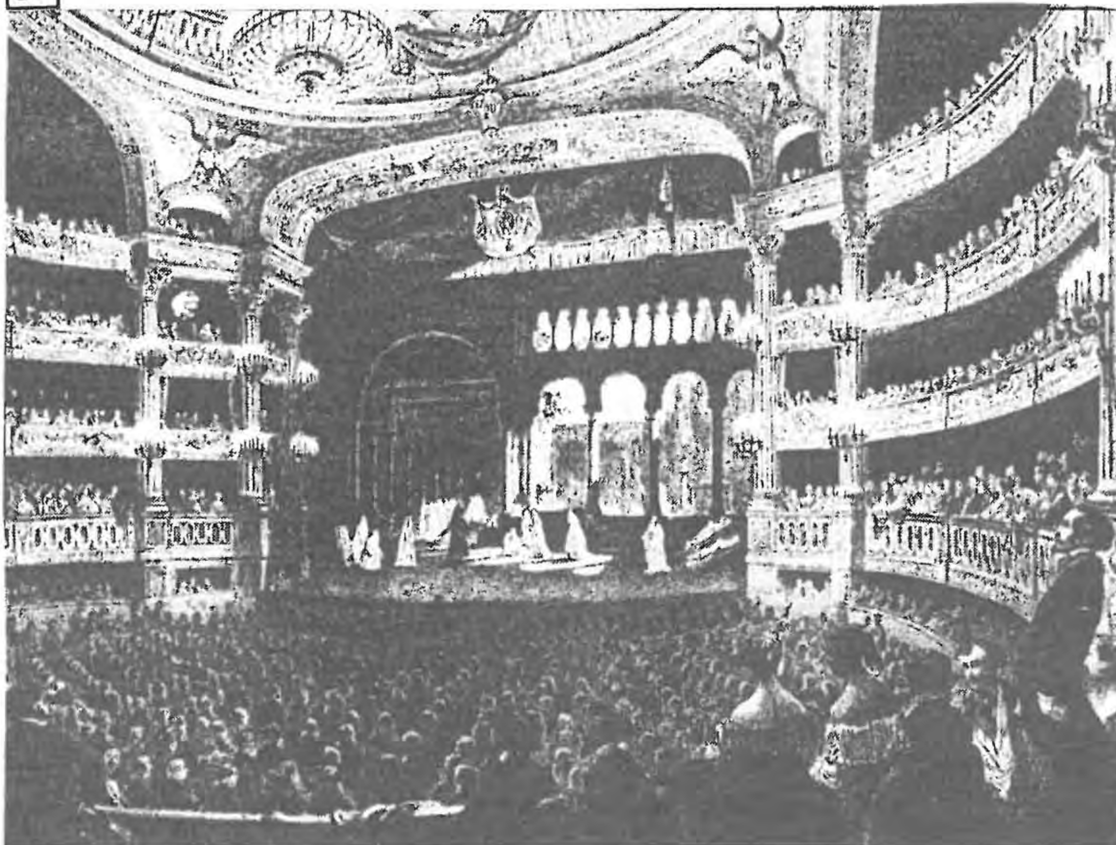

Here were elements that would satisfy both Véron's bourgeois tastes and the spirit of Romanticism. But the importance of the industrial revolution in the theatre and related advances cannot be overstressed. This ballet was made at the perfect time in the development of stage lighting:

> The innovation of gas-lighting, with its uneven, throbbing warmth, pooling the revolving white calyx of dancers' skirts with round, dark shadows, making its tarlatan edges incandescent from beneath, had also its part in the Romantic revolution, aiding the spectral, the nostalgic, the magic atmosphere.[91]

Robert le Diable was revived in 1870 long after the great age of the Romantic ballet was over, and Gautier's critique comments on the impact and significance of the lighting effects in the original production:

> Those who did not see the first performance of *Robert le Diable* can have no idea how novel this great work appeared at that time. This scene (the *Ballet of the Nuns*) is admirably composed; the groups are well arranged, and the soft lighting does not divest those dancers of the tomb of their poetry and their mystery. But at the moment when they have to seduce Robert, the lamps hanging down on high light up by themselves, electric light floods down on every side, and the shades vanish. Daylight has come into the cloister, and its atmosphere has disappeared.[92]

The impact of this ballet was so great because of the lavish stage image which had been skilfully calculated to appeal to the current Romantic taste for medievalism and the supernatural. The contemporary vogue for the gothic novel helped popularize an idealized image of the Middle Ages, with gloomy castles in moonlit landscapes. Ruskin comments:

> It is that strange disquietude of the Gothic spirit that is its greatness; that restlessness of the dreaming mind, that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly around the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and roof, and yet is not satisfied, nor shall be satisfied. The Greek would stay in his triglyph furrow and be at peace.[93]

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91 Kirstein 1977, p 245

92 Gautier in Guest 1986, pp 330 & 331

93 Ruskin in Honour 1988, p 155

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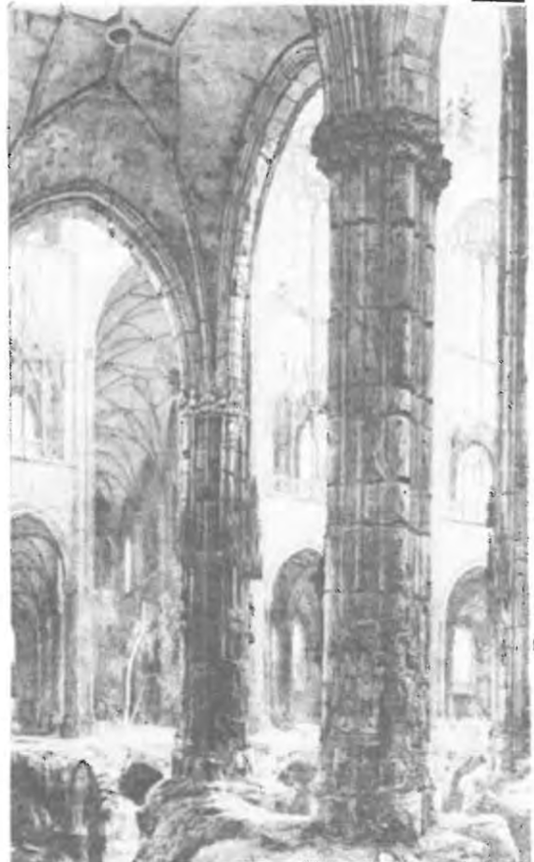

Two aspects of the Gothic Revival:

38. *The Gothic Vogue* satirized by Gillray, 1802. Tension mounts as a group of women read the Gothic horror novel, *The Monk*. Something of the content of the book is indicated by the ornaments in the room, and its general atmosphere.

39. *Gothic Church in Ruins*, a painting by Karl Blechen, 1826. The *Ballet of the Nuns* introduced both the Gothic aspiration towards the infinite, and the note of sadness and nostalgia inherent in ruined beauty.

And if the cloister is ruined, as in the *Ballet of the Nuns*, it would appeal even more to the Romantic imagination. Since the eighteenth century, writers and artists had come to admire ruins, both for their inherent beauty, and as sad relics of a departed world. In this ballet, with its eerie spectral atmosphere, was all the mystery of Romanticism, and the magical scene caught the imagination of all who saw it. With the auditorium lights extinguished and the gas jets simulating moonlight, everything - music, dance, lighting, stage design - was subordinated to the general illusion. Gautier's Romantic soul, the audience's bourgeois fantasies and Véron's cash boxes were all equally satisfied.[94]

Coleridge described the Gothic as infinity made imaginable, and the Gothic cloisters in *Ballet of the Nuns* introduced this Romantic idea. Gothic was in a perpetual state of becoming, like Romantic poetry, aspiring to ideals which could never be realised in this world. It was a sense of perpetual aspiration, ever reaching up to God. This was the principal theme of most serious literary Romantic works, "man's search for his own soul as he battled against mysterious forces and tried to reconcile his life as he lived it in reality with that of the spirit to which he aspired. The first choreographer successfully to develop this in the form of ballet was Filippo Taglioni in *La Sylphide*, 1832, ... the struggle between the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit."[95] Through the influence of the Romantic movement, *La Sylphide* introduced a new era to the ballet. It responded perfectly to the mood of the time, and the story mirrored the tragic conflict between ideals and reality that runs through all Romantic art, and echoes the essential duality in the human experience.

The contrast between ideals and the real world outside the theatre was becoming gradually more striking and more horrifying, as typhus and cholera epidemics raged through Europe. In Britain thirty-one thousand people had died of cholera since the epidemic started the previous year; and in Paris, as Véron complained in his *Memoires*, the cholera epidemic of 1832 had driven the most

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94 The middle class audiences brought with them attitudes of materialism, prudishness and hypocrisy. A few years before the premiere of *Robert le Diable*, for example, all danseuses at the Opéra had been commanded to lengthen their skirts so as not to inflame the male spectators. (Anderson 1974, p 43)

95 Lawson 1976, p 55

popular dancers away from the capital.[96] The need for distraction and escape into a beautiful dream world was becoming ever greater. *La Sylphide*, one of the greatest artistic achievements in ballet, was created during these disturbing times.

The *Ballet of the Nuns* had been choreographed by Filippo Taglioni and the nuns were led by his daughter and pupil, Marie Taglioni, the first of the five great ballerinas of the Romantic age. Alfred Nourrit, the tenor who played Robert, was inspired to create a new libretto for a full-length ballet with an ethereal and supernatural atmosphere. Banking on the success of the *Ballet of the Nuns*, Véron accepted the suggestion, and the gamble paid off handsomely. Like many Romantic ballets, the libretto drew on contemporary literature. The source and inspiration for *La Sylphide* was the elf of Argyll in a novella by Charles Nodier, *Trilby, ou le Lutin d'Argail*.

In this, the prototype Romantic ballet, the Taglionis and their collaborators succeeded in drawing together all the new aesthetic and technical developments that had first appeared in *Ballet of the Nuns* into a unified whole. *La Sylphide*, "the most influential dance work of the century",[97] was a realization of all that music, choreography, dancing and design could contribute. It was for example, one of the few ballets in which the action was completely developed in dancing. The vital Romantic concept of synaesthesia in the arts was to be a factor of some consequence in each of the great ballets of the age.

When *La Sylphide* opened at Paris Opéra in 1832, Marie Taglioni was hailed as 'a charming revolutionary', 'Romanticism applied to the dance', and credited with the inauguration of a new style. *L'Etat actuel de la Danse* cried, "Open revolution has broken out at the Opéra. Since the latest newcomer appeared, all the dancers have been taglionising."[98] Marie infused the role with such

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[96] Chapman 1986, p 306

[97] Robertson & Hutera, 1988, p 15

[98] Guest 1980, p 79

poetry that dancers and non-dancers alike strove to imitate her; the former by dancing on *pointe* or 'taglionising' and the latter by dressing their hair *á la Sylphide*.[99]

The *Courrier des Théâtres* made this significant observation: "Her skilful use of *pointe* work revealed how it could be assimilated artistically in a dancer's execution."[100] *Pointe* work had been evolving gradually. The earliest attempts were momentarily held poses to give an illusion of extra lightness. Marie Taglioni was totally different from the dancers who had preceded her. As classical dance technique had grown in difficulty and complexity, Filippo Taglioni had devised a gruelling training programme which provided her with a superb technique and style characterized by qualities of lightness and elevation. This assured technical grounding in the classical ballet tradition enabled her to "raise *pointe* work from a feat to an art", [101] and make an important contribution to the developing art form. In addition to its lyrical beauty and dreamy poeticism, Marie's achievement in transcending technique and expressing her own personality through her dancing was in the true spirit of Romanticism, which was concerned with the world as experienced by the individual. A key feature of her style was the balanced use of all the body parts combined with a freedom, ease and grace. The image she created was intense, truthful and striking in its naturalness.[102] This appearance of ease was an important aspect of the illusion of effortlessness so central to the image of the ballerina.[103] A later Russian ballerina said of Marie Taglioni: "It was found that she danced as a nightingale sings, as a butterfly flies, that dancing was her language, her life, her happiness,"[104] and a new art form came into being.

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99 Au 1988, p 50

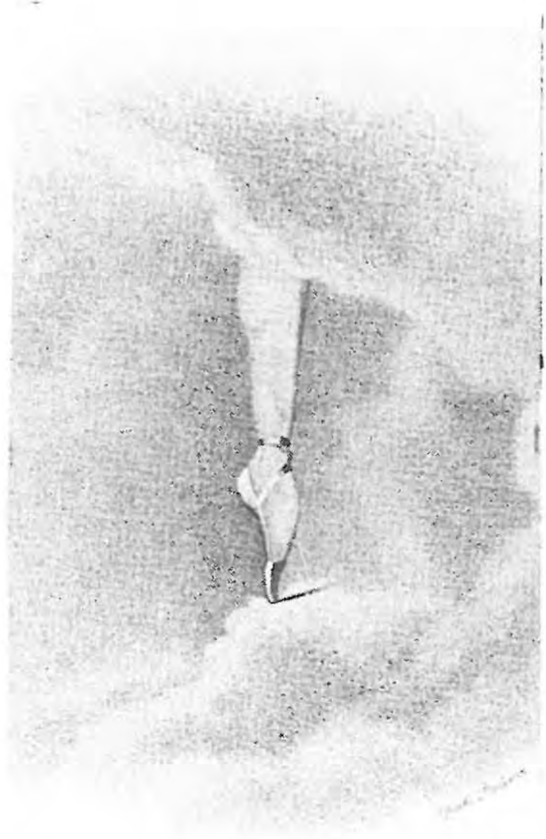
100 Guest 1980, p 80

101 Guest 1970 (b), p 71

102 See Chapman 1986, pp 62 to 70 for further details.

103 Singer Clara Novello saw Fanny Cerrito, one of the four great ballerinas who followed Taglioni, at La Scala in Milan in 1841, and she noticed how the ballerina "when coming down to the footlights to acknowledge plaudits after marvellous flights, would restrain her pantings, to do away with the appearance of effort in what she had done." (Guest 1974, p 31)

104 Roslavleva 1964, p 58



40. Marie Taglioni as *La Sylphide*. Chalon's lithograph captures the translucent grace and modest beauty of Taglioni's new poetic style of dancing, with *pointework* integrated into the artistic interpretation. This pose may still be seen in Bournonville's version of the ballet, preserved by the Royal Danish Ballet since 1836.

41. Taglioni's foot *en pointe* appearing from the clouds, St Petersburg c 1840.

42. *Une Danseuse a pointes.* Sofia Fuoco. A delightful cartoon showing the kind of effort and strain that audiences were made all too aware of in *pointework* before the arrival of Taglioni.

Marie Taglioni's contribution in the creation of *La Sylphide* was a fundamental one, partly because the role of the Sylphide had been devised with the object of revealing in a perfect setting her new and poetic style. "Truly", she remembered ecstatically in her old age, "I shimmered in the air."[105] Lady Blessington, who was in the audience at her debut, recognised the unique merit of her dancing:

> Here is a totally new style of dancing, graceful beyond all comparison, wonderful lightness, and absence of all violent effort, or at least the appearance of it. and a modesty as new as it is delightful to witness in her art. She seems to float and bound like a sylph across the stage, never executing those *tours de force* that we know to be difficult and wish were impossible, being always performed at the expense of decorum and grace, and requiring only activity for their achievement ... There is a sentiment in the dancing of this charming votary of Terpsichore that elevates it far beyond the licentious style generally adopted by the ladies of her profession, and which bids fair to accomplish a reformation in it.[106]

Marie conquered Paris through the expression in her dancing. In the same year she had also conquered London. An article in the *Times*, dated 5 June 1838, emphasizes her popularity there:

> The fair *artiste* was received with several distinct rounds of applause, and was obliged to remain curtsying in acknowledgement of them for some minutes after her *entrée* ... At the termination of the opera, the Queen of Dancers again appeared in the last act of the *Sylphide*. She moved with that noiseless step, which is so remarkable in her style, and glided about the stage like a fairy form. The *Sylphide* passed off with the same success which ever must attend it when Taglioni appears.[107]

Taglioni was unique because she avoided the dazzling tricks then in vogue. Her technique was so controlled that it never obscured the poetry of her dancing, and although revolutionary, her style was

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105 Guest 1980, p 75

106 Guest 1980, p 77 In this quotation the writer gives some interesting information about the state of the art prior to Taglioni.

107 *British Newspaper Library, British Museum*
Two additional points are of interest here. Firstly, ballet at this time was usually presented in combination with opera, both between the acts of the opera and to end the evening's entertainment. And secondly, the unfortunate custom of presenting popular bits of ballets out of context seems to have been in vogue then, as it is in our own time in South Africa and elsewhere.

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43. Marie Taglione in *La Sylphide.* One of a series of lithographs by Alfred Edward Chalon, now in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* Picture Library, London.

firmly founded on the traditions of classical dance. "Even today, her image of airy delicacy holds sway as a universal picture of ballet dancing. Taglioni was, in all senses, the first modern ballerina."[108]

In her Foreword to the American edition of Guest's *The Romantic Ballet in Paris*, Lillian Moore comments on the timeless magic of the *ballet blanc*. "Its symbol in dancing is flight: the aerial flight of ballerina as sylphide, or dryad or wili; the ballerina as a supernatural being, the visible incarnation of man's idealism and aspiration."[109] Taglioni became the ethereal embodiment of the human being's idealism and aspiration towards the infinite: a vaporous figure in diaphanous white drifting forever out of reach of the mortal whom she had enchanted - one of the central images of the Romantic ballet. "The allure that such creatures exercised over mortals - as they do in old tales going back at least as far as the *Odyssey* - became in the Romantic ballet, a metaphor for the artist's yearning for the unattainable idea."[110] In *La Sylphide* dancing truly expressed the aspirations of its age.

This image of the supernatural, the hopeless quest, of which the ballerina is the most perfect example, is found everywhere in Romantic art and literature. "For Keats the 'poetic romance' of *Endymion* was to become a hazy breathtaking quest for the ideal",[111] and the sylphide, the *'faery's child'*, is his *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. Turner's evocations of misty colour and atmosphere belong here too, the painter of light, air and space. Of great interest to the Romantics was the cult of failure: the defeated hero, the unfulfilled genius, the unconsummated passion. They had a tendency to depict lovers as doomed or dying.[112] Also expressive of the Romantic spirit was the music of Beethoven; the sound of the European reaching out for something beyond his grasp and going to confront the

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108 Robertson & Hutera 1988, p 12

109 Moore in Guest 1980, p ix

110 Au 1988, p 45

111 Vaughan 1988, p 226

112 "That so many Romantics depicted lovers as doomed or dying ... is a reflection of the morbid idea that no completely perfect union could be achieved this side of the grave." (Honour 1986, p 388)

45. *The Wanderer above the Mists* c1817-18 by Caspar David Friedrich: The Romantic confronts the infinite.
46. Girodet *The Sleep of Endymion* 1792. For Keats the 'poetic romance' of *Endymion* was to become a hazy breath-taking quest for the ideal.

infinite. E.T.A. Hoffman, writing in 1810, describes Beethoven as a pure Romantic composer because his music "sets in motion the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, of suffering, and awakens that infinite longing which is the essence of Romanticism."[113] And 1830 witnessed the first public hearing of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, a full-blooded expression of the composer's anguished and unrequited passion for English actress Henrietta Smithson. Gautier wrote of Berlioz:

> In this renaissance of 1830 he represented the musical Romantic idea; the breaking of old patterns, the substitution of new forms for the invariable square rhythms, the complex and skilful richness of the orchestra, the fidelity of local colour, unexpected effects of sonorousness, tumultuous and Shakespearean profundity of passion, amorous and melodic reveries, the nostalgia and demands of the soul, undefined and mysterious sentiments which cannot be rendered in words.[114]

Goethe's *Faust* and the plays of Shakespeare, and later, the operas of Richard Wagner, were all great favourites with the Romantics. Subjectivity, passion, aspiration towards the infinite, a sense of yearning: all these qualities feature strongly in the Romantic ballet.

George Balanchine, speaking in this century, comments on the essential feature of this artistic revolution: "To be Romantic about something is to see what you are and to wish for something entirely different. This requires magic."[115] Parisians of all walks of life were very conscious of the pedestrian bourgeois world around them, and of the horrors of disease and human suffering. Many of them sought their escape in the magic of the theatre. It was this element of magic, to transcend reality and make dreams and ideals seem possible, that *La Sylphide* embodied so perfectly. In the theatre were the technical skills to transform the ordinary and create illusion on a grand scale; for the stage has the unique ability of creating the illusion of idealized reality, if only for the duration of a performance. To many, magic implies fairy tales, and the fairy tale is a basic element of the Romantic ballet. The woodland settings inhabited by sylphides and wilis are significant because they convey

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[113] Hoffman in Honour 1986, p 126

[114] Gautier in Honour 1986, p126

[115] Balanchine in Anderson 1974, p 44

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47. August Bournonville's ballets brought a taste of Romanticism to Denmark. In this contemporary lithograph, Junker Ove, the hero of *A Folk Tale*, 1854, is surrounded by a bevy of dangerously alluring elf-maidens.

48. *Les Sylphides* by Theyre Lee-Elliot, painted between 1936 and 1937. Twentieth century versions of *Les Sylphides* are usually based on Fokine's choreography for the *Ballets Russes*, which was inspired by the spirit of the original *La Sylphide*.

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something sinister and impenetrable while one is at the same time drawn to the secrets hidden there. Nature has always held out to the Romantic an enigmatic key to mysterious freedom. And these woods are inhabited by sylphs, special kinds of imaginary creatures, mortals without souls, elemental airborne beings. In the Romantic language, wings are symbols of ecstatic moments in life, for ephemeral beauty, but also for the fulfilment of our dreams. In *La Sylphide*, James is unable to reconcile reality with his dreams. His mind seems divided, his psyche in a state of unrest; he does not seem quite at home in the bourgeois setting of his sweet Effie, whom he is supposed to marry. At the end of the ballet, when Effie passes in the background to marry someone else, another Romantic hero is defeated, and the life of ordinariness remains triumphant. Sorell notes how the story of the ballet subtly echoes the mood of the time:

> Two years previously, in 1830, students and workers had lost a revolution to the bourgeoisie establishment, gradually replacing a worn-out aristocracy. A disappointed youth faced a reality in which the machine more and more encroached on their daily existence ...[116]

If 'revolution' was the key concept underlying Chapter One of this study, it becomes apparent that 'duality' is the central idea of this chapter. *La Sylphide*, the greatest ballet of the 1830's, is an artistic representation of the dual nature of the human being: material and spiritual, body and soul, earth and air; and of the sadness inherent in the disharmony between these polar opposites.

> Essential to the ideology of the Romantic period was the fact - which Hugo emphasizes a number of times in his preface (to *Cromwell*) - that man is a dual being. This idea entered our civilization with Christianity, but became a crucial point for Romanticism, which questioned whether the price of harmony was the exclusion of one side of man's nature, leaving only a half-complete human being.[117]

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[116] Sorell 1986, p 222 (see pp 222 to 224 for further details)

[117] Aschengreen in *Dance Perspectives* 1974, p 9

La Sylphide struck a vital chord in the intellectual climate of the time,[118] and is still danced today partly because of the essential truth inherent in its theme, the human being struggling to reconcile his dual nature.

What is truly astonishing about this ballet is the fact that it was a complete fluke. *La Sylphide* was a great artistic triumph and went to the heart of the Romantic ideology, not because of its bourgeois facilitators, but in spite of them. Neither Véron nor Filippo Taglioni understood the exact nature of this spectacular achievement; Filippo and his fellow choreographers at the Opéra were never able to repeat this success. None of the other ballets of the decade were in such deep accord with the Romantic spirit as was Charles Nodier's ingenious tale of James and his yearning for the unattainable.

The earthly and supernatural elements in the Romantic ballets required contrasting styles of dancing. In the first act of *La Sylphide*, Filippo (and Bournonville, whose version of the ballet we have inherited) used the country dances of Scotland as a basis for the choreography of the world of reality, set in a Scottish farmhouse. For scenes of real life the style tended to be relatively earthbound, or *terre á terre*, and the choreographers made use of precision and speed, little steps that bit the boards with rapidity and sharpness, known as *dance tacqueté*. The atmosphere of the second act was in total contrast. The spiritual and ethereal mood centred on the graceful lightness and *grande élévation* of the sylphide on her *pointes*, and wearing the new white diaphanous 'classical tutu' that has since distinguished the *ballet blanc*. This poetic and elevated style that gave the illusion of weightlessness, was termed *danse ballonné*. Here, the essential duality of the age appeared in a practical form in the classical ballet technique itself; as it was to be personified in the contrasting styles of two of the great

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[118] Kirstein comments further: "In fact, ballet was but another channel by which the predominantly Germanic ideas affected the period. Levinson points out the significance of Scandinavian blood in Marie Taglioni's veins for she "danced what Kant purely thought", what Novalis, of the blue flower sang, what Hoffman and Lenau nocturnally imagined. Everything in her expression had an inherent duality; the real world, immediate and everyday, juxtaposed to an ideal, higher plane of essential reality. Thus, the ballet also proved the vanity in appearances, the truth of dreams." (Kirstein 1977, p 249)

Romantic ballerinas. Marie Taglioni and her greatest rival, Viennese dancer Fanny Elssler, represented the two opposite but complementary facets of the Romantic ballet. Just as Taglioni would always be associated with *danse ballonné*, Elssler was renowned as the finest exponent of *danse tacqueté*. The stage image that she conveyed was passionate and sensual and her movement was *terre á terre*, but with great style and precision. A famous quotation by Théophile Gautier further defines and compares the two styles as 'Christian' and 'pagan':

> Fanny Elssler's dancing is quite different from the academic idea, it has a particular character which sets her apart from all other dancers; it is not the aerial and virginal grace of Taglioni, it is something more human, more appealing to the senses. Mille. Taglioni is a Christian dancer, if one may make use of such an expression in regard to an art proscribed by the Catholic faith: she flies like a spirit in the midst of the transparent clouds of white muslin with which she loves to surround herself, she resembles a happy angel who scarcely bends the petals of celestial flowers with the tips of her pink toes. Fanny is quite a pagan dancer; she reminds one of the music Terpsichore, tambourine in hand, her tunic, exposing her thigh, caught up with a golden clasp; when she bends freely from her hips, throwing back her swooning, voluptuous arms ...[119]

It was in 1834, when Taglioni's success had been generally acknowledged, that Dr Véron inaugurated the star system and shrewdly turned his attention to promoting a rival. Elssler was as great a ballerina but with a very different quality and appeal. The resulting interest and popular controversy had a salutary effect on box-office receipts, and Véron was soon able to retire, his fortune made. Interestingly, a playbill from the *Royal Opera House* Archives, Covent Garden, dated as early as May 20 1833, advertises Taglioni in *La Sylphide* and "the first appearance on the English stage" of the Elssler sisters. The programme includes:

> ... the celebrated **BALLET** of **LA SYLPHIDE** with new Scenery, Machinery, Dresses and Decorations ... The Part of ***La Sylphide*** **by** ***Mademoiselle*** TAGLIONI, positively her only Appearance on the English Stage this Season ... and (among a list of others) Mademoiselles **FANNY** and **TERESA ELSSLER** ...

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[119] Gautier in Beaumont 1980 (revised edition) p 16

Véron's perception of the function of ballet, as a sensual and visual experience of sheer escapism that would pander to bourgeois fantasies, was to have one particularly severe repercussion on the development of ballet during the nineteenth century.

> Véron, the force behind many of the trends and fashions at the Opéra in the early 1830's, saw to it that the female performers were better paid and better publicised than their male counterparts. He also ensured that the *danseuses* were the main features of his ballets.[119]

With the ballerina elevated to star status and a symbol of the Romantic yearning for the unattainable ideal, the male dancer, with a few exceptions such as Perrot and Bournonville, became an endangered species, and was not to recover his status until Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* in 1909. Both Véron and Gautier and his fellow dance critics must take responsibility for this unfortunate development.[120]

The setting for *La Sylphide* was misty and remote Scotland, a locale that had been made both exotic and fashionable by Sir Walter Scott's novels, which enjoyed immense popularity at this time. A playbill housed in the *Royal Opera House* Archives, Covent Garden, dated October 22 1832, advertises a new play in five acts "founded on Sir Walter Scott's FIRST celebrated Novel of **WAVERLEY**". This is indicative of an important trend in Romanticism, an escape from everyday realities provided by glamorous foreign places and local colour. It was Fanny Elssler who helped to popularise this aspect, by perfecting the 'character' dances of other lands, such as Hungary, Poland and Spain. Her most famous dance was *La Cachucha*, a balleticized Spanish dance in Coralli's ballet *Le Diable boiteux*, 1836, (*The Devil on Two Sticks*). The need for escape to another world had intensified; by 1837, the year after *Le Diable boiteux* opened, cholera had killed eighteen thousand victims in Paris alone, mainly from the poorer classes.

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119 Chapman 1986, p 79

120 The significance of this focus on the ballerina in relation to the bourgeois value-system of the day will be examined in some detail in the last chapter of this investigation.

Based on the novel by Le Sage, the ballet's scenario was packed with local colour, fantasy and interesting situations, and gave the designer and choreographer, Jean Coralli, full scope to evoke the splendour of eighteenth century Spain. "*Le Diable boiteux* was the ballet *par excellence* for Fanny Elssler ... the most spirited, precise and intelligent dancer who ever skimmed the boards with her steely toe."[121] *La Cachucha* contained the concentrated essence of all that was voluptuous and exciting in the dancing of the time. The full impact of the dance, its blazing sensuality, is rapturously described by Théophile Gautier:

> She comes forward in her pink satin *basquine* trimmed with wide flounces of black lace, her skirt, weighted at the hem, fits tightly over the hips; her slender waist boldly arches and causes the diamond ornament on her bodice to glitter; her leg, smooth as marble, gleams through the frail mesh of her silk stocking, and her little foot at rest seems but to await the signal of the music. How charming she is with her big comb, the rose behind her ear, her lustrous eyes and her sparkling smile! At the tips of her rosy fingers quiver ebony castanets. Now she darts forward; the castanets begin their sonorous chatter. With her hand she seems to shake down great clusters of rhythm. How she twists, how she bends! what fire! What voluptuousness! What precision! Her swooning arms toss about her drooping head, her body curves backwards, her white shoulders almost graze the ground. What a charming gesture! Would you not say that in that hand which seems to skim the dazzling barrier of the footlights, she gathers up all the desires and all the enthusiasm of the spectators?[122]

When Duponchel, Véron's successor at the Opéra, suggested Le Sage's novel *Le Diable boiteux* as the setting for a new ballet for Elssler, he was exploiting the contemporary vogue for things Spanish. Fanny Elssler's exotic and warmly human style transported her spectators to the languors of the east, the exhilarating rhythms of the Slavic peoples and, most of all, the colour and passion of Spain, which had an irresistible attraction for all Romantics. This ballet reflected the contemporary

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121 Gautier in Steinberg 1980, p 75
This 'steely toe' was not yet supported by the modern toe shoe; these ballerinas used to oversew the toes of their shoes to give some measure of support.

122 Gautier in Beaumont 1980 (revised edition) p 15. It is characteristic of Gautier's individual approach to dance criticism that he is attracted as much by the woman in the dancer, as by the dancer in the woman. His critique is written totally from the viewpoint of the male spectator.

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49. Fanny Elssler in the balleticized Spanish dance, *La Cachucha*, which shocked the more prudish members of her middle class audiences and thrilled the Romantics with its dangerous eroticism.

interest in 'folk', and the awakening of the spirit of nationalism with all its complicated consequences.[123]

> It was accepted among Romantics of all shades that 'the folk' ie normally, the pre-industrial peasant or craftsman, exemplified the uncorrupted virtues and that its language, song, story, and custom was the true repository of the soul of the people... The very word 'folklore' was an invention of the period (1846) ... The 'Folk' could be a revolutionary concept, especially among oppressed peoples about to discover or re-assert their national identity.[124]

There was a political reason for the French ballet coming under the influence of Spanish dance. A dynastic crisis in Spain brought about a theatrical crisis in Madrid; the theatres were closed and four of the country's leading dancers were authorised to accept an engagement in Paris on the invitation of Dr Véron. They were received enthusiastically in January 1834, and pointed the way to a fuller exploitation of local colour in ballet.[125] As has been noted, a significant aspect of Elssler's popularity was her ability to provide escape from mundane reality, to transport her audiences to glamorous foreign locales. There was a strong element of the magical mystery tour about the Romantic ballet, which often combined travelogue, fantasy and nostalgia. This distance in space or time provided relief from the new industrial world of smoke, grime and disease. The Industrial Revolution's improvements in travel and transportation may have had something to do with this interest in foreign lands. The first railway, from London to Birmingham, opened in 1837, and the following year ships made the first steam-powered crossing of the Atlantic. Improved transportation gave access to remote places, while industrialism simultaneously threatened their unspoiled charm. Rail and steamship services contributed positively by facilitating the extensive touring undertaken by all the great ballerinas of the age, as they helped to spread the spirit of Romanticism from Imperial Russia to the Americas. The Industrial Revolution provided transport for raw materials, manufactured goods, people and ideas.

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123 Die Volk and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism provides a modern South African experience of this concept.

124 Hobsbawm 1988, p 321

125 Guest 1980, pp 131 & 132

Elssler's gifts included one that was to prove of vital importance to the ballet of the time: she was a superb actress with extraordinary passion and dramatic power and genius. This was to be her particular contribution to the classical ballet tradition; for as Ivor Guest says in his biography of Fanny Elssler:

> The work of great performers endures by merging into the developing tradition of their art, for true genius oversteps the bounds of individuality to become, by its power of example and inspiration, a beacon of artistic endeavour ... Fanny Elssler was one of the rare phenomena who personify the achievements of their age.[126]

An article in the *Illustrated London News* dated Saturday February 25 1842 describes Elssler as an "actress-dancer" and attests to her international popularity, with "long mazes of successes, presents, poems, tributes, bouquets, and every other order of theatrical triumph, even to diamonds gifted by monarchs, and carriages drawn by nobles." The article delightedly announces Elssler's forthcoming appearances at both the *Royal Opera House*, Covent Garden and *Her Majesty's Theatre*, Haymarket. "She has driven France, Austria, Prussia and America mad - and now *les Anglais vont suivre les autres ... Tant mieux*! We are all the better for a little excitement, and none make it more gracefully than *the* Elssler."[127]

What was the exact nature of this excitement? Fanny Elssler personified a crucial element in the Romantic ballet which is suggested but seldom fully discussed in published works. In the introduction to his unpublished thesis, Chapman describes the 'Romantic' features of the ballet and notes that "the soul of Romanticism is lacking. There is no rebellion against the social, no sense that a stance is being taken against society."[128] It is true that the ballets do not deal with the social and economic problems of the day. The element of danger in the Romantic ballet was not social or economic, it was sexual. And this danger, most strongly represented by the sensual and passionate

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126 Guest 1970 (a), pp 263 & 264

127 *Illustrated London News* Archives: No 43 Volume II p 125

128 Chapman 1986, p 4

stage presence of Fanny Elssler, challenged middle class 'Victorian' norms and values,[129] and provided that revolutionary threat that is an essential part of the Romantic movement. Erik Aschengreen identifies a strong emphasis on the closely united erotic and demonic elements as early as 1831 in the *Ballet of the Nuns*:

> The erotic and demonic - often tightly interwoven - are essential features in the artistic physiognomy of the period. People then believed in swans, sylphs or naiads as little as we do. They were symbolic expressions, just as 'demonic' was the era's word for human nature's hidden and irresistible drives, which were now depicted with increasing audacity. Sexual anxiety, mental sterility, frigidity, and the psychology of the seducer were bold new subjects of the time.[130]

Although Taglioni's style was so pure and ethereal, inherent in *La Sylphide* were the intense passions that both attracted and frustrated people of the era. Sylphides, so ardently desired, were dangerous for the tranquillity of the soul, and were twice as dangerous because they were beautiful and compelling. Passions were strong but there was also a vibrant longing for a purer world. The harmony of the eighteenth century was gone and since 1789 the world had been restless and insecure; when ideas came into conflict with reality, existence was no longer harmonious. *La Sylphide* expresses this conflict in an ingenious way. Contemporary critics recognised that James was intoxicated with this creature, and that this intoxication was both dangerous and exciting for James. There is also the suggestion that erotic contact is dangerous to the sylphide. When James tries to turn his fantasy into reality and captures the sylphide with the scarf, she dies; and the harmony and happiness that James has experienced in the woods are shattered the moment the sensual is admitted.[131]

It was of course Fanny Elssler who most strongly represented the sensuous and the passionate, the revolutionary and dangerous side of Romanticism. Her voluptuous character dances from Spain

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129 This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, which focuses on the images of the ballerina and the middle class woman.

130 Aschengreen in *Dance Perspectives* 1974, p 10
This series of articles appears to be the only published works in English that deal with this vital aspect of the Romantic ballet. I am indebted to them for this discussion

131 Aschengreen in *Dance Perspectives* 1974, pp 7 & 9

Fanny Elssler

and other lands to an extent broke the rules established by Taglioni, just as Hugo in *Hernani* had violated classical rules. The idolization of passion, a strong Romantic trait, found its theatrical expression in the dancing of Fanny Elssler.[132] And Elssler's dancing may have thrilled Gautier and the critics, but it initially shocked the more prudish members of the general public, and the middle class morality of the respectable bourgeoisie:

> It is of interest at this point to quote Charles de Boigne's impression of the effect produced on the general public by this dance. 'A certain number of performances were required to accustom the real public to the Cachucha. Those swayings of the hips, those provocative gestures, those arms which asked to be kissed, the body that thrilled, shuddered and twisted, that seductive music, those castanets, that unfamiliar costume, that short skirt, that half-opening bodice, all this, and, above all, Elssler's sensuous grace, lascivious abandon, were greatly appreciated by the opera-glasses of the stalls and boxes. But the public, the real public, found it difficult to accept such choreographic audacities.' Nevertheless, despite the doubts and fears of the more prudish members of the audience, the critics were loud in their praise of Elssler's dancing.[133]

Despite their very different styles and appeal, and the fact that Taglioni was Swedish/Italian and Elssler was Viennese, there is evidence to suggest that Taglioni and Elssler were regarded by the French as symbols of freedom, or of a yearning for golden moments in the recent past. As Marie Taglioni was about to depart on a European tour, Paris realised its loss:

> 'We are losing Mlle. Taglioni,' deplored Frédéric Soulié. 'She is fleeing bound for London, Edinburgh and St Petersburg. May the gods be kind and restore her to us, for we alone have a feeling for her and understand her as she deserves. We are not very sure that this white floating shade that is called Taglioni will appear so clearly to the eyes of the British through their thick fogs. Alas what will become of this white mist amid the common coal smoke! What destiny awaits this beautiful butterfly amid the icy winds of the Baltic! Taglioni belongs to us, and yet no one objects when she is snatched away! What has become of the France of July? Indeed the French have fallen low.'[134]

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132 Aschengreen in *Dance Perspectives* 1974, p 19

133 Beaumont 1949, p 147. Of interest is the implied power of the critics in forming and influencing opinions.

134 Guest 1980, p 159

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The idolization of Fanny Elssler

51. A lithograph of Fanny in Vienna, 1831, by R Theer after Carl Agricola.
52. A coloured etching of fans fighting in a barrel of eggs over a bouquet of flowers thrown down to them by Fanny from her window on the Seilerstatt, 1842.
53. A rather unpleasant meerchaum and amber cigarette holder, made to represent Fanny Elssler's leg.

53

There is a definite sense of national identity here, with the elevated Romantic ballerina represented as a spirit of the ideal of freedom and as a symbol of the July revolution of 1830. Also of note is Britain's contemporary identity as a land of industrial smog, even in these early days of industrialisation. The leftist newspaper *Le Constitutionnel* also interpreted the Sylphide as a political symbol of the desired freedom that they had failed to obtain in 1830.[135] And perhaps the Sylphide could have represented a more universal figure of freedom, for the year after the ballet opened in Paris and London, slavery was abolished in the British Empire.

In his pre-publicity campaigns promoting Elssler's ballets, Dr Véron had deliberately used rumours of her supposed association with Napoleon's son, to stimulate interest in her. This young man, whose portrait hung on many humble walls throughout France, had recently died, romantically of consumption, and he became a martyr in the cult of Napoleon. With the Napoleonic legend growing fast in French imagination and Bonapartism emerging as a political force, such a story was bound to have effective appeal. Maurice, proprietor of *Courrier des Théâtres*, wrote in 1834:

> Whether this rumour is well-founded or not, it is certainly one that will stimulate interest and curiosity in Mlle. Elssler. Whether it is seen only as a excuse for poignant memories, as a thought associated with many cruelly-disappointed hopes, or as an occasion ... to express feelings which people who have not renounced their principles have for the illustrious dead, the opportunity will be seized to see and applaud her, and ponder.[136]

The yearning for an unattainable ideal that was such a strong feature of the Romantic ballet would have had an extra resonance in the unexciting and pedestrian France of Louis-Philippe.

> Louis Philippe pursued policies which appealed less and less to a country still not resigned to life without glory ... France was bored. Unmindful of the benefits of peace, the average Frenchman hummed Bonapartist couplets.[137]

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135 Aschengreen in *Dance Perspectives* 1974, p 11

136 Maurice in Guest 1970 (a), pp 56 & 57

137 Dunan 1974, p 200

The July revolution had been the work of liberals and Bonapartists. After his death Napoleon became a legendary hero who embodied the glory of Empire and became a symbol of liberty. As the promises of 1830 soon withered, gradually stifled through censorship, there were many who felt both boredom and a sense of betrayal as they saw the daring changes of Revolution and Empire atrophying in the hands of the new bourgeois officialdom. Nostalgia was the prevalent mood: reactionaries yearned for the *Ancien Régime* with its elegance, opulence and privileges; revolutionaries for the dawn of liberty and the heady days of 1789 and 1830; and old soldiers and their families recalled the splendid years of French domination of Europe under Bonaparte. People of all political complexions found themselves looking back wistfully to recent periods which had already come to seem tantalisingly out of reach. Nostalgia and disillusion would explode into action in the revolution of 1848, but for most of the period under discussion, the image of the ballerina was subtly in tune with the mood of the times in France. "What Baudelaire described as 'a sense of irreparable loss' had very real meaning when applied to the memory of the Utopian dreams of the previous century."[138] It is not surprising that Taglioni's *La Sylphide* and Elssler's *La Cachucha* were so strongly identified with the ballerinas who danced them and as popular in their time as Pavlova's *Dying Swan* would become in the next century.[139]

The dominant feature of the first half of the nineteenth century was the duality of the times, which was impeccably expressed by Charles Dickens in his novel about the two cities under discussion in this investigation; *A Tale of Two Cities* was written in the 1850's, about the period of the French Revolution of 1789. It opens with these words:

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138 Vaughan 1988, p 22

139 Although particular ballets are associated with certain ballerinas, most of the ballets were danced by several different dancers.

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.[140]

This famous sentence underlines the duality which was an essential characteristic of the political, economic, social and artistic life of the period. It was an age of extremes, of astounding contrasts, which were reflected in the central theme of duality in the two great contemporary Romantic ballets, *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*.

Politically the era was bracketed by revolution and distinguished by the constant threat of similar disruption; yet in France the pedestrian, bourgeois reign of Louis-Philippe led to a mood of boredom and nostalgia for past glories, a yearning for unattainable ideals that was reflected in the ballet. Economically, the middle classes extended their wealth and power, while the masses of labouring poor lived deprived and brutal lives in the industrial centres, savaged by typhus and cholera. In social terms the bourgeoisie found escape in the lavish stage illusion of the ballet, which provided visual and sensual fantasy; and the working classes also sought entertainment and relief from harsh reality of their working and living conditions, in the theatre. The industrial revolution provided gas lighting to create an atmosphere of moonlit mystery and transport the spectators to exotic fantasy and foreign locales, while, in reality, industrial pollution was beginning to destroy such scenes of unspoiled beauty. The pedestrian middle class materialism of the first machine age contrasted dramatically with the flights of fancy and poetic imagination of the prevailing Romantic aesthetic.

This essential duality was inherent in *La Sylphide* on many levels. The central theme offered the tragic conflict between apparently irreconcilable opposites: reality and idealism, sensuality and spirituality, earth and air. The material security and middle class prudery of the bourgeois world was

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[140] Page 9 of an inherited nineteenth century leather-bound edition of *A Tale of Two Cities*, published in Great Britain by Collins clear type press and undated.

threatened and challenged by the erotic danger of the intense passions inherent in *La Sylphide*, that both attracted and frustrated the people of the age. Duality was reflected in the developing classical ballet technique itself as well as in the styles and images of the star ballerinas: *danse ballonné* supported the modest 'Christian' style personified by Marie Taglioni, while *danse tacqueté* contributed to the 'pagan' voluptuousness of Fanny Elssler.

What emerges is an impression that the important influence of middle class facilitators, values and attitudes was predominantly negative, while the spirit of Romanticism in the arts, that *La Sylphide* so perfectly reflected, had the positive effect of enabling this ballet to transcend emergent bourgeois influences and limitations. *La Sylphide*, a superb example of the Romantic aesthetic, offered a dynamic and subtle interaction with the duality of the times.

CHAPTER 3

Giselle: Synthesis and Resignation

Chapter Three extends the investigation into the 1840s in Paris and London. The focus is on the quintessential Romantic ballet, *Giselle*, which confronts the problems of duality discussed in the previous chapter by uniting in perfect balance the two contrasting facets of Romanticism. The essential contribution of poet, librettist and critic, Théophile Gautier, is assessed, and the discussion ends with an examination of the Romantic ballet in London, and the contributions of Theatre Manager, Benjamin Lumley, and choreographer, Jules Perrot.

In her foreword to the first American edition of Ivor Guest's *The Romantic Ballet in Paris*, Lilian Moore writes: "If *La Sylphide* was the prototype, *Giselle* was the epitome of the Romantic ballet and it has survived into our time, not as a quaint museum piece, but as the very touchstone of the dancer's art."[141] *Giselle* represents the ultimate refinement of romantic taste; it became the display piece *par excellence* for ballerinas of all future generations. In her autobiography, *Giselle and I*, twentieth century British prima ballerina, Alicia Markova, comments on the importance of this ballet:

Chapter Three title page: Key images

Top (repeat of **57**): The original setting of *Giselle*, Act II. Albrecht pursues his unattainable ideal in *Giselle*, synaesthesia of the arts, and epitome of the genre.

Bottom Right (repeat of **65**): Théophile Gautier, poet,journalist, dance critic, co-creator of *Giselle*, leader of the late Romantics in France, accepts the mundane bourgeois reality of the times with bitter and melancholy resignation.

Bottom Left (repeat of **74**): *Pas de Quatre*, London, 1845. The first abstract plotless ballet spotlights the central image of the ballerina, which subtly reflects the contemporary middle class attitudes to women.

141 Moore in Guest 1980, p x

> *Giselle* is the fullest single expression of what can be said in terms of dance. No other role gives equal variety, equal range, from gaiety to deepest pathos, on through grief to ethereal lightness and calm. Because of this richness I have always felt it so important to offer *Giselle* to the audience, and to keep her fresh and alive.[142]

In 1841 *Giselle* was to transcend the horrors of social conditions and epidemics, and of middle class mediocrity, to become the Hamlet, the Lady of the Camellias, the Violetta of the dance. This work was an outstanding example of artists in collaboration; it was inspired by the research of literary men.[143] Théophile Gautier collaborated with experienced librettist Vernoy Saint-Georges to create the scenario, and Adolphe Adam wrote an original score. As far as we know, Jean Coralli was responsible for all the choreography except Giselle's dances, which were devised by Jules Perrot. They are usually given dual credit for the choreography. As with *La Sylphide*, each of these constituent elements contributed equally to the total poetic effect. This is in tune with the Romantic doctrine of synaesthesia in the arts; an interest in the relationship between the various arts and their combined influence on the senses of the spectator. Wagner was later to develop this idea into his *gesamtkunstwerk*. Novalis states:

> ... in their essential nature, music, the visual arts and poetry are one, and the ultimate artistic experience would be synaesthetic: a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* or 'total art form' ... this is one of the most important and most deeply Romantic concepts of the period.[144]

Vaughan, in his chapter on the hierarchy of the arts, discusses those arts that expressed most completely the properties of Romanticism: poetry was supreme, also music and painting.[145]

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142 Markova 1960, p 40

143 "The number of writers enamoured of the Dance - from Lucien to Cocteau - has been astounding ... The writers and poets who have associated themselves with the dance have been spiritual anchors of this fleeting art form.

> For those who never muster sufficient liking for any theatrical form of dancing are the same people who will rarely be found in a lonely corner reading poetry. For dance, like poetry, penetrates the mysterious world of our emotions, fantasies and dreams." (Sorell 1986, p 216)

144 Novalis in Honour 1986, p 119

145 Vaughan 1988, p 266

Evocative music and magical painted settings were an integral part of Romantic ballets, which are constantly referred to in terms of poetry. Comments include: *Giselle* was "born of a poet's fancy" with steps by a "poet of choreography", "it is a true masterpiece, a poem in dance,"[146] and the "story of the ballet has poetic reality";[147] a contemporary reaction states, "we had discovered the lost poetry".[148] The *Times* proclaimed that dancing had become "an art worthy to rank with poetry and painting".[149] And in Boston, watching Fanny Elssler dance: "Margaret Fuller exclaimed, 'This is poetry'. But Ralph Waldo Emerson replied, 'No, it is religion.'"[150] It seems as if some form of heightened language was needed to express the feelings and reaction inspired by the Romantic ballet. Contemporary newspapers and popular journals are filled with poetic tributes of varying quality, accompanying sketches of favourite ballerinas, some of which are included in this thesis. The contemporary response to *Giselle* was primarily to its poetic atmosphere.

Between *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*, ballets were mainly concerned with trendy aspects of Romanticism and sensual escapism. Then with *Giselle* ballet once again took on a deeper perspective. A comparison between *La Sylphide* and *Giselle* demonstrates the evolution of the Romantic ballet, and indicates the supremacy of the latter. For example, in *La Sylphide* the dancer's flights were made possible by wires; in *Giselle* machinery is totally replaced by a dance technique that is both richer and more refined. In *La Sylphide* the fantastic element dominated over the realistic, whereas in *Giselle* both elements are in equal balance, and the realistic actually gains ascendancy because the hero is not destroyed by the fantastic world.

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146 Guest 1980, p 215 216. Guest notes that of all the productions staged at the Paris Opéra during this period, *Giselle* alone has survived.

147 Denby 1986 (revised edition) p 126

148 Guest 1980, p 3

149 Roslavleva 1964, p 57

150 Cohen 1977, p 67 This echoes "the Romantics' belief that art and love were mysteries akin to those of religion." (Honour 1986, p 303)

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

All lovers of graceful agility, or, in other words, elegant dancing, will regret to hear that Carlotta Grisi is about to depart from, or has

MDLLE. CARLOTTA GRISI IN LA ESMERALDA.

already left our shores. The following tributary lines we believe will express the general loss or lessening of enjoyment which is experienced by her absence.

MDLLE. CARLOTTA GRISI.

"And will *she* not come again?"—SHAKSPEARE.

Farewell! farewell! Terpsichore's daughter!
  Buoyant, and graceful, and free—
Ne'er did more beauty come over the water
  Than we have worshipp'd in thee!
Light be thy heart as thy own reckless bounding,
  Ne'er may it sorrow or sigh,
But while the world with thy fame is resounding,
  Turn the sweet light of thine eye
Back to that island where many regret thee,
  Many who think thee the *first*—
Who, if they see thee not, ne'er will forget thee,
  But keep in their memory nursed
"The form of a Grace with the mind of a Muse,"
  A sylphid they lov'd and unwilling to lose!

54

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

55

MDLLE. FANNY ELSSLER DANCING "THE SARAGOSSA."

IMPROMPTU TO MADLLE. FANNY ELSSLER, ON HER DANCING THE SARAGOSSA.

With such a form of beauty and such face,
'Twere easy to mistake thee for a Grace,
But that one only of the Sisters Three
Could not reveal thy various symmetry
The air is musical where'er thy feet
In mazy turnings cause vibrations sweet—
Their echoes, than the sounds to which they move
More exquisite—more soul-inspiring prove,
And make us think that ev'n the Muses Nine
To make Thee *One* their sister charms combine!

Poetic tributes to star ballerinas from the *Illustrated London News.*

54. Carlotta Grisi, No 100 Vol IV p 208, March 30, 1844.

55. Fanny Elssler No 115 Vol. V p 32, July 13, 1844.

Gautier understood the ballet in terms of its complementary opposites and he almost anticipated the synthesis of the two styles in the third great Romantic ballerina, Carlotta Grisi, for whom he wrote *Giselle*. Gautier said that Grisi as Giselle "danced with a perfection, a lightness, a boldness, a chaste and refined seductiveness which place her in the first rank between Elssler and Taglioni."[151] The libretto that Gautier created for *Giselle* was based on two sources: he was reviewing a collection of German legends, *De l'Allemagne* by Heinrich Heine, when the story of the Wilis captured his attention. The term 'Wili' is derived from the Slavic word for vampire, and they were the spirits of betrayed maidens who rose from the grave at midnight to dance any unsuspecting male traveller to death. The other source was *Orientales*, Victor Hugo's poem about a young girl whose love of dance led to her early death, and whose ghost haunted the ballroom. The simple and poetic scenario, built around the potential of dance for both dramatic and pictorial expression, provided a unique framework for the ballet.

The Wilis seem to have been a fascinating phenomenon in the mid-nineteenth century; quite detailed information about their nature and origins appears not only in contemporary articles but on the playbills themselves. A playbill in London's *Theatre Museum* dated 1841 contains this description of the "German Tradition" on which *Giselle* is founded, and it acknowledges *De L'Allamagne par Henri Heine* as its source:

> The Wilis, or Nocturnal Dancers, are Brides who die before the day of Marriage, without having satisfied their love of dancing. There still remains in the heart which has ceased to beat, and the feet that no longer move, that passion for the Fete which inspired them during life. These young affianced ones cannot lie quiet in their graves - at the hour of midnight they rise, and assemble in troops near the highways, and woe to the young man that meets them, they rush on him and make him dance till he dies. They have a crown of flowers on their heads, and sparkling rings on their fingers; their faces though white as snow still preserve the freshness of youth. Dressed in their marriage garments ... these Brides of death are irresistible. It is in vain their unhappy victims would fly them; they follow, and own in death their fatal fascination.[152]

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[151] Guest 1980, p 209. Guest's biography of *Fanny Elssler* gives a detailed description of Elssler's later interpretation of *Giselle* on pages 197 to 199, and he asserts that she was the first to reveal fully the dramatic content of the role.

[152] A Playbill in the *Theatre Museum*, London, dated 1841.

The motives of the Wilis have been discussed by Brinson in a modern anthropological study entitled *Society and the Dance*: "... like other nonverbal arts, as a creature of climate, dance can generate feelings and emotions leading to the creation of ideas for action." He gives the example of a group of Masai women who gathered together to take collective revenge on a rapist, but points out that this vengeance cannot be compared to that of the Wilis because their dance is not performed with any intention of a direct response. "At most, through an exaggerated inversion, *Giselle* may arrest an audience and cultivate a greater sensitivity to the sexual inequalities and contradictions of our society, contributing towards changing attitudes in the longer term."[153]

The first act of *Giselle* is set in the local colour of rural Germany, and is full of pantomime and adaptations of folk dances and of the festivities of a central European vineyard town. It is the second act set in a mysterious and magical forest, which is haunted at night by the ethereal Wilis led by their cold and heartless Queen. A *Theatre Museum* playbill for the *Theatre Royal*, Sadlers Wells, dated 23 August 1841, includes these two verses from the *Song of the Wilis* which elaborates further on their legend:

> O'er wild and o'er Waste, when the moon glimmers bright,
> From our tombs we do haste, to dance through the lone night;
> Then gladly we bound while the Nightingale sings,
> Spreading day all around with the light of our wings.
> We the wanderer lure in the dance till he joins,
> Of our victim still sure, when with us he entwines,
> Through bush and through brake, he is whirled through the heath,
> Till in the cold lake we consign him to death.
>
> No rest in the tomb can the young Wili know,
> Still at night, through the gloom, does she rise from below,
> Threading still the wild dances, she in life loved so well;
> Luring all to advance, with her magical spell,
> She hangs from the willow, she bathes in the stream,
> Sweet Infancy's pillow knows no brighter dream;
> She vaults on the flowers, as fragile as they
> Dancing through midnight's hours, till she dies with the day.[154]

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[153] Brinson in Spencer 1985, p 203

[154] A playbill for the *Theatre Royal*, Sadlers Wells, dated 23 August 1841, in the *Theatre Museum*, London.

Contemporary lithographs from the *Victoria and Albert Museum* Picture Library

56. *Giselle* Act I: the Romantic Realism of a German vineyard town.

57. *Giselle* Act II: the supernatural moonlit forest filled with haunted spirits.

The phrase "she vaults on the flowers" explains the numerous lithographs of ballerinas with a toe *en pointe* balancing delicately and somewhat surprisingly on what appear to be actual growing flowers and twigs. The thrilling horror of the Wili legend was obviously considered popular escapist entertainment and a strong audience drawcard. There is no hint on these playbills that *Giselle* would be any different from previous mediocre works.

Many Romantic paintings and drawings have a hallucinatory, dreamlike or even nightmarish quality that is part of the mood of Act II. In a letter to Heine, Gautier described the "snow-coloured Wilis who waltz piteously ... in a mist softened by German moonlight ... the action takes place in a vague country, in Silesia, in Thuringia, even in one of the Bohemian sea-ports that Shakespeare loved; it suffices for it to be on the other side of the Rhine, in some mysterious corner of Germany."[155] Pierre Ciceri, a gifted set designer, created the wonderfully evocative scenery which contrasted the earthly and the spiritual moods of the two acts. Unlike most ballets of the time, the descriptive and richly atmospheric score was specially composed by Adolphe Adam, with several leitmotifs or themes that are repeated and adapted throughout the ballet to develop both the action of the story and the character of Giselle. The characterization was developed through a combination of dance steps and acting, and through a contrast in choreographic styles between the two acts: bright quick folk-inspired steps for the scenes of peasant life, and an extended and elevated, remote and joyless style for the second act. Motifs in movement matched the motifs in Adam's score, and these phrases of dancing belonging to leading characters were repeated with variations to indicate dramatic development. The role of the *corps de ballet* was also developed and integrated into the action with enormously varied dancing.

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[155] Gautier in Steinberg 1980, pp 192 & 193

Sorell notes that the German brand of Romanticism was the most colourful in texture, and it gave the movement its philosophic backbone. "Friedrich Nietzche used the dance as a simile for lightness of being. To him the essence of the art of life was a dance in which the dancer rises to inner freedom and rhythmic harmony, overcoming the ordinariness of existence." (Sorell 1986, p 228)

58

58 Marie Taglioni with Antonio Guerro in *l'Ombre*, London, 1840. Taglioni is depicted in an unlikely attitude, apparently balancing on a growing rose bush. "She vaults on the flowers, as fragile as they..." from the *Song of the Wilis.*

An added attraction was that this ballet was about dance; Giselle is a lover of dance who indulges in it when inspired. As in *La Sylphide*, dancing in *Giselle* was the catalytic ingredient which united and gave life to the other arts. And in this ballet it was not only the stars who were important; the poetic illusion depended on the dancing and the performances of the entire company. A contemporary critique on *Giselle* in the *Times* of 14 March 1848 notes:

> This is a pretty romantic story; the office of the Wilis is a novel one, and has the advantage of the ballet that it consists in dancing - that dancing is not the mere casual illustration of an independent drama, but part and parcel of the Drama itself. [156]

Benois describes the Wilis as "punished after death for having danced too much on earth",[157] and Giselle, as the girl who danced too much, who went too far,[158] is an interesting reflection of an aspect of the socio-cultural and political context. From the aesthetic perspective, the young Romantics passionately desired to live life to the utmost. Hugh Honour stresses the importance of the "individual capacity for experience"; the Romantic motto appears to be, "Dare to Feel".[159] The poems of Byron and Victor Hugo, the paintings of Delacroix and Gericault, and the music of Berlioz, Beethoven and Liszt - all reflect a desire to experience life at fever pitch. Claire Lamont comments, "Romantic poetry pushes experience to the utmost, where there is no reference to the ordinary world. Like the nightingale's song it has:

> Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn. [160]

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[156] *British Newspaper Library*, *British Museum*, London

[157] Benois 1945, pp 70 & 71

[158] I am indebted to Gary Gordon for this image.

[159] Honour 1988, p 282

[160] Lamont in Rogers 1987, p 309

Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* is a tale of a dangerous voyage beyond the limits of the known world. The heroes of the age were Napoleon and Shakespeare "and other trespassers beyond the ordinary limits of life ... the limitless and uninterrupted pursuit of *more*, beyond the calculation of rationality or purpose ... haunted them."[161]

But this age was equally aware of the political consequences of going too far; "... memories of the excesses of the French Revolution and of Napoleon's defeat afforded reminders that fervour could go astray."[162] And the dangers socially and sexually of going too far were particularly pertinent to Victorian middle class society. In the "domestic bourgeois ideal of Victorian family life, the man dominated the entire family and servants and the subservience of women was clearly underlined by the enormous difficulties they faced if they cast aside roles expected of them."[163] The middle class family exerted pressure for social conformity which was all but overwhelming. I am not suggesting that the creators of *Giselle* were consciously aware of these attitudes, but simply that this ballet seems to be an almost perfect reflection of the age on so many levels.

Class consciousness was becoming an increasingly important issue in the nineteenth century. Albrecht was given a proper background of wealth and aristocratic behaviour, so that the conflict between the two worlds is also a conflict between rich and poor, another favourite topic of dramas and operas of the mid-nineteenth century. The conflict is not well developed in *Giselle* and it is certainly a romanticised middle class view of rural poverty, but the fact of its presence is significant. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, class stratification became increasingly evident. The wealthy and powerful *haute-bourgeoisie* or upper middle class leaders of society (Véron's important patrons at the Opéra), the large numbers of the middle class itself, and the *petit-bourgeoisie* or lower middle class clerks, soldiers and shop girls, were all sharply divided from the growing masses of the labouring poor, who were beginning to identify themselves in both France and Britain as the working classes. There

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[161] Hobsbawm 1988, p 314

[162] Anderson 1974, p 43

[163] Walvin 1988, p 124. Chapter Four discusses this further.

59

59. Carlotta Grisi in her Romanticised Rhineland peasant costume for the realistic Act I of *Giselle*, in the original production, 1841. *Victoria and Albert Museum*, Picture Library Collection.

was always the possibility, with good fortune, education and luck, of rising above one's class, but the social and economic divisions and conflicts between the classes were a strong factor in nineteenth century life.[164]

Some attention must be given to the complex and challenging characterisation of Giselle herself. Alicia Markova spent her dancing lifetime developing the role:

> I had a long journey to make yet. For Giselle, though a simple maiden, presents the ballerina with many a subtle challenge. Innocence, for example, is one key to the role. But the unconscious innocence of a young girl is not so poignant on the stage as that of a mature artist who can still convey the meaning of innocence and its universal language. Again, Giselle calls for an artist of great experience and ability to sustain the rôle, one who can command her emotions and project her personality to large and small audiences alike.
>
> In the characterisation of Giselle, if one special point has set my interpretation apart from that of others, it may have been my sense of her, in Act One, as ultra-sensitive, frail and unusual, rather than a robust peasant lass. Gautier himself tells us that Giselle is delicate, and that she has had a dream which forewarns her of the tragedy to come. But apart even from this, Giselle's story is only believable if she is different from ordinary girls. With them she shares the simple human qualities, the joy of dancing, the capacity for laughter, love and tears. But for her all these things are sharper, more intense.
>
> Like a child or a poet, she would have, I knew, an endless capacity for wonder, making most everyday things seem marvels.[165]

Cyril Beaumont's views support this interpretation of the role. He sees Giselle as physically delicate, pale-complexioned, "a strange, complex being, paradoxically shy and simple, yet elusive and enigmatic, a restless, hypersensitive creature, introspective and essentially unworldly."[166]

The Romantics had a particular weakness for pale sickly girls doomed, like Giselle, to die in their youth. It was fashionable at the time to have a pale complexion and to pine away languorously.

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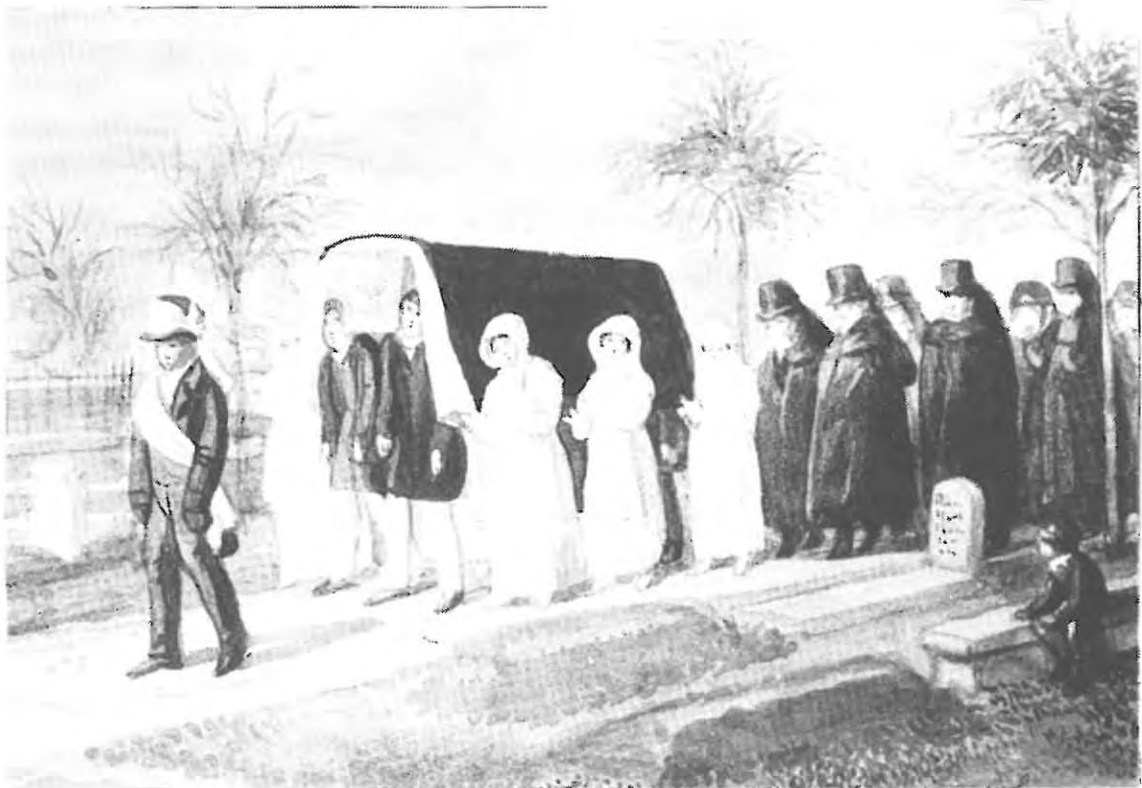
164 These class divisions are strikingly apparent in the discussion in Chapter Four on the idealization of the ballerina, the reality behind the image of poor ballet girls, and the prevailing middle class attitudes to women.

165 Markova 1960, pp 55, 137 & 138, 145

166 Beaumont 1987 (revised edition) p 80

60

60. Carlotta Grisi suspended above her grave in the moonlit and supernatural Act II of *Giselle*, in the original production, 1841. *Victoria and Albert Museum* Picture Library Collection.



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62

61. A Victorian Funeral. The Victorian way of death, a burial in Hamstead, 1842. Mourning was surrounded by strict public conventions for those who could afford it.

62. Gericault *The Cleptomaniac.* A sympathetic attitude to irrational behaviour is reflected in this haggard yet sensitive portrait.

63. (overleaf) Don Quixote, the paradigmatic Romantic hero pitted against the material world, also echoes this new view of the insane. This painting by Honore Daumier, reflects the artist's wit, compassion and sardonic cruelty.

But it was also easy to identify the self-consuming process of consumption with the unfulfilled longing of the Romantic. Sorell observes: "When Gautier looked for a proper dramatic story to precede Act II of *Giselle*, chlorisis must have been on his mind. Only a weak heart condition can lead to heart failure when Giselle has to endure the shock of a frightful disillusion."[167] Giselle dies tragically young at the age of fifteen, at the end of the first act. The nineteenth century had a great interest in death: "Where we have sex at every turn, they had death ... they were afraid of sex; we are afraid of death".[168] Because of the high rate of infant mortality and deaths from other causes, the ordinary Victorian family was intimately acquainted with death in a way which is rare today.[169] The poignancy of Giselle's sudden death would have been felt particularly strongly by contemporary audiences.

Before her death, Giselle has a brief but sensitively portrayed and memorable few moments of madness. On the psychological level there was a growing curiosity about irrational behaviour evident in the new more sympathetic treatment of insanity. Evidence of this sympathetic attitude can be found in Gericault's subtle and delicate portraits of the insane, with haunted haggard yet curiously gentle and dignified faces. Hugh Honour notes that the emergence of *Don Quixote* as the paradigmatic Romantic artist, in communion with eternal truths inaccessible to everyday materialist common sense, coincides with the development of this new attitude to the demented and insane. In terms of Romanticism, madness is utterly detached from the substantial world, it is the imagination wholly free from reality. Together with the beauty of nature, forlorn love, madness and death may be considered dominant Romantic themes.[170] Kirstein points out that "danced hysteria was a metaphor for insanity", and that the Wilis, "Slavonic will o' the wisps who lured young men to their death by

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[167] Sorell 1986, pp 244 & 245

[168] Priestley 1974, p 33

[169] This high rate of mortality is, of course, still a tragic fact of life in third world countries.

[170] Honour 1988, p 271 to 274

dancing, (were) perhaps a memory of that dancing mania, the St. Vitus' dance of the Middle Ages."[171]

> In the early years of the century, humanitarianism established itself as a major intellectual and social force ... the idea that rights belonged to everyone - men and women, young and old, black and white, sane and mad, free and prisoners - entailed better treatment of neglected groups ... The mad were now treated in a more humane fashion, prisons were reformed, an array of cruelties (to animals and children) was attacked, slavery was abolished, factory conditions were improved ...[172]

These changing attitudes meant that by the 1840's some of the major social problems of the new industrial society were beginning to be addressed. In the year that *Giselle* opened in Paris, laws were passed in France to regulate child labour in factories and by 1845 worker's associations were legally recognised there. And new local authorities were formed that began to deal with the urban problems of the day. As these new attitudes began to prevail, the socio-economic context of the ballet slowly began to change. Where escape from the horrors of the age had been an important factor in the 1830's, the effects of the more secure and entrenched middle class values became gradually more dominant in the later ballets of the decade. The spirit of Romanticism and the synaesthesia in the arts enabled *Giselle* to transcend these limitations, but there was a deterioration in standards at the Paris Opéra after 1841; the tendency was towards unchallenging trivial escapism and comfortable trendy Romanticism which pandered to bourgeois male sexual fantasies.

Of great importance was the artistic perspective that provided the cultural context of *Giselle*, and particularly Gautier's aesthetic in relation to the ballet. Gautier's viewpoint rejected the traditional *ballet d'action* which was rational and useful in that it aimed to teach moral lessons about life through dramatic storytelling. He believed in *l'art pour l'art*, in the intrinsic value of the form, of dance as an art in itself; and in the ability of ballet to create poetic images and illusion. The aim of art was not utilitarian; its function was simply to be 'beautiful' in terms of the Romantic artist's

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171 Kirstein 1984, p 150

172 Walvin 1988, p 98

concept of beauty. With Gautier, ballet entered the realm of poetry, not of the mind but of the senses, which led the imagination to worlds of seductive images, fantasy and dreams. This echoes John Keats' philosophy when he wrote in 1817, "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination - What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth ... O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts."[173] And at the end of the *Ode to a Grecian Urn* Keats wrote:

> 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' - that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.[174]

There was no place in Gautier's appreciation of ballet for the social problems of the day, or the harsh realities of life that provided the basic material for Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* or Hugo's *Les Miserables*. His art was elevated into the realms of eternal beauty; he sought escape from mundane reality into the spheres of pure artistic ecstasy. Both Gautier and another influential critic, Jules Janin, shared this imaginative and poetic approach to dance, and a strong appreciation for sensual and aesthetic beauty. They responded to the ballet and the ballerina as a sense experience and with a kind of idealised and poeticised sexuality that cannot be classed as voyeurism. Chapman defines their appreciation in this way:

> There is a sensual side to Gautier but it is not of the passions. Gautier tasted art in the way a connoisseur sipped wine, savouring its wonders without becoming intoxicated. He touched art with fingers which felt the form without feeling the flesh.[175]

Gautier and Janin made a vital contribution to ballet appreciation and helped to define in the minds of the audience and ballet artists this concept of the *ballet poetique*, an aesthetic which allowed dancing to be appreciated as the expressive and sensual experience that was the essence of the

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173 Furst 1989, p 88

174 Ellershaw, Henry ed. *Keats Poetry and Prose*. London: Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951

175 Chapman 1986, pp 151 & 152

64

64. Lonrenz, *Giselle* parody, 1841. This sketch of Giselle and Loys in Act I counterbalances the idealization of dancers in contemporary lithographs. Of interest is the ballerina's underwear; she appears to be wearing fitted buttoned knickers over her 'fleshings', which would be in accordance with the modesty of the times.

65. Portrait of Theophile Gautier, with an inset caricature by Cham, 1858, showing Gautier demonstrating steps to Amalia Ferraris for his later ballet, *Sacountala*.

65

Romantic ballet. Romantic artists considered that their own society severely restricted the human spirit and caged the soul within the confines of a mundane existence. This was particularly true of Théophile Gautier in the pedestrian France of the 1840's. He hated the triumph of the bourgeoisie, and wanted ballet to provide an escape and transport him into the realms of beauty, sensation, illusion and poetry, which shabby reality denied.[176]

Like *La Sylphide*, *Giselle* was an expression of its time, and although Gautier did not recognise ballet as a symbolic art form, *Giselle* said something crucial about the Romantic view of existence in the 1840's. Aschengreen points out that in order to understand *Giselle* as it was in its own day, one must examine the original ending. Today's version usually ends, like *La Sylphide*, with both heroes left onstage in despair. But originally, before sinking into the grave for the last time, Giselle asked Albrecht to marry Bathilde, who had come onstage, and he complied with her wishes. Albrecht returns to the reality that he has sought to escape in his romance with Giselle. For him she represents prospects beyond the conventional relationship with Bathilde; she is the dream of the happy free unbourgeois unconventional life. Like James in *La Sylphide*, Albrecht stands between dreams and reality; but when the dream is shattered he turns back to reality. Giselle ends with an affirmation of the real world, but it is a moment of bitter and unhappy resignation. In the original version, the ballet is an expression of the duality in the lives of Gautier and other Romantics. Gautier took refuge in the realm of beauty while living his life according to bourgeois values - earning his bread as a journalist and attending to family responsibilities. Compared with *La Sylphide*, the later Romantics had learned to live with discord, but they did so with untranquil disillusion and melancholy resignation. And the mood of *Giselle*, its sadness and inevitable doomed loss, embodied its epoch. Like Albrecht, Gautier sought to experience unity and perfection and escape his restless dissatisfaction with his world; there is something desperate in Gautier's love of art as a palliative for a painful life. For a disappointed generation there was the dual sensation of actually existing in, and at the same time fleeing from, the problems the materialism and the monotony of bourgeois life.

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[176] This discussion is indebted to Chapman's section on Gautier's contribution.

> Gautier wrote of the Romantic generation's disappointment in its dreams and expectations. Reality was below the mark. Enthusiasm was fraudulent. If *La Sylphide* had been a congenial and audacious picture of the Romantic's striving towards the ideal in the midst of reality, the ensuing ballets were a flight from this situation and an escape from a society where money and respectability had the last word and where it was Eugene Scribe who walked off with the victory.[177]

A preview of the effect which bourgeois taste would have, by the end of the decade, in reducing Romanticism to a debased fashionable spectacle is provided by a *Theatre Museum* playbill, dated August 23 1841, the year *Giselle* opened in Paris and two years before it opened in London. This advertises a nineteenth century equivalent of 'Giselle on Ice', which panders to popular taste and sensation:

FIRST NIGHT of the most MAGNIFICENT CHOREOGRAPHIC

AQUATIC SPECTACLE!

Ever produced,

which for MAGNIFICENCE AND SPLENDOUR will defy Competition!

::

FIRST NIGHT OF THE REAL WATER!

::

MONDAY, August 23rd, 1841, & During the Week, will be presented, for the First Time, and entirely **New, Grand, Melo-Dramatic, Choreographic, Fantastique, Traditionary Tale of Superstition,** (in Two Acts) founded on the singularly wild and impressive Ballet-Pantomime now performing at the Grand Opera in Paris under the title of

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177 Eugene Scribe was a nineteenth century Barbara Cartland. He made a fortune writing numerous forgettable popular librettos and dramas based on the formula of the 'well-made play'.
Aschengreen in *Dance Perspectives* 1974, p 24 and pp 26 to 30

GISELLE, OU LES WILIS

Which, from its originality, deep interest and novel effects, has created in the French capital a sensation and excitement hitherto unprecedented in Theatrical Annuls - The Piece called

GISELLE

OR THE

NIGHT DANCERS

With the Original Music, Entirely new Scenery, Dresses and Decorations, Extensive Machinery, Gorgeous Properties, and New and Extraordinary Apparatus for the Introduction

of

THE REAL WATER

AND THE

TRANSLUCENT PALACE OF 100 FOUNTAINS!

THE DEATH of the WILI QUEEN

In her **MAGNIFICENT CAR,** which will travers the *Entire Length of Stage!* Expanding as it advances!

surrounded by Playing

FOUNTAINS OF REAL WATER!

BRILLIANTLY ILLUMINATED BY VARIEGATED FIRES.

Boxes 2s Pit 1s Gallery 6d

Doors open at 6, Performances commence at a quarter before 7

Children under 12 years half price

(*Theatre Museum* Collection, London)

This extraordinary playbill illustrates the kind of bourgeois values and attitudes to the theatre that Gautier so despised, and that would eventually contribute to the deterioration of the Romantic movement. The prices indicate that this is regarded as family entertainment for middle and working class audiences.

After *Giselle*, the centre of ballet activity moved to London, which seriously challenged the supremacy of Paris during the 1840's.

The 1830's had seen a Reform crisis in Britain, riots in the rural areas against the mechanization of agriculture, and the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which assigned paupers to the misery of gaunt workhouses. Eighteen year old Queen Victoria had acceded to the throne in 1837 and the early part of her reign saw the beginnings of a vast railway network in Britain, as well as the horrors of typhus and cholera epidemics. Working class movements were extremely strong during the 1830's and 1840's as the new proletariat became aware of its potential power and repeatedly challenged the middle class establishment. Chartism was the main political expression of the social and economic aspirations of the working classes. In 1836 Robert Owen's *The Peoples' Charter* had demanded universal male suffrage, and in 1839 Carlyle published his essay on Chartism and raised the 'Condition-of-England' question that was to dominate the next decade. At the start of the 'Hungry Forties' the Penny Post was introduced and the Cunard ship Brittania crossed the Atlantic in fourteen days. 1841, the year *Giselle* opened in Paris, saw the first issue of *Punch Magazine*, which often caught the middle class mood in London. In 1844 Engles published *The Condition of the Working Class in England* and a Royal Commission was established to investigate health in towns. Two things immediately become apparent from this chain of events. Firstly, in London as in Paris, life was still characterised by the duality of the times, the wonders and the horrors of the industrial age. The poverty and misery of the poor contrasted with increasing bourgeois prosperity. Although the middle classes still felt the need for escape from conditions that threatened their security, slow progress was being made towards the prosperous middle years of Queen Victoria's reign. The entrenched

bourgeois values of the middle classes were gradually becoming the dominant factor in the socio-economic and cultural climate of the time.

In London, one of the major entertainment centres was Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket, which was to provide "the conditions for choreographers and dancers from the Continent to engage in a burst of activity which had no parallel elsewhere".[178] Ballet in London was an imported art. "It therefore followed that factors which influenced the development of ballet in Paris were also at work in London."[179] The key facilitator of the ballet was the middle class impresario and Manager of Her Majesty's, Benjamin Lumley.

> Certainly the Romantic ballet would never have reached the standard of perfection that it did in London during the 1840's had it not been for the presence of Benjamin Lumley at the head of affairs at Her Majesty's Theatre.
>
> For his taste and enterprise he was rivalled by no other opera house manager of his day. It was at his suggestion that Perrot set to work to create a ballet out of Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*.[180]

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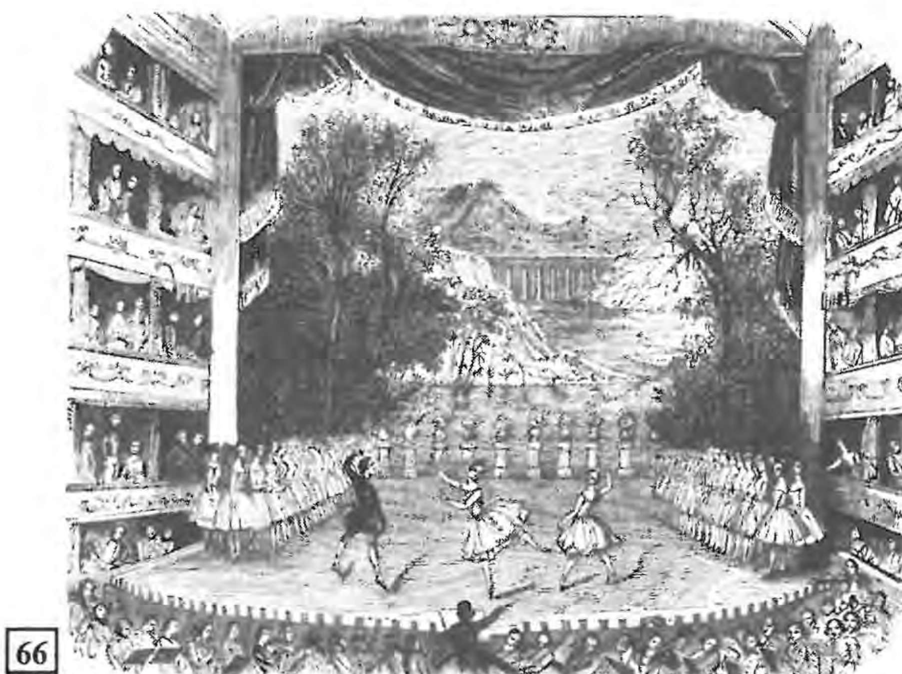
[178] Guest 1972, p 9

"The King's (or Queen's) Theatre, Haymarket, had a practical monopoly of opera and ballet from the beginning of the eighteenth century." (Winter 1974, p 31) This Theatre was known at different periods as the Queen's Theatre, the King's Theatre, Her Majesty's or His Majesty's, depending on who was on the throne at the time. It was first built by Vanbrugh (the playwright) in 1705 during the reign of Queen Anne; it burnt down and was rebuilt as The King's Theatre in 1791, and then was renamed Her Majesty's at the accession of Queen Victorian in 1837. (After demolition in 1890 the present theatre was rebuilt on the same site.) This venue was famous for its association with the Romantic ballet, and the Swedish singer, Jenny Lind, made her London debut there in 1847. The installation of gas lighting is noted by Leacroft: the "continued use of candles was a constant source of dirt and irritation ... In 1815, when the interior was redecorated by Nash and Repton, the opportunity was taken to replace the candles by gas ... " (Leacroft 1988, p 133)

Although Her Majesty's was the most popular venue, ballet was presented at other London venues, such as the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. It is also interesting to note that there were other theatres in the Haymarket: the Theatre Royal was the venue for Fielding's satires on public figures and politicians, mentioned in the discussion on censorship in Chapter One.

[179] Guest 1970 (b), p 10

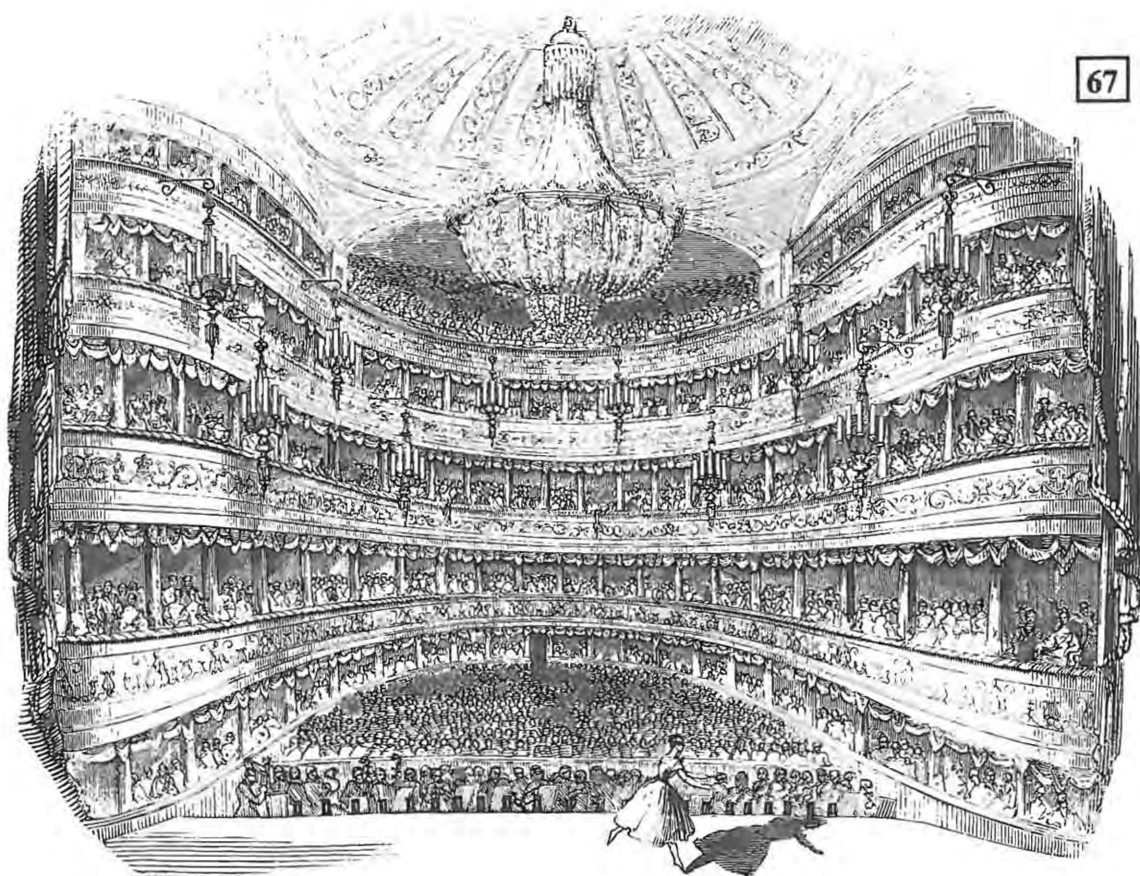
[180] Guest 1972, pp 83 & 84. See Chapter Twelve for further details on Benjamin Lumley.



Her Majesty's Theatre, in the Haymarket, London

66. Jules Perrot, Fanny Cerrito and Marie Guy-Stephan on stage. Note the proximity of the lower boxes to the dancers.

67. The view from the stage. *Illustrated London News* Picture Library, June 15, 1844 p389



Lumley had appointed as resident choreographer, Jules Perrot, common law husband of Carlotta Grisi for whom the ballet *La Esmeralda* was created. It is regarded as one of Perrot's greatest works and fragments of it still remain in the Leningrad repertory. In its origins Romanticism was a literary movement; every art form became affected by literary sources, particularly by the poems and plays of Victor Hugo. The story of *La Esmeralda* is roughly based on Victor Hugo's novel, *Notre Dame de Paris*, 1831. It is the representative in ballet of "the profoundly important rediscovery, and rehabilitation of the European Middle Ages as one of the great 'organic' periods of the past."[181] Both *Giselle* and *La Esmeralda*, 1844, reflect this contemporary nostalgia for the Middle Ages.[182] *Giselle* is set, somewhat vaguely, in medieval Germany.

> Germany, in this period, "acquired something not far from a monopoly of the medieval dream, perhaps because the tidy *Gemutlichkeit* which appeared to reign beneath those Rhine-castles and Black Forest eaves lent itself more readily to idealization than the filth and cruelty of the more genuinely medieval countries. At all events medievalism was a far stronger component of German Romanticism than of any other, and radiated outwards from Germany.[183]

By their very name the Romantics professed a fascination for the Middle Ages. The old romances - censured by the prudish heroine of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* as "calculated to *fire* the *imagination* rather than to *inform* the *judgement*", 1740, - became a powerful symbol for those who were seeking to replace rules and taste with inventiveness and enthusiasm.[184]

As early as 1831 *Robert le Diable* had popularized the vogue for the Gothic in ballet, the looking-back to the non-classic world; and there were certain similarities between the medieval and Romantic cults of love, both of which invested the relationship between the sexes with a mystical aura.

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181 Kumar 1983, p 60

182 In reaction to industrialism, the backward-looking focus led to medievalism, and the forward-looking focus to socialism. See Williams 1958, p 140 for further details.

183 Hobsbawm 1988, p 319. Hobsbawm gives as examples Grimm's *Fairy Tales* and *Giselle*, one of only two brief mentions of the Romantic ballet in his excellent history of the period 1789 to 1848.

184 Vaughan 1988, p 100

Scott's medieval novels, *Ivanhoe*, 1819, and *Quenton Durward*, 1823, contributed to the popularity of this period; he allowed the Middle Ages idealism, faith, nobility and chivalry, and inspired the medievalism associated with the religious movements of the nineteenth century.[185] *Don Quixote* has a place here too, as a symbol of the elevated spirit that is always scorned: "the Don seems to personify the Romantic in his own and public estimation, as the lover of medieval romances, the man of imagination who creates and inhabits a world of enchanted castles, the knight errant seeking to establish spiritual values in a materialistic age."[186]

In *La Esmeralda* Perrot brilliantly caught the atmosphere of medieval Paris. The plot of Hugo's novel was modified to suit early Victorian middle class tastes; the focus was changed to the gypsy girl, Esmeralda, and with a reduced and simplified libretto, the ballet had a happy ending. Contemporary critics were warm in their praise of the choreographer's adaptation:

> Perrot is the inventor, and it might be pointed out as a perfect model of ballet building. Never did we see those parts of a long story that might be dramatically effective selected and arranged with such skill as in this new ballet ... the tact with which the five tableaux have been taken out of the romance, and combined into a neat pantomime of action without a gap, deserves unqualified praise.[187]

When the vogue for ballet was over, Carlotta Grisi's performance in this work would be recalled nostalgically:

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185 Rogers 1987, p 323

186 Sorell 1986, p 268

187 *The Times*, 11 March 1844, *British Newspaper Library, British Museum,* London.

68

MAJESTY'S THEATRE,

ITALIAN OPERA HOUSE.

THIS EVENING,

SATURDAY, April 13th, 1844,

Will be performed, (2nd time this Season) Donizetti's celebrated Opera.

DON PASQUALE

Norina, - - Made GRISI,
Dr. Malatesta, - - Sig. FORNASARI,
Ernesto, - - Sig. MARIO,
Don Pasquale, - - Sig. LABLACHE,
A Notary, Sig. GALLI.

A CORRECT COPY of this Opera is published, and may be had of JONES, 1, and MORGAN, 12, Opera Arcade, Pall Mall; FENTUM, 78, Strand, and CLEMENTS, 21 and 22, Pulteney Street.

Between the Acts A PAS DE DEUX, by Mdlle LOUISE & M. MONTASSU.

Mdlle C. GRISI & M. PERROT, will Dance (for the 2nd time in this Country) the POLKA Dance.

After which will be produced, the new Ballet, by M. PERROT, Founded on "Notre Dame de Paris," called

LA ESMERALDA.

La Esmeralda, - Madlle CARLOTTA GRISI,
Fleur de Lys, - Madlle ADELAIDE FRASSI,
Made Aloise de Gondelaurier, Made COPERE.
Phœbus de Chateaupers, M. ST. LEON,
Claude Frollo, M. GOSSELIN,
Pierre Gringoire, M. PERROT,
Quasimodo. M. COULON,
Clopin Trouillefou, - - M. GOURIET,
Truands, M. M. VENAFRA, BERNASCHINI, and BERTRAM,

In the course of the Evening the following original Dances will be presented:
1st Tableau—*LA COUR DES MIRACLES.*
VALSE DE VIEUX PARIS by the Coryphees of the Corps de Ballet
La Truandaise—Pas Caracteristique, by
Mdlle C. GRISI and M. PERROT.
Bacchanale, by the Corps de Ballet.
2nd Tableau—*La Nuit des Noces*,
Pas Scenique, by Madlle C. GRISI & M. PERROT,
3rd Tableau—*FLEUR DE LYS*
Pas des Fleurs by MADLLE A. FRASSI,
Supported by Mesdlles FERDINAND and BARVILLE.
Pas de Trois, by Mesdlles SCHEFFER, PLUNKETT and M. ST. LEON

69

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68. Jules Perrot in *Nathalie*. An engraving by Koning from a drawing by A Lacauchie.

69 A playbill advertising the opening season of Perrot's *La Esmeralda*, which appears in the programme after Donizetti's opera.

70. Benjamin Lumley, Manager of Her Majesty's Theatre, London. Engraving from a sketch by Count d'Orsay.

Carlotta! Carlotta! we think of the days
When bright *Esmeralda* set up such a blaze
In our pulses and hearts; and thy lov'd tambourine
Gave the note of approach, as you flashed on the scene.
That pose above all - you and Phoebus together -
When you blew from his cap the light morsel of feather..

Carlotta! Carlotta! we beg - we implore -
Come back, dear, and play *Esmeralda* once more,
Carlotta![188]

It must be remembered that male dancers were anathema to most Romantic critics, but they all had to concede that Perrot was exceptional. French critic Jules Janin hailed him as "Perrot the aerial, Perrot the Sylph, the male Taglioni".[189] Perrot had studied with the great Auguste Vestris, who had only to glancé at his short figure and plain features and observe his unusual strength and elevation, to provide him with the formula for success - constant activity, never keeping still. This advice was heeded, for fellow pupil August Bournonville described him as "a restless being of indescribable lightness and suppleness, with an almost phosphorescent brilliance."[190]

Together with the prima ballerina's choreography in *Giselle* and the later *Pas de Quatre*, *La Esmeralda* was considered one of Perrot's greatest masterpieces. Compared with previous ballets, this work was characterised by intense realism in individual portrayals and among the *corps de ballet*, which was treated as an ensemble. In his biography of Jules Perrot, Ivor Guest notes that the distinctive feature of *La Esmeralda* was that the ballet had been conceived as a dance drama, opening up new possibilities in the use of dance to express dramatic narrative, atmosphere and characterisation. Of all his works, *La Esmeralda* marked the farthest advance in the development of ballet as a theatre spectacle, and dance as an integral part of the dramatic action.[191] It therefore contributed to the continuous dance tradition in a very different way from Perrot's famous *Pas de Quatre* the following

188 Albert Smith in the *Natural History of the Ballet Girl* in Guest 1972, p 107

189 Janin in Guest 1980, p 202

190 Guest 1984, p 113 & 114

191 Guest 1984, p 113 & 114

year. *La Esmeralda* also reflected a move towards Realism in the characterization; the detailed spectacle and Romantic Realism of the settings in the ballet were indicative of this new Realist aesthetic that would dominate the latter part of the century, as well as the beginnings of the cluttered and over-elaborate High Victorian taste. Elements of post-Revolutionary France were also present in the work. The hero was a man of the people, an itinerant poet, and democratic principles were inherent in the story. When Perrot produced the ballet in Imperial Russia, there were objections to a police officer playing the villain, a priest running off with an innocent girl[192] and the mob depicted as heroic demonstrators against a feckless aristocracy. The revolutionary spirit in this work was strong enough for it to be restaged in Soviet Russia in the 1930's, using "the towers of Notre Dame as a background for the triumph of a proletarian *corps de ballet*."[193]

The final work in this study of the great age of the Romantic ballet is *Pas de Quatre*, 1845, which sums up the past and looks to the future; it also provides a climax to the ballet of this period because it focuses so intensely on the image of the ballerina, which will be examined in some detail in relation to Victorian values and attitudes at the end of this investigation.

Perrot's *Pas de Quatre*, presented at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1845 for a few performances only, was specially choreographed for four of the five great ballerinas of the era: Marie Taglioni, Carlotta Grisi, Fanny Cerrito and Lucile Grahn.

Fanny Cerrito was a spirited and skilful Italian dancer who was the much-adored leading ballerina at Her Majesty's between 1840 and 1847. She worked throughout Europe as a dancer and choreographer, and died in retirement in Paris while Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* was rehearsing for its first Paris season in 1909, that was to herald a revival of ballet in western Europe. Lucile Grahn was a famous Scandinavian ballerina, renowned for her outstanding technique and dreamy graceful

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192 This idea was not original. *The Monk*, 1796, by Matthew Gregory is a nightmare Gothic novel about a monk who rapes a young girl in a charnel house. (Lamont in Rogers 1987, p 313)

193 Kirstein 1984, p 154

abandon, for whom the other great choreographer/dancer of the age, August Bournonville, created his version of *La Sylphide* in 1836. Perrot and Bournonville were the only real male stars in this age of the ballerina: "What makes Bournonville's ballets unique amongst those created during the romantic era of the nineteenth century is that the male dancer shares pride of place with the females."[194]

As with the other two great ballets of the period, the idea for *Pas de Quatre* was rooted in middle class manipulation of the art form to make a profit, as the tone of this quotation indicates:

> Box office economics led directly to the creation of *Pas de Quatre*, an ingenious entrepreneurial showcase conceived by Benjamin Lumley, director of Her Majesty's Theatre. His idea was to assemble the great ballerinas of the day and have Jules Perrot, the finest choreographer, concoct a short ballet for them to perform before Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort.[195]

From these inauspicious beginnings, and in spite of the facilitator's predominantly material motives and the short run of the ballet in London only, *Pas de Quatre* passed into legend.[196] A *Times* article, dated December 12 1935 and discovered in the *Theatre Museum* Collection, recalls the *Pas de Quatre* as *A London Event of 1845* and gives background and details of this 'daring experiment' of ninety years before.

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194 Williams comments with hindsight in *Dance and Dancers* September 1979, p 18

195 Robertson & Hutera 1988, p 22

196 There is a famous story quoted in several dance books which demonstrates Lumley's skill in manipulating his stars' fragile egos. This version is from Guest's biography of Fanny Cerrito: It had been accepted that the ballerinas would dance in order of importance, with Grahn first and the most senior, Taglioni, last. "Lumley had foreseen the difficulties under which Perrot laboured, for almost at the last moment the rivalry between Fanny and Carlotta erupted in a quarrel over precedence, both claiming the right to dance immediately before Taglioni ... Poor Perrot fled to the sanctuary of Lumley's office ... 'The question of talent must be decided by the public,' he said. 'But in this dilemma, there is one point on which I am sure the ladies will be frank. Let the *oldest* take her unquestionable right to the envied position.' Perrot, who was gifted with a great sense of humour, smote his forehead and bounded from the room, beaming with amusement. When he announced the manager's judgement, the two ballerinas 'tittered, laughed, drew back': the difficulty was solved." (Guest 1974, p 97)

THE TIMES, SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1845. [72]

HER MAJESTY's THEATRE.

THIS EVENING, Saturday, July 12, will be performed Donizetti's celebrated opera ANNA BOLENA. Henry VIII. (King of England), Signor Lablache; Percy, Signor Moriani; Smeaton (Page and Minstrel to the Queen), Signora Brambilla; Anna Bolena, Made. Grisi; and Jane Seymour, Mlle. Rossi. Between the acts of the opera will be presented (for the first time) a new PAS DE QUATRE, composed expressly by M. Perrot, for Mlle. Taglioni, Mlle. Cerito, Mlle. Grahn, and Mlle. Carlotta Grisi (her last appearance but three). To conclude with the first tableaux of the admired ballet of LA ESMERALDA. La Esmeralda, Mlle. C. Grisi. Applications for boxes, pit stalls, and tickets to be made at the box-office, Opera-colonnade. Doors open at 7, and the opera to commence at half-past 7.

The Iconography of the Pas de Quatre

The opening performance was advertised in *The Times*. The photostats above are from the arts column of the rather fragile and indistinct original in the *British Newspaper Library*, London.

72. "The first section of the ballet consisted of all four dancers in a series of poses. Taglioni always at the centre, with the other three framing and supporting her as one pose melted into another ... The Illustrated London News featured ballet extensively from its first issues through the high romantic period and beyond, and when in 1845 Perrot produced the *Pas de Quatre* the I.L.N. sent along an artist. A woodcut appeared on the front page of its next issue, that of the 19th of July, the day of the ballet's last performance in 1845. The block was cut by Smyth ... from a sketch taken at the theatre. The woodcut shows Taglioni centre stage, Grisi behind her, Cerrito on the left and Grahn on the right. Fanny Cerrito wore a single rose in her hair in contrast to the bands of roses of the other dancers and many considered this in very poor taste. Mr Smyth has tactfully shown her as she should have appeared. This is the most active of the depictions and shows these I.L.N. blocks at their very best the action halted in mid flight, a totally unposed action study."

(J.K. Cavers in *Dance Research*)

> Of the four dancers engaged Marie Taglioni was the senior, and acknowledged to be the first. A Neapolitan, she was already an established favourite in London, where for nearly twenty years she had charmed the public with her dancing. As far back as 1836 she had been earning £100 a night, and Thackeray had written of her *Sylphide* that nobody would ever see anything so exquisite again. In the London Museum today you may look at some small dolls, which were dressed by the young Princess Victoria to represent Taglioni as different characters. Lucile Grahn was a Swede, who on her first appearance in Paris in 1838 had met with the opposition of rival claques, but on a second visit the following year had triumphed by sheer merit, and was now regarded as the legitimate successor of Taglioni. Carlotta Grisi, a cousin of the opera singer, Giula Grisi, was a pupil of Perrot, who had himself been a noted dancer, until an accident on the stage had stopped his active career and obliged him to become a ballet-master instead. Under his tuition Grisi had made rapid progress, and a *pas de deux* which the pair had danced in 1837 had been a striking success. Francesca Cerito (sic), another Italian, came to London in 1840, when she was 19, and though she was the youngest of the four dancers she seems to have had as large a circle of worshippers as any of them. So many bouquets were showered upon her when she danced in the *Pas de Quatre* that her companions had to help her to collect them - and it may be added, as showing how much she was in the fashion, that one of the best greyhounds in coursing history was named after her. In the picture which Chalon painted of the dance she certainly looks a fascinating little creature.[197]

Innovations in theme, costume and technique were all centred on the ballerina; the *Pas de Quatre* was the apogee of this concept, a *divertissement*, a series of plotless dances, that displayed the particular gifts of each ballerina. As the first plotless abstract ballet this work was a celebration of pure dance, and of the classical tradition of the past on which it built; every step the ballerina took depended on a rigid analytical training and severe discipline. It also looks forward decisively to our own century. *Pas de Quatre* represented a synthesis of the European schools and it glorified the dancers and the dance. In *Four Centuries of Ballet* Kirstein sums up the significance of this ballet:

> A ritual celebration of achievements in academic classical ballet as developed over two and a half centuries ... *Pas de Quatre* was perhaps the first deliberately abstract ballet whose subject was the *danse d'ecole* itself, without apology, autonomous and absolute ... Distilled, refined, concentrated - it was like chamber music or a symphonic scale, at once exercise and portraiture ... The dance itself, without recourse to sewn-on wings, would be seen as dramatic in its own execution. Independent of mimicry, plot or pretext, it became exciting in and of itself, by virtue of its flexible, infinitely extensible, vocabulary.[198]

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[197] The 'claques' or fan clubs could be manipulated by management to orchestrate audience response or build up a rivalry between ballerinas.

[198] Kirstein 1984, pp 158 & 159

THE POLITICAL PAS DE QUATRE.

73

The Iconography of the Pas de Quatre

73. Punch magazine was unable to resist using the popular image of the *Pas de Quatre* for political satire. Yearbook 1845 p 57.

74. "Chalon's famous lithograph *The Celebrated Pas de Quatre* is the epitome of the Romantic ballet print ... The dancers posed for Chalon, probably at the theatre, sometime after the first performance and before Grisi's departure for the continent only a week or so later. The lithograph was entrusted to T.H. Maguire, a Star pupil of the master lithographer R.J. Lane, Chalon's favourite collaborator. ...Fellow owners of a *Pas de Quatre* will have noticed that Mr Maguire's name is spelled incorrectly on the print appearing as T.H. Maquire." This print was published on September 8, 1845.
(J.K. Cavers in *Dance Research.*)
"In a curious way a picture can evoke a whole age for us. A pose, a grouping of people, will reveal a great deal about a society or way of life, and nothing is more revealing of the Romantic movement in ballet than the lithograph of the *Pas de Quatre.*" (Clarke & Crisp).

The *Pas de Quatre* was significant as the climax of this great age of the Romantic ballet and as the first that looked forward to the twentieth century. Contemporary critics greeted the work with rapturous enthusiasm. "Never was such a *pas* before," said the *Times*, "it was the greatest Terpsichorean exhibition that ever was known in Europe." The article continues:

> The manifestation of enthusiasm on the part of the audience was scarcely less remarkable than the manifestation of energy on the part of the artists. The whole long *pas* was danced to the running sound of applause, which, after each variation swelled to a perfect hurricane, the *furore* of partisanship being added to the weight of general admiration ...[199]

This work was an artistic, social and financial success, the last of the 'golden age', before the long decline of ballet until much later in the century in Russia.

Marie Taglioni had announced that she would retire after the 1845 season, and her Farewell Performance at Her Majesty's was tumultuous:

> ... the applause, as may be anticipated, was loud and long; bouquets in profusion fell at the feet of the charming *danseuse*, and she acknowledged them with a gratitude that she must have really felt towards the British public, who were amongst the first to appreciate her talent and the last to bid her adieu.[200]

In 1847 Marie Taglioni finally retired, and in 1848, the year that Marx published his *Communist Manifesto*, revolution again exploded in Europe, as economic crisis and political discontent coincided and governments and dynasties toppled. In 1851 the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park ushered in the relatively stable and prosperous middle period of Victoria's reign, when the benefits of industrial wealth and Empire became evident to most Britons. The year before, 1850, Ibsen had published his first play, and Realism began to replace Romanticism as the dominant artistic philosophy

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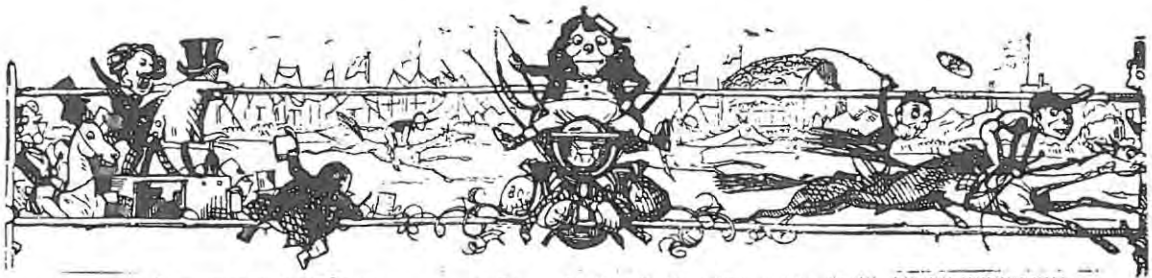
199 *The Times*, 14 July 1845. *British Newspaper Library, British Museum*, London.

200 The *Illustrated London News* Archives: No. 171, Vol. VII p 88, August 1945



Bubbles of the Year.—Testimonials to Managers.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.

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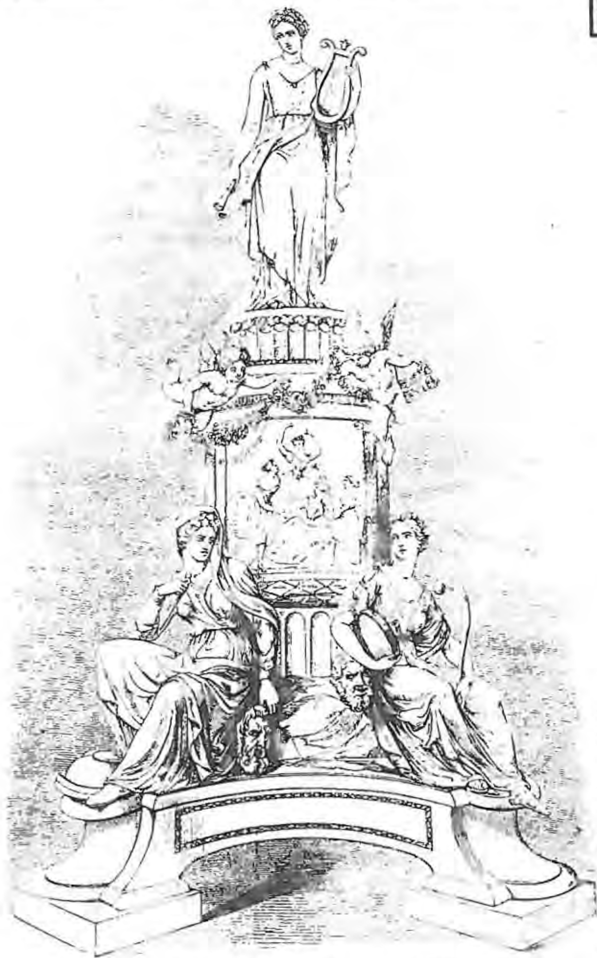
76



75. *Punch Magazine's* May calendar 1847 includes this satiric sketch of ballerinas presenting testimonials to Benjamin Lumley.

76. The August 7 edition of the *Illustrated London News* featured a full-page engraving of the Lumley Testamonial, with the side featuring a relief in silver of the *Pas de Quatre.* This is a photostat, reduced in size, of the original page in the *Illustrated London News* Library archives.

of the time. As the political, economic and socio-cultural context changed, so the predominant art forms created within the context also changed.

In 1846 a magnificent piece of plate, which included a statue of Terpsichore and an image of the *Pas de Quatre*, was presented to Benjamin Lumley. It was inscribed:

In record of the Zeal, Judgement, and Liberality,
Evinced in the Management of Her Majesty's Theatre,
This Testamony is presented
To B. LUMLEY, Esq.,
by
His friends and Subscribers
1846

On the same page of the *Illustrated London News* dated August 7 1847 on which a drawing of the Lumley Testamony appears, is an item describing a statuette of Jenny Lind, commemorating her first visit to England; and the classified section offers a publication of *All Jenny Lind's Songs*, with Italian and English words. This provides evidence of the end of the great days of ballet and the awakening interest in opera and operetta.[201]

Two powerful and opposing forces have dominated this chapter: firstly, the accumulating effect of the gathering strength of the bourgeoisie; and secondly, the transforming spirit of the Romantic movement in the arts, particularly as it triumphed in the quintessential Romantic ballet, *Giselle*. These antagonistic themes are indicative of the essential duality of the age, which is also reflected in the contrast in tone between Chapters One and Four of this investigation, which focus on the predominantly negative political, economic and social context, and Chapters Two and Three, which deal primarily with the more positive interaction between the key ballets of the period and the

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201 *The Illustrated London News* Archives: no. 275, Vol. XL, pp 95 96, August 7 1847.

Romantic aesthetic. This discussion on *Giselle* and the *Pas de Quatre* forms the climax in the unfolding of the conceptualization of Romanticism, and of the technical developments in the theatre and in the classical ballet tradition.

Giselle was the ultimate refinement of the Romantic taste in ballet; a perfect example of the synaesthesia of arts and artists, the work combined in harmonious balance the complementary opposites of reality and spirituality. And the two acts provided the synthesis of the two dance styles, *tacqueté* and *balloneé*, in the person of the ballerina who played Giselle. As the supreme example of the *l'art pour l'art* philosophy, it provided Gautier with a total poetic experience, the pure artistic ecstasy of the imagination and the senses. Like all Romantics, Giselle pushed experience to the utmost; and in this age of revolution and of middle class materialistic values and pressures to conform, contemporary society was well aware of the political, social and sexual consequences of fervour going astray. The late Romantics felt an increasingly desperate need to escape from the pedestrian world around them. This disappointed generation experienced the dual sensations of both existing in and trying to flee from the materialism and monotony of bourgeois life. For Gautier, ballet was the palliative, and his mood of bitter resignation is encapsulated in the final moments of *Giselle*, which is a comment on the late Romantic view of existence.

After 1841 ballet at the Paris Opéra finally succumbed to overwhelming bourgeois tastes, and London became the centre of ballet activity. Here too, box office economics dominated, but Perrot's *Pas de Quatre* surmounted such inauspicious beginnings, to become the first abstract plotless ballet which celebrated the *danse d'ecole* itself. Male dancers were totally excluded, and four star ballerinas were featured, highlighting the fact that innovations in theme, costuming and technique in the genre, were all centred on the ballerina. The interrelationship between the art form and the dominant contemporary value system may be summed up by means of an intensified tight focus on the prevailing image of the ballerina and the woman, which is the subject of the final chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The Image: Ballerina and Woman

The final chapter focuses on nineteenth century attitudes to women, and examines the issues of sexuality, gender and class. The discussion spotlights the relationship between two images: the Romantic ballerina, the 'priestess' on the stage, worshipped on her pedestal as an idealized vision of womanhood;[203] and the middle class woman, the 'angel in the house', uneducated chaste and ladylike, apparently unsexual, propertyless and protected; with the shadowy image of the working class woman as servant or mine labourer in the background, refuting the validity of the other two images. Of crucial importance are the implications of what these images reveal about the bourgeois male attitudes and middle class value-system of the age.

La Sylphide established the ballerina as the central figure, the *raison d'etre* of the ballet, worshipped and idealized as a vision floating on waves of mist and moonlight; an apparition of loveliness, untouchable, and all the more desirable for being unreal. The iconography of the period celebrated the female dancer poised delicately and weightlessly on tiny tapering feet. The vast output of lithographs, prints and ephemera testify to the importance of the ballerina, and give a fair view of what the Romantics believed dancing was about. The lithograph of the *Pas de Quatre* captures

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202 **Chapter Four title page: Key Images**

Top right — (repeat of No. **86**) The young Florence Nightingale with her sister, Parthenope. The image of the young middle class woman; demure and chaste, domestic in her interests, occupied with embroidery and Bible-reading.

Top left — Marie Taglioni in *La Sylphide*. The new modest and poetic image of the Romantic ballerina was consciously manipulated to suit the contemporary idealization of women.

Bottom right — (repeat of No **112**): For poor ballet girls the reality behind the image was less Romantic.

Bottom left — (repeat of No **100**): The exploitation of working class women as mine labourers, servants or prostitutes gave the lie to the other two images.

203 I am indebted to my supervisor Gary Gordon, for suggesting this area of research.

perfectly the image of the ballerina as infinitely delicate, gracious, charming and lightly poised in clouds of soft white tulle. (Plate No. 74) Ballet had become emasculated.

The Romantic tutu concealed the figure, but the translucent fabric together with bare neck and shoulders hinted at flesh and blood reality. As Gautier has pointed out, dancing is essentially a physical and sensual activity. In her modern study, *Dance, Sex and Gender*, anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna presents a similar viewpoint:

> Sexuality and dance share the same instrument - the human body. ... With the medium as part of the message, dance evokes, reinforces and clarifies desires and fantasies.[204]

The ideal of beauty in a dancer before Marie Taglioni was somewhat blatant and sexually obvious. She had none of the physical glamour and bravado of style that reflected their all too available sexual charms:

> Taglioni offered grace, demure charm and incomparable lightness. Her lack of obvious physical allure meant that she had a different attraction to offer an audience - something discreet, intangible, other-worldly ... Her way of dancing was found to be something totally new in its floating gentleness, its decorum and its rejection of every bold artifice of the dancers habitually seen at the Opéra.[205]

Gautier's concept of her was as a 'Christian' dancer. Her modest style, combined with the physical daring and the relative state of undress of the diaphanous tutu, which she introduced to the *ballet blanc*, suggested something of the conflict between spiritual and sensual which was so much a part of nineteenth century life. Carlotta Grisi is praised for her 'refined seductiveness' and Fanny Elssler for her 'modest provocativeness',[206] phrases which, like 'Christian dancer' seem almost a contradiction in terms; they also reflect the theme of duality which was such a strong characteristic of the age.

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204 Hanna 1988, p xiii

205 Clarke & Crisp 1978, p 145

206 Guest 1980, pp 209 & 211

What is of paramount importance here is that the image of the dancer had to be adapted to suit the contemporary attitude to women. Filippo Taglioni deliberately moulded his daughter's dance style into this new chaste image. He demanded, in addition to lightness, grace and wonderful elevation, that Marie should remove all hints of the carnal from her dancing. He would not allow her to make a single gesture or attitude lacking in decorum or modesty. He told her: "Mothers and daughters should be able to see you dance without blushing."[207] This is an example - there were to be many more in the history of ballet - of a male choreographer manipulating and presenting the image of the female dancer. This crucial manipulation was to place the Romantic ballerina securely within the Victorian bourgeois moral code.

> The antithesis of a flirt or coquette, she embodied a 'Christian' spirit ... a virginal paleness, sweet suffering ... while dancers as courtesans had won international renown, Taglioni was the first to enjoy a reputation as a priestess, elevated to a higher moral level than that of mere performer.[208]

Louis Véron underlined the point that Marie's achievement was due to her father's strenuous training programme. Theatrical dynasties in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took considerable pride in their family's honour. Marie's physique would not have pleased a father seeking to bring his child up to maintain the family glory. She was tall and thin and round-shouldered, with disproportionately long arms and a rather prim expression. She had been a skinny child with a tendency to stoop, and her fellow ballet pupils used to taunt her by asking, "Can this little hunchback ever dance?"[209] In his writings, Levinson was quite brutal about the difference between 'plastic perfection' and 'choreographic beauty'. "To be frank, Marie Taglioni looks like a sickly old maid who has suffered many woes, and made up her mind to take the veil"; "like a grasshopper or a kangaroo her exceptionally long legs enabled her to leap" and her physical 'defects' thus assisted her dance

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207 Levinson in Steinberg 1980, p 75

208 Kirstein 1984, p 142

209 Guest 1980, p 73

77. Marie Taglioni, London, 1842 "Marie Taglioni looks like a sickly old maid who has suffered many woes, and made up her mind to take the veil" (Levinson).

78. Marie Taglioni as Flore. This caricature by Theophile Wagstaff (William Makepeace Thackeray), London, 1836, also notes the contrast between 'choreographic beauty' and 'plastic perfection'.

79. Grevedon's 1835 lithograph of Fanny Elssler, "a supremely beautiful woman" (Binney). At this time her rivalry with Taglioni was at its height.

style.[210] When Marie visited Russia on her first tour in 1837, a former pupil of the theatrical academy in St Petersburg left a souvenir of her visit to the school:

> The most celebrated dancer Taglioni arrived in St Petersburg with her father and came to our school to do her exercises. The director and officials treated her with every courtesy. Taglioni was a very plain, excessively thin woman with a small, yellowish and very wrinkled face. I felt quite ashamed because the pupils after the class surrounded Taglioni, and, with a charming note in their voices, said in Russian: "What an ugly mug you've got! How wrinkled you are!: Taglioni, not knowing the language and thinking compliments were being paid to her, smiled and replied in French: "Thank you, dear children."[211]

The four dancers who followed Taglioni were all exceptionally beautiful women as well as great ballerinas, and the comparison was sometimes noted by critics. Binney comments on the rivalry between Taglioni and Elssler: "Taglioni was older and homely, Fanny ... was not only six years younger, but also a supremely beautiful woman."[212] Gautier particularly, responded warmly to the personal beauty of the ballerinas (he was in love with Carlotta Grisi for years, in spite of being married to her sister). He wrote of Elssler and Taglioni: "she is the dancer for men, as Mlle. Taglioni was the dancer for women."[213] Beaumont points out the cruelty of using the past tense in referring to Taglioni. There are also very clear patriarchal structures evident here. Men admire women for their beauty, and from a man's perception, women must admire other women for their chaste and homely middle class virtues.

However unfashionable her looks, Taglioni was feted as a great ballerina. All the Romantic ballerinas were subject to the doubtful compliment of hero-worship, much as rock singers and film stars are today. Elssler's fans drank champagne from her ballet slipper, Taglioni's admirers ate a pair

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210 Levinson in Steinberg 1980, pp 71 to 73

211 Kirstein 1977, p 255

212 Binney 1985 (revised edition) p 36

213 Beaumont 1980 (revised edition), p 27

of hers![214] Yet there was a disconcerting note of hysteria about these tales. Ballet was becoming a mania. Here the ballerina functions as an Icon, one of the modes and devices for conveying meaning in dance described by Judith Lynne Hanna (in a modern and non-theatrical context): "An Icon ... is responded to as if it were what it represents, for example, dancing the role of a deity which is revered or otherwise treated as a deity."[215] An article in the *Illustrated London News* dated July 15 1843 on Fanny Cerrito in the Shadow Dance from *Ondine*, considers the contemporary idolization of the ballerina:

> 'Of its own beauty is the mind diseased,
> And fevers into false creation!'
>
> says Byron; but we require some stronger, more satisfactory reason why, in sober health, we become occasionally indifferent to the beautiful realities of our own earth, and fly to the immortals for ecstasies that, after all, are but a poet's dream. Everybody is not a Numa, and therefore cannot indulge in the blissful phantasy that he holds intercourse with 'moulds beyond the earth'; and yet we would if we could, such is our 'longing after immortality'.
>
> 'Egeria! Sweet creation of some heart
> Which found no mortal resting-place so fair
> As thine ideal breast!'
>
> how often has thou been conjured up to our imagination!

No solution is offered, as the writer joins in the worship of the "goddess" Cerrito, whose performance as Ondine "inclines us to agree more than ever with the old Greek assertion that 'Dancing is silent poetry'".[216] It seems that the nineteenth century Romantic needed a goddess, an idealized woman; something real but sufficiently removed from his everyday reality in order to keep up the dream of the spiritually pure and unattainable ideal:

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214 "A Russian balletomane bought a pair of Taglioni's ballet slippers for 200 rubles to take to a farewell dinner celebrating the dancer's departure for France in March 1842. This gala dinner featured as the main dish Taglioni's slippers, which, expertly cooked, were served with a special sauce. One can hardly imagine a more spectacular outburst of balletomania." (Sorell 1986, p 211)

215 Hanna in Blacking & Kealiinohomoku 1970, p 37

216 The *Illustrated London News* Archives: July 15 1843, p 45

> Since the advent of Christianity the woman had been spiritualized and glorified. From the image of the madonna figure to an idealized Platonic being in the chivalrous days of knighthood, she was finally moved into the ethereal realms of the Romantic where his tormented soul and body could gratify both through her.[217]

The idealization[218] of the ballerina may have grown out of one of the major themes of Romanticism: the notion of purity and regeneration through the freedom and experience of the body, which is the essence of William Blake's emphasis on sensuality and sexual freedom. This provides an interpretation of the Romantic ballerina as a symbol of pure and free sexual ecstasy.[219] Robertson and Hutera provide a different perspective. They suggest that Taglioni's style ushered in an age where woman was too good to be true, too perfect to love in the real world:

> Alluring, amoral and (literally) soulless heroines dominated the Romantic stage. These enchantresses gave each hero a taste of the sublime while destroying his ability to cope with real life and 'mere' mortal women. The basic duality of the Romantic ballet was of an absolute love devoid of sexual fulfilment. Sanctity of the kind reserved for mothers and sisters was subliminally sanctioned through a passion of enforced chastity. The ballets of the era accommodated this double standard to perfection.[220]

The life of the dancer behind the image was hard in those days, and provides an interesting contrast to the idealized image itself. Dancers came, almost exclusively, from the poorest families. Two letters to the press written by 'poor ballet girls' later in the century, illustrate the reality for members of the *corps de ballet*:

> Sir, - Will you give me a space in your valuable columns to show a few of the trials, troubles, and temptations of these whose lot it is to belong to the ballet. In the first place it is not generally known that we have to practice for four to six weeks, for which in London we get not a single penny-piece. Surely the rehearsal time is the time we want money most to obtain food and other necessaries. As soon as the

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217 Sorell 1986, p 245

218 The ballerina was both 'idolized', worshipped to excess, and 'idealized' as the embodiment of an ideal of perfection.

219 Sorell 1986, p 232

220 Robertson & Hutera 1988, p 12

> rehearsals are complete we have a night or two before the production of the ballet to go to the Hall or Theatre at twelve o' clock at night and rehearse till five of six the next morning ... There are more girls annually that I know who have been brought to Shame and trouble through midnight rehearsals than through any other cause.
>
> Yours obediently,
> A POOR BALLET GIRL
>
> Tights, shoes and muslin dresses take over a pound to pay for out of our money ... We have rehearsals from ten in the morning until five, then sometimes in the evening; and then you have your own dresses to make ... you are starving, and have to depend on your landlord to let you run on a bit, or pawn all you have got, or do something else, and that is our lot in life. This is how us poor girls are treated that want to get an honest living, as I and hundreds more do.[221]

The struggle for survival and the temptation to resort to prostitution is obvious in these letters.

The boxes at the Opéra closest to the stage soon acquired the nickname of *loge infernale*, for there sat the fashionable men-about-town whose interest in the ballet was certainly not purely aesthetic. One of Dr Véron's innovations had been to allow the more important subscribers to the Opéra to go backstage to the *Foyer de la Danse* to flirt with the dancers while they were warming up. Informal parties were organised for ministers with some of the more attractive dancers and singers at the Opéra. A short extract from Véron's autobiography describes the *Foyer de la Danse*, which became an important part of the *bordello* politics at the Opéra:

> Do not disturb this beautiful, preoccupied young person who is avoiding your gaze. She is passionately poring over a letter which the theatre concierge just gave her. It concerns matters of the utmost gravity; it is a love letter. Some of the dancers are running; others are stretched out on the floor. There is nothing more cheerful, diversified, and picturesque than the encampment of dancers. In such a pagan temple sacrifices are offered to Venus, Love, Fortune and Terpsichore.[222]

Véron's priorities are clearly establish with 'Terpsichore' at the bottom of the list. Anderson comments on this moral climate:

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221 Jackson 1989, pp 121 & 122.

222 Véron in Anderson 1986, p 82

80

80 *A Roomful of Rats* Bettanier freres after Tiechel. Lithograph, c 1860. The Paris Opera was a notoriously happy hunting ground for men of all ages in search of female companionship. The liaisons that resulted were to provide material for novels, plays and a cascade of lithographs which pinpointed exactly contemporary morality. For the girls, the opportunity for a rich lover was sometimes the main reason for their entering the dancing profession. The 'rats' of Teichel's title were the *corps de ballet* girls, and the double demands of a ballet master and of an admirer are cleverly indicated.

A less enchanted view of the Romantic goddesses than that presented in the lithographs of the period comes from Lady Blessington, in her ode *The Belle of the Season.*

Brisk music gayer scenes announces,
And in a half dressed danseuse bounces,
With arms that wreathe, and eyes that swim,
And drapery that scarce shades each limb ...
When Mary saw her vault in air,
Her snow white tunic leaving bare
Her limbs, and heard the deafening shout
Grow louder as she twirled about,
With one leg pointing towards the sky
As if the gallery to defy:

Surprised, and shocked, she turned away,
Wondering how women e'er could stay,
And thinking men must sure be frantic
Who patronised such postures antic:
She felt abashed to meet the eye
Of every fop that loitered by:
And, oh! how rudely did it vex
Her fresh, pure heart, to mark her sex
Thus outraged, while the noblest came
To gaze and revel in their shame ...
(Clarke & Crisp, 1978 p 61)

Although not great poetry, this curious little ode gives some indication of the element of erotic danger in the Romantic ballet, that gave it a contemporary dimension of threat to the middle class value-system, which is lacking in our appreciation of these ballets today.

> Officially, the Church condemned the theatre and refused to marry or bury actors or dancers. At the same time, high-ranking clergymen often hired dancers to entertain at their banquets. A few even took dancers as mistresses. It was widely assumed that female dancers would have well-to-do men as lovers and, because many of these women came from poor families, it is hardly surprising that they welcomed the jewels, gold, banquets and other gifts their lovers lavished on them.[223]

To survive this kind of exploitation, the French dancers became extremely tough, and from a young age knew how to get as many material benefits as they could from the situation. The French ballerina, later to be immortalized by Degas, was a stocktype of shrewdness.[224]

In England the situation was very similar, but Benjamin Lumley was less blatantly materialistic than Véron, and, although as manipulative, he had a real appreciation of the art form. Lumley was to some extent dependent on the aristocratic and wealthy middle class members of the Haymarket audience who paid advanced prescriptions for theatre boxes for the season. The two double boxes flanking the proscenium and level with the stage were known as the omnibus boxes, and until mid-century, housed the dandies and fops. These young and old debauchees, hangovers from the Regency period, ogled the dancers onstage and competed for their favours behind the scenes. Fanny Cerrito, for example, was the idol of the public and the *bell'alma adorata* of the omnibus boxes. This verse, more frank than most, explains why:

> The season o'er - Cerrito's steps
> Attracts no more the amorous glances
> Of beardless boys and aged rips,
> Pure patrons of lascivious dances.[225]

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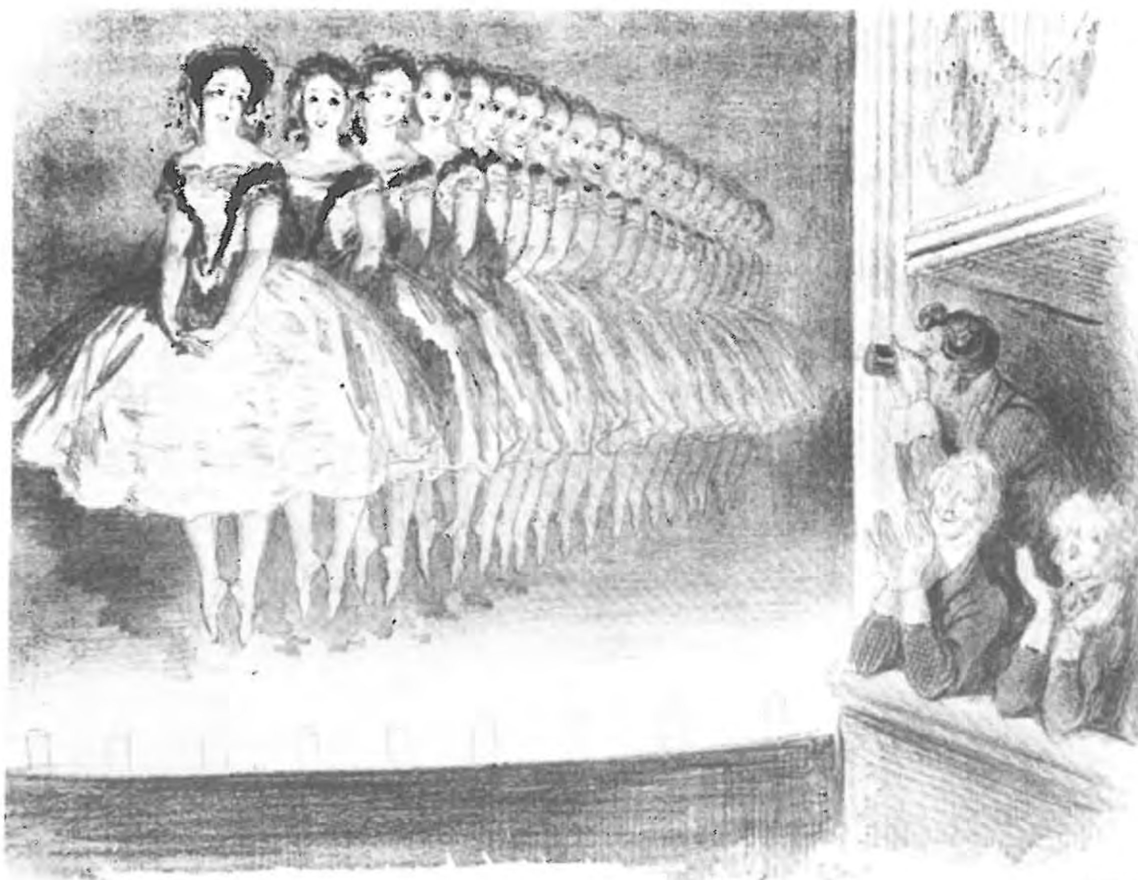
223 Anderson 1974, p 44

224 One sobbing mama was supposed to have come to her daughter with the news of her father's death. The child was candid, suppressing a sigh she remarked, "Why tell me that now? It will spoil my *mastic*." The *mastic*, a thick white liquid enamel, took a long time to apply over face, neck and arms (Kirstein 1977, p 251).

225 Guest 1974, p 70



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81. Gustave Dore *Les Rats de l'Opera.* Lithograph. Dore's caricature speaks for itself: a line of pretty girls fully aware of the gentlemen in the box and the gentlemen no less aware of the girls. It is an entirely realistic view of the relationship between dancers and audience in the middle of the nineteenth century.

82. *L'Opera au XIXe Siecle* Lithograph by E. de Beaumont. The caption reads 'The unpleasant thing about a danseuse is that she sometimes brings along a male dancer'.

By comparison with the balletomanes of St Petersburg and the *claques* of Paris, they had very little true appreciation of the ballet, and the Green Room at the Haymarket never became a social institution like the *Foyer de la Danse* at the Opéra. By mid-century a greater sense of middle class Victorian propriety pervaded London society and the ballet, and by 1848 Lumley was able to deny the men of the omnibus boxes access backstage.[226]

With the Romantic ballerina elevated to a symbol of Romantic yearning and of masculine fantasies in general, the male dancer, with a few exceptions such as Perrot and Bournonville, became an endangered species, and was not to recover his status until Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* in 1909. As some cartoons suggested, on a more mundane level, male dancers provided competition for the affections of the ballerinas. (Plate No. 82) A preponderance of female dancers reduced this element of competition for the men in the audience. Bournonville was the only exception in terms of the prevailing attitude to female dancers; male dancers in his company shared pride of place with the females, who tended to retain their real identity as women in his ballets, rather than some fantasized status. It is also important to note that the actual development of ballet was in the hands of male choreographers; there were very few women involved in the creative process of making ballets.

The contemporary attitude to the male dancer needs to be examined in closer detail. The critical comments about male dancers are almost universally derogatory, but it is crucial to note why this was so. Jules Janin provides an example in an article written in 1850:

> Speak to us of a pretty dancing girl who displays the grace of her features and the elegance of her figure, who reveals so fleetingly all the treasures of her beauty. Thank God I understand that perfectly, I know what this lovely creature wishes us, and I would willingly follow her wherever she wishes in the sweet land of love. But a man, a frightful man, as ugly as you or I, a wretched fellow who leaps about without knowing why, a creature specially made to carry a musket and sword and to wear a uniform. That this fellow should dance as a woman does - impossible! That this bewhiskered individual who is a pillar of the community, an elector, a municipal councillor, a man whose business it is to make and above all unmake laws, should come before us in a tunic of sky-blue satin, his head covered with a hat with a waving plume amorously caressing his cheek ... Today, thanks to this revolution we have

[226] Information from *Dance Perspectives* 37 Spring 1969, p 7 to 49

> affected, the woman is the queen of the ballet ... she is no longer forced to cut off half her silk petticoat to dress her partner with it. Today the dancing man is no longer tolerated except as a useful accessory.[227]

There is blatant sexism emerging here, as well as a commentary on the status and function of men and women in the society of the day. Far from being a compliment to the ballerina, this is obviously just another example of Victorian male paternalism: it would be both effeminate and demeaning for the so-called male 'pillar of society' to disport himself in public. In England the legacy of ridicule attached during the eighteenth century to Italian opera singers (especially *castrati*) and to the French male dancers, served in the nineteenth century to stamp both opera and ballet as effete and effeminate occupations, tolerable in foreigners but unacceptable among Britons.[228] A woman on the other hand is of subservient status and it is therefore proper and fitting for her to function as a representative of male sexual fantasies. Even today, *pointe* work remains a woman's way of dancing, although there is no anatomical reason why it cannot be attempted by men. The only occasion on which modern male dancers use *pointe* work is for satire and comedy, for example, Cinderella's Ugly Sisters. We have inherited and still apply to some extent, the sexism and image problems that were so strongly a part of mid-Victorian life.[229]

The contrasting images of male and female dancer have interesting parallels in the roles of men and women in middle class society, and their attitudes to sex are revealing in this context. For example, "floating free in space ... this metaphor for sexual ecstasy was to appear again and again in Romantic art, in works ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous."[230] An American visitor to the ballet, Nathanial Willis, described the impact of Taglioni's dancing: "Her difficulty seems to be to keep to the floor. You have the feeling that, if she were to rise and float away like Ariel, you would

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227 Janin in Guest 1980, p 21 (emphasis mine)

228 Wickham 1985, p 192

229 Ann Daly's article on the Balanchine ballerina is of interest here. (See reference list for details).

230 Honour 1986, p 307

scarce be surprised ..."[231] A Russian critic wrote of Taglioni: "it is impossible to describe the suggestion she conveys of aerial flight, the fluttering of wings, the soaring in the air, alighting on flowers and glittering over the mirror-like surface of a river ..."[232] Commenting with hindsight, twentieth century American writer Lincoln Kirstein describes her as "a symbol of lightness, who conquered air and space, and gained freedom from the tyranny of the down-to-earth. She was a metaphor of evanescence, transparency, floating ..."[233] Judith Lynne Hanna, in her modern study of *Dance, Sex and Gender* points out that ballet is rampant with representational orgasm. There are climaxes by the dozen in any one ballet and an ascending accumulation of energy is a favourite device. Overt sexuality is highly stylized in the Romantic ballet male-female encounters. The woman is exalted to ethereality as a sylph or a wili and borne loft and glorified in ways that seem to transcend sexuality. Yet there are symbolic yearnings as partners reach out towards each other in erotic foreplay and come together, one partner passing over or through the other's personal space of legs and arms in sexual fulfilment or conquest.[234] To understand fully the implications of the image of the Romantic ballerina in its sociocultural context, the attitudes of the society need to be examined:

> ... by examining a peoples' attitudes to the human body and their definition of its boundaries, we should gain some understanding of the nature of the informant's *other* body - his social body, his society ... of the social context itself.[235]

What has to be examined is both the attitudes to the body and the prevalent value-system, and what they reveal about the interconnections between the idealised ballerina, the corsetted and apparently sexually repressed middle class woman in the audience, and the adult and child prostitutes who roamed freely inside and outside the theatres; and also of course, the relationship of the middle class men in the audience to all three categories.

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[231] Guest 1980, p 104

[232] Cohen 1977, p 67

[233] Kirstein 1984, p 146

[234] Hanna 1988, p 165 & 166

[235] Polhemus in Benthall & Polhemus 1975, pp 26 & 27

Floating free in space, as a metaphor for sexual ecstacy, appears again and again in Romantic art.

83. *The Leap from the Rocks*, 1833, L. Schnorr con Carolsfield.

84. Fanny Cerrito floats above *Le Lac des Fees*, London, 1840.

85. William Blake. *Whirlwind Lovers*, c 1824.

What was the image and role of the middle class woman in contemporary society? Of great significance was the cult of home and the sanctity of family life. The cosy comfortable private home provided the setting in which was embowered the middle class family. "Capitalism demanded assertive and competitive behaviour from men at work, so increasingly the middle class home became a refuge, a retreat which had to be preserved."[236]

> The house mistress, ideally the wife, was the linchpin of the static community. It was she who waited at home for the return of the active, seeking man. Her special task was the creation of *order* in her household ... The functions made explicit in one of the best known sources of this concept, Ruskin's lecture 'The Queen's Garden'.
>
> > 'The woman's power is not for rule, not for battle - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, management and decision.'[237]

And so the mythology of the home primarily appealed to the professional and bourgeois groups, and the woman's role in that mythology gradually became established: her true and natural vocation was considered to be the nurture of the coming race and the running of a well-ordered healthy and happy home. This institution emerged in early Victorian Britain and bourgeois France as a well-defined stable and confident part of society - an example to labouring men and aristocrats alike. That was the ideal.

In reality the middle class family was strictly hierarchical with the husband at the head; he had absolute authority over all the other members of the group - wife, young and adult children, dependents and servants; and his effective control was reinforced by legal sanctions. Hobsbawm comments on the bourgeoisie:

> Its men personified the money which proved their right to rule the world; its women, deprived by their husband's money of even the satisfaction of actually doing household work, personified the virtues of their class: stupid ('be good sweet maid, and let who will be clever'), uneducated, impractical, theoretically unsexual,

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236 Marks in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, p 183

237 Davidoff, L'Esperance & Newby in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, pp 154 & 155

> propertyless and protected. They were the only luxury that an age of thrift and self-help allowed itself. The British manufacturing bourgeoisie was the most extreme example of its class.[238]

There was also a practical reason for this state of affairs. What made Victorian life a man's world was not only the power of the domestic ideal, but the simple demography of Victorian life. In England there was always a surplus of women.

A moralizing attitude to sex was inevitable in an age when there was a moral colouring to all social arguments. While the woman was apparently venerated within the home, the pedestal on which she was placed was a false one. Women had to be chaste before marriage and 'modest' after marriage. Their sexuality was explicitly denied and annual pregnancies guaranteed their dependence:

> Man for the field, woman for the hearth,
> Man for the sword and for the needle she:
> Man with the head and woman with the heart,
> Man to command and woman to obey.[239]

This verse from Tennyson's *The Princess* sums up contemporary attitudes, and reveals the appalling patriarchal structures upon which middle class society was based. The publication of Richardson's *Pamela* as early as 1740 had crystallized the new stereotype of femininity. The model heroine was young and inexperienced and so delicate that she fainted at any sexual advance; essentially passive, she was devoid of any feelings towards her admirer until after marriage, and then all her attention and devotion was exclusively for him. Victorian private schools educated young girls for marriage with the emphasis placed on ladylike accomplishments:

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238 Hobsbawm 1988, p 231

239 Briggs 1983, p 243

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88

The 'angels in the house':
nineteenth century images of
modest middle class women

86. Florence Nightingale and her sister Parthenope, watercolour by William White, c 1836.

87. Day dresses from *Le Follet*, 1848; examples of the extremely modest styles of the 1840's. Queen Victoria's newly discovered love of Balmoral led to the popularity of tartan fabrics.

88. *The Doubt* by Henry Alexander Bowler, 1856. A problem picture directed at three Victorian preoccupations - religion, death and the idealized young woman.

89

182 Morning and evening dress, 1831

90

91

89. *A Soldier's farewell*, 1853, by John Callcott Horsley. A young girl watches her soldier march away, as she peeps modestly through the lace curtains of her home and sanctuary.

90. The image in this fashion plate of 1830 is more frivolous; it could provide an illustration for Punch's Ladies' *Report of the Season.*

91. This satire on middle class concepts of female giddiness and silliness appeared in 1846. The caption reads:

Miss Flora Macfungus: "I dare say you think me a very odd girl, and indeed, Mama always says I'm a giddy, thoughtless creature and -"

Partner: "Oh, here's a vacant seat, I think."

> ... to produce a robust physique is thought undesirable, rude health and abundant vigour are considered somewhat plebeian ... a certain delicacy, a strength not competent to walk more than a mile, an appetite fastidious and easily satisfied joined with that timidity which commonly accompanies feebleness ... all are held more ladylike.[240]

The kind of interests, frivolous attitudes and general silliness expected of contemporary young women is satirized in *Punch Magazine*, in an article entitled *Ladies' Report of the London Season* (1844):

> MISS MARY ANNE STOWERS informed *Punch* that she had been in town for several months ... Went everyday to the West End. The shops - she meant the linendrapers of course - were magnificent. Saw dresses in the windows that were perfect loves, and bonnets as lovely. Had seen all the sights. Went to the Opera once ... Couldn't recollect what she saw. It was Don something ... but very splendid ... Begged that *Punch* wouldn't talk about the *Polka*; it was perfection. Had made many observations on things in general; had principally to remark - that tunics were a great deal worn, and skirts, trimmed with a succession of flounces, highly fashionable.
>
> MISS EMMELINE AUBREY said that she had been staying with her aunt, Lady Mincingham, in Grosvenor Square; where she had passed an existence truly delightful. Was always going out in the carriage; seldom walked, except now and then through a quadrille. Occasionally promenaded, very gently, in Kensington Gardens to hear the band play. Delighted with the 'Blues', did not mean literary society by that - what a question! Had been to the Opera and ballet over and over again, ... to balls, concerts, exhibitions, and sights without number; had been in short, everywhere. Had never been to the British Museum: where was it? Had seen Westminster Abbey - the outside of it ... The Opera was paradise; the Ballet, beyond everything. Cerito was an angel; Grisi and Persiani nightingales ... Charles Kemble's readings of Shakespeare were clever; so was Shakespeare himself, certainly ... but *passé*. Preferred the French plays immeasurably. English performers were not *artistes*. Had learnt a great deal while in town - couldn't say what, it was more than she could tell ... no other observations had occurred to her in particular.[241]

The 'Blues' referred to would have been bandsmen of the 'Blues and the Royals', who with their fellow regiment, the 'Lifeguards', form the mounted Household Cavalry guarding the Royal Family and their Palaces. The young officers in their magnificent uniforms have always provided desirable escorts for young debutantes.

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240 Archer in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, p 182

241 *Punch Magazine* Archives: 1844 Volume, p 99

The clothes women wore reflected the social attitudes of the day. Quietness and delicacy were the qualities most admired; rouge was entirely abandoned as 'interesting pallor' was highly fashionable. Prosperous businessmen asked that their wives be models of domestic virtues and that they should not undertake work of any kind, as a mark of their husband's social status. This attitude was reflected in their clothes, which were extremely restrictive. The large number of petticoats worn during the mid-Victorian period prevented women from pursuing any activities without fatigue. Florence Nightingale's mother and sister provide examples of these attitudes: "Miss Nightingale described what she had endured from Fanny and Parthe during the summer of 1857: 'The whole occupation of Parthe and Mama was to lie on two sofas and tell one another not to get tired by putting flowers into water.'"[242] This was after Florence had returned from the Crimea and while she was working day and night on reports aimed at reforming nursing and hospitals.

One of the most obvious manifestations of womens' enforced submission and dependence was the corset, which dominated fashion from the 1830's to the 1890's in Britain and Europe. It was "simultaneously an affirmation of female beauty and a denial of female sexuality."[243] Desmond Morris, in his recent anthropological study *Bodywatching* has this to say about tight corsetting:

> (It) embodied an unspoken 'bondage' factor. The corsets 'trapped' the soft flesh of the attractive young female, giving her the air of someone ensnared and vulnerable, unable to move freely or forcefully ... (It) squeezed the soft female flesh into ... a state of crushed subordination and symbolic surrender ... A curious feature of the long period of fanatical tight-lacing was the way in which it lost sight of its original purpose, which was to render the female more feminine and therefore more sexually appealing. Victorian females *without* stiff corsetting were looked upon as wanton and depraved, despite the fact that it was they who were displaying themselves in their natural shapes ... Tight corsets had become so much a part of polite fashion that to appear without them was tantamount to having started to undress in public.[244]

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242 Woodham-Smith 1964, p 223

243 Turner 1984, p 197

244 Morris 1987, pp 190 & 191

In her book on one hundred and fifty years of *Punch* on fashion, Christina Walkley makes several useful observations on the corset in the nineteenth century. Dresses have a limited identity; they need a body to fill them so that they can take on the identity of the wearer, who has already moulded her shape in response to the prevailing fashion. A certain amount can be achieved by padding, but the two chief ways of moulding the body to a given shape are corsetry and dieting. Corsets, or stays, were considered so essential to a good figure that quite small girls were put into them, and were often not allowed to remove them even at night. *Punch* repeatedly satirized the wearing of the corset and the detrimental effects on women's health caused by this personal disfigurement. Women did undoubtedly suffer illness and even death from tight-lacing. Since they could not breathe properly they were subject to giddiness and fainting, and in time their internal organs could become severely crushed and displaced, which accounts partly for the notoriously difficult time women had in childbirth.[245] A careful study of the iconography of the period indicates that dancers also wore corsets during their exertions, though no mention is made of this fact in any of the dance books that I have read.[246] In his biography of Fanny Cerrito, Ivor Guest mentions that she was prone to occasional fainting on stage which he assumes was the price of her extraordinary bursts of vigour;[247] the effects of tight corsetting is a far more feasible explanation. Interest in the subject grew, and by the late 1860's the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* was receiving such a volume of correspondence about it that a special supplement had to be published. The letters throw much light on this strange topic, and reveal so clearly its psychosexual aspect - one young girl referring to the delicious sensations, 'half pleasure half pain' induced by tight-lacing - that they are now classified as pornography in the British Library.

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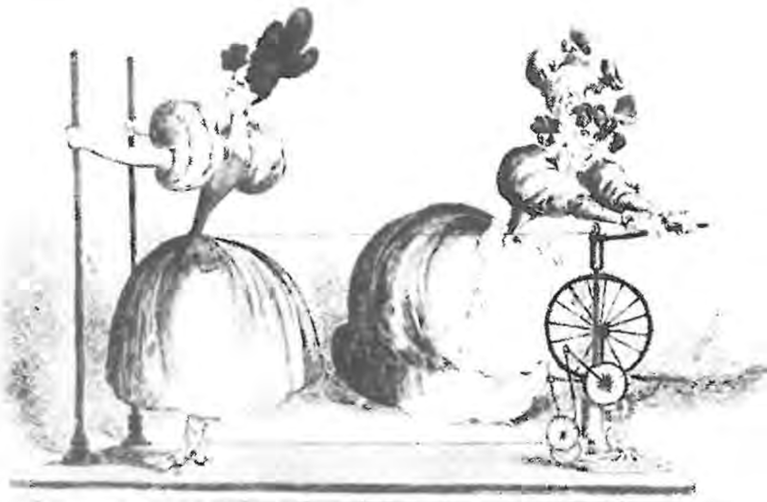
245 Walkley 1985, pp 47 to 50

246 In this context, it is interesting that Isadora Duncan, 1878 - 1927, who used dance as a powerful medium of personal expression, threw out the conventional corset, together with classical technique and the other trappings of the ballet tradition, and danced barefooted and barelegged in loose, flowing draperies.

> "The nude - as the apotheosis of nature - is the noblest form in art, she felt, and the correct conception of beauty can be gained only from the shape and symmetry of the human body. What is dance, if not beauty awakened in the human body? And it is in this context that we can hear the faint, but very distinct, echo of Gautier and the spirit of Romanticism." (Sorell 1986, p 322)

247 Guest 1974, p 86



92

92. Satire on the ludicrous extremes of waist-tightening in the nineteenth century; it is hardly surprising that fainting and swooning away became so commonplace in polite society.
93. A tightly-corsetted ballerina and her admirers.
94. By midcentury, wasp-waists and huge crinolenes made any movement difficult; *Punch* consistently satirized the social problems caused by this fashion, 1 October 1864.

93

94

THE SAFEST WAY OF TAKING A LADY DOWN TO DINNER.

PUNCH 1846

p 238

LECTURE ON TIGHT LACING.

YOU are aware, young ladies, that by means of tight lacing, the waist of the female figure may be made to vie with that of the wasp, and to resemble the form of an hour-glass, or the letter X; thus very much improving its appearance. You have seen, perhaps, the statue of the VENUS DE MEDICIS; and you know what a fright of a figure it has, in consequence of the model from which it was taken evidently never having worn a *corset*.

The rose, however, is never without the thorn; the most agreeable evening party has its drawbacks. And so there are, unhappily, some unpleasant results consequent on compression, at the expense of which a slender waist is purchased.

The circulating fluid, from a disagreeable law of nature, is forced up into the head. The colour of the fluid is rosy, as you know. The delicate health attendant on tight lacing forbids it to adorn the cheek, and accordingly it is transferred to the nose; which its tint does not adorn by any means.

IT MAKETH ANKLES AND FEET TO SWELL.

IT MAKETH RED THE NOSE.

Within the circle of the waist are comprised certain plaguy vessels, whose freedom from pressure is unfortunately required. When they are subject to any obstruction, as they are by close lacing, there is a vexatious tendency in the ankles to swell; and the worst is, that a tight shoe only renders the disfigurement the more conspicuous.

Young ladies have also some tiresome muscles, whose support is necessary to the spine. Their power is destroyed—what a pity this is!—by tight stays; and then the back assumes a curvature. How grievous that one cannot be at once slender and straight!

Comfort must also be sacrificed to elegance; and the reduction of the waist occasions giddiness and headach. This perhaps alone would be a trifle; but lacing involves short life: and as the contracted figure suggests a resemblance to the hour-glass, the hour-glass suggests a warning to the contracted figure.

THE HANDS INCREASE IN SIZE.

This restrictive clothing, and the attitudes that it reflects, seems all the more strange when one considers that in the world outside the home, the 1840's was a decade of quite extraordinary innovation and upheaval. In all this, women were supposed to have no part.[248]

> The elevation of the home to mystical levels of sanctification demanded an intensification of the double standard despite marriage on the basis of personal choice and love, not that of parental arrangements. The carefully corsetted married woman (and her forerunner the even more carefully guarded pure, innocent, unmarried daughter) living at home, never going into public places except under escort and then only on the way to another private home, surrounded by orderly rooms, orderly gardens, orderly rituals of etiquette and social precedent was in stark contrast to the woman of the streets, the outcast, the one who had 'fallen' out of the respectable society which could only be based on a community of home, to ... prostitution.[249]

The double standard of morality resulting from the enormous influence of prostitution in the nineteenth century was derived from this same bourgeois code. It was this society - certainly neither the upper class nor the common people - that put the angel in the house; women were economically dependent on the dominant male, so many of them accepted the angel-role, delicate, tender, comforting and sexually undemanding, that he offered them. Dr William Acton, accepted authority on sex in mid-Victorian England, reinforced this stereotype by stating that married women had no wish to be treated on the footing of a mistress. Women were now divided into two types: the modest middle class wives, all those household angels, and the sexual demons, the mistresses who delighted to waste a man's time and energy.[250] Sex was unmentionable in the bourgeois home; this was part of a long tradition of delicacy about behaviour which was, and is, highly personal:

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248 Information on costuming from Laver 1986, p 172.

249 Davidoff in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, pp 156 & 157

250 This discussion on the 'angel in the house' from Priestley 1974, p 33

97

Storytelling painters shocked and enthralled the Victorian middle class, who were highly sensitive to sexual frailty, domestic shame and 'fates worse than death'.

96. The first of three studies of a faithless wife by Augustus Egg, 1858.
97. *The Outcast* by Richard Redgrave, 1851, illustrates the moral code of the time, and the absolute authority of the male head of the household over everyone in that family.
98. Depravity at the Victoria Saloon in Catherine Street off the Strand in 1848.

96

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> Behind the early Victorian family, and essential for the maintenance of its facade, was the great underworld of prostitution ... It is in relationship to this underworld of prostitution and crime that the middle class concepts of respectability, purity and prudery become so meaningful. They were fences erected by a superior social class to mark itself off from, and to protect itself against, an inferior culture. The patterns of poverty could not be allowed to undermine the patterns of prosperity.[251]

Chesney, in his book *The Victorian Underworld*, supplies additional detail. As far as men were concerned, the stress on propriety and formality and the prudish sexual inhibitions of ordinary society encouraged sexual encounters that offered unbuttoned casualness, and could be kept right apart from their ordinary daylight lives. Despite its risks and penalties, "prostitution was, materially, an attractive trade for a girl who could get on top of the competition. Indeed, with the exception of the stage, it was the only one in which a woman without capital could reasonably hope to earn a substantial living by her own efforts."[252] George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, 1893, is concerned with these double standards and makes precisely this point.[253] The London areas round the Haymarket and Leicester Square were not only renowned for theatrical entertainment, they were "the great national centre of prostitution."[254]

> Nothing formed so close a bond between the underworld and respectable society as prostitution. By modern standards the importance of commercial sex in Victorian life seems extraordinary; and what was so striking was not just the number of prostitutes in a society that has come to be a byword for sexual repression, but the blatancy with which they carried on their trade, even in the heart of fashionable London.
>
> The porticoes of the main theatres, and the neighbouring pavements, were the most celebrated whore's paradise in the country, while inside the theatres themselves the saloons and passages were a favourite stamping ground for high class prostitutes. The tangle of streets and alleys at the upper end of the Haymarket ... was the core of the whole complex, where rouge-caked drabs, unshaven bullies and prize-ring touts, bawds, swells in starched fronts and opera hats and elegant women in yards of watered silk, were to be seen cheek by jowl.[255]

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251 Harrison 1988, p 121

252 Chesney 1976, p 396

253 I am indebted to Gary Gordon for this observation.

254 Chesney 1976, p 396

255 Chesney 1976, pp 363 & 364

This seems an astonishing environment to emerge into after a performance of *La Sylphide*, *Giselle* or *Pas de Quatre*. One must realise that, in addition to adult men and women, baby farming and child prostitution were rife; virgins (real and simulated) were particularly popular, as sex with a virgin was supposed to cure venereal diseases:

> In London the openness with which the business was carried on was astonishing ... Especially about the Haymarket, but also in parts of the City and elsewhere, little creatures in petticoats could be seen pursuing male pedestrians, plucking at their elbows and trying to excite their interest by all sorts of lewd remarks.[256]

As the notion of middle class respectability became increasingly fashionable, prostitution became somewhat less blatant. In 1842, for example, actor/manager Macready was able to exclude prostitutes from Drury Lane Theatre.

What is vitally important to note here is that this was not only sex dominance, it was also strongly class related:

> One of the many hypocrisies of Victorian conservative thought was its typification of woman as a frail, delicate and decorative creature, and its simultaneous tolerance of, and indeed dependence on, the exploitation of vast numbers of women in every kind of arduous and degrading work, from coal-mining to prostitution.[257]

The dislocation of modern industry, the rapid increase in population, the herding of the population into towns, dramatized class antagonisms and forced the condition of the working classes on to the attention of the propertied class as a mass of documentary evidence reveals. These revelations shattered middle class complacency and, as was discussed in Chapter One, aroused the reforming zeal of Evangelical and Utilitarian philanthropists. Evangelicalism sanctified the family, along with piousness, industriousness and obedience, as "the main bulwarks against revolution. The Victorian ideal of womanhood originated in this counter-revolutionary ideology. The woman, as wife and

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256 Chesney 1976, p 387

257 Thompson in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, p 112

VICTORIAN PHOTOGRAPHS: IMAGES OF CHILD PROSTITUTES, probably intended for under-the-counter distribution, from *Victorian Children* by Graham Ovenden and Robert Melville (London: Academy Editions, 1972)
Top Left. Anon. Child Prostitute. 1871. A disinterested note on the reverse of the photograph reads: "Mary Simpson a common prostitute age 10 or 11 year. She has been known as Mrs Berry for at least two years. She is four months with child."
Bottom left. John Allison Spence. Street child, 1851
Top and Bottom right. From an album assembled by J. T. Withe in 1847, containing many explicitly erotic scenes with children. The lean and ravaged little girl with the huge head of hair has already been abused too frequently to be of much use to a brothel keeper.

"It rarely occurs that one so young escapes contamination; and it is a fact that numbers of these youthful victims imbibe disease within a week or two of their seduction. They are then sent to one of the hospitals under a fictitious name by their keepers, or unfeelingly turned into the streets to perish..."

Henry Mayhew *London Labour and the London Poor.*

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101

Images of nineteenth century working class women:

99. "Well Sir! And pray what are you looking at?" is the caption to this print of a mid-Victorian under-housemaid, who worked a sixteen hour day and kept the steps of houses shining and oiled the wheels of society for a wage of nine pounds a year.

100. Mineworkers at an ironworks in South Wales, 1865. Women were employed underground in mines until 1862. The hours of labour of children in the mines was not regulated until 1872.

101. A moving photograph of a destitute woman, 1877, who slept on the stone steps of a workhouse, and spent the day looking after babies in return for a cup of tea and some bread.

mother, was the pivot of the family, and consequently the guardian of all Christian and domestic virtues."[258]

The essential problem, the reality behind this value-system, was the need to contain female sexuality for procreation only within marriage. One of the most significant investigations into male control of the female body in urban secular capitalist society, is a modern study by sociologist Bryan Turner, in *The Body and Society*, 1984. "... any sociology of the body involves a discussion of social control and any discussion of social control must consider the control of women's bodies by men under a system of patriarchy."[259] He discusses how control of female sexuality in pre-modern societies has been closely tied up with the distribution of property under a system of primogeniture. In feudal societies a woman's place was next to the hearth with her master's progeny; legitimate sexuality was promoted and separated from desire. Our attitude to the body in the west is in part a reflection of the Christian attitude to the body as the location of sinful desire and appetite and irrationality. The dual concept of Eve, the harlot (the cause of all our woe), and Mary, the pure mother (the source of spiritual power) is part of Catholic morality, which aimed to repress pleasure in the interest of reproduction, and to subordinate passion to reason in the interest of social stability. The resultant duality as a crucial characteristic of nineteenth century society has been an important theme in this investigation:

> The legacy of both Christianity and industrialism is the prominence of bi-polar oppositions in thought and culture between the body and the soul, the body and the mind, matter and spirit, reason and desire.
>
> Prior to the matrimonial causes act of the late nineteenth century, on entry into marriage women were no longer legal persons ... It would be possible to regard feminism as a movement to establish citizenship for women which followed socialism as an attempt to secure citizenship for working class men.[260]

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258 Alexander in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, pp 60 & 61. In his television series, *America*, Alistair Cooke paid tribute to precisely these qualities in pioneering nineteenth century American wives, as the crucial factor in civilizing the 'wild' West.

259 Turner 1984, pp 2 & 3

260 Turner 1984, p 113

102. The woman as the guardian of all Christian and domestic virtues within the home, while the man's activity centres outside the sanctuary of the home. *Letter from Papa* by Frederick Goodall, c 1855.

The arrival of a new baby was often an annual event in the Victorian home.

103. *Family Portrait*, 1880, middle class home.

104. *The latest arrival*, c 1855 - 60, working class home.

Turner includes an interesting discussion on the relationship between female illness and this attitude to female sexuality. Female 'hysteria' was strongly prevalent in the nineteenth century. The name is derived from the Greek word *hystera* meaning womb, and there is a link with ancient Egyptian medicine where the womb was thought to dry up unless regularly employed; marriage and many children were therefore the favoured solution to hysteria. And the implication is that spinsters were inevitably perpetually hysterical. Historically, hysteria and melancholy were not simply conditions of women, but especially of middle class women. "Hysteria was a metaphor of the social subordination of women ... the illnesses of women have one important thing in common - they are at least sociologically, products of dependency."[261]

It is no wonder that the Romantics so adored fashionably pale sickly anaemic girls. *Giselle* and the *Dame aux Camélias*, Violetta in *La Traviata* and Mimi in *La Boheme* were all symbols of popular taste.

> Modern females have discarded the crippling clothing restrictions of previous generations, but they have replaced the old tyranny with a new one: the rigid diet.[262]

It appears that the vogue for slimness, which is so much a part of the modern Western view of beauty, may have begun with the Romantic ballerina. This is certainly in contrast to the accepted Victorian ideal; later in the century, the heroine of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* is referred to as both plump and pleasing. Many critics of the day shared this view. We have noted Levinson's

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261 Turner 1984, p 113

> There is considerable discussion on the modern, young, middle class female phenomenon of anorexia, which can be perceived in terms of a struggle within the middle class family where over-protected daughters seek greater control over their bodies and their lives. Corsets, jogging and anorexia have one important medical side-effect, that they suppress menstruation. Ballerinas, as a subculture, are commonly anorexic.(pp 183 to 5)

262 Morris 1987, p 192

views on Marie Taglioni, whose "anatomy violates all our preconceived ideas of feminine beauty."[263] Théophile Gautier also strongly disapproved of 'anatomical skinniness', and he praised Fanny Elssler's rounded well-shaped arms in comparison with her fellow ballerinas whose frightful thin arms looked like "lobster claws dabbled in wet-white".[264] Gautier's critiques are full of complaints about dancers as thin as lizards that have been fasting for six months, whose swirling arms and legs make them look like spiders disturbed in their webs, and whose necks and chests consist of tendons stretched to breaking point.[265]

> *Figaro*, that witty journal of shattering truths, declares that Mlle. Fitzjames would be well cast as an asparagus in a ballet of vegetables ... the very sight of such lack of flesh is most painful. It should never be forgotten that the principal quality required of a dancer is beauty. There is no excuse for not being beautiful, and it is permissable to reproach her for her ugliness just as one may criticize an actress for faulty delivery. Dancing is nothing more than the art of displaying elegant and correctly proportioned bodies in various positions favourable to the development of line. It is essential for a dancer to have a body which, if not perfect, is at least graceful. Mlle. Fitzjames has no body at all. She would not even be substantial enough for ghost parts, for she is as diaphanous as the horn of a lantern, and the ballet girls bobbing about behind her show through her completely.[266]

Of significance here is Gautier's ruthless insistence that his Victorian concept of beauty is an essential of his dance aesthetic and the sense experience it offers. While one cannot help sympathizing with the unfortunate Louise Fitzjames, who was undoubtedly born ahead of her time, it is interesting to note that the thin look was current among dancers long before the advent of George Balanchine.[267]

An interesting result of the reduced status of male dancers was the phenomenon of ballerina's taking male roles *en travesti*, which revealed about as much of the female figure as could decently be

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263 Levinson in Steinberg 1980, p 72

264 Guest 1986, p 23

265 Guest 1986, p 6

266 Guest 1986, p 29. A sobering thought in this witty discussion. Are these ballet girls hungry? Can they afford food? The letters on page 91 seem to indicate otherwise.

267 Au in Dorris & Anderson 1988, p 124

105. Lithograph by Caboch Gregoire. "*Figaro*, that witty journal of shattering truths, declares that Mlle. Fitzjames would be well cast as an asparagus in a ballet of vegetables ... the very sight of such lack of flesh is most painful." (Théophile Gautier)

106. The tightly corsetted plump and pleasing, popular female body image in the nineteenth century, revealed in this painting of the *corps de ballet* in the Tarentella from *l'Etoile de Messine*, Paris, 1861.

105

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permitted at the time. It has been suggested that the development of the danseuse *en travesti* eliminated the male danseur, the only remaining in-house obstacle in the social class and *bordello* politics in the theatre.[268] In his article *The Sexuality of Pantomime*, David Mayer says that pantomime (like ballet and the circus) was one of the few genteel middle class entertainments where the configurations of a woman's body, clothed in tunic and fleshings, could be observed by the whole family without shame or guilt.[269] The breeches part had been a well-established convention since the Restoration, and appeared in pantomime from about 1815.[270] In these roles the thin or plump female body seems also to have been an issue. The first women to be cast in these breeches roles were rather androgynous in shape. Oil portraits and music covers show Miss Poole, who was fifteen in 1831, as sexually ambiguous, pretty rather than provocative. Twenty years later the fashion in principal boys had changed. The women cast were more mature and riper in appearance, with tiny waists and substantial breasts, hips, thighs and buttocks.[271]

In a modern study from the perspective of the Rights of Women, Ann Daly has published a highly critical and challenging article on the Balanchine ballerina in which she focuses on the issues surrounding the ballerina as a cultural icon of femininity; this article indicates that some of the controversies surrounding the image of the ballerina discussed in this chapter have yet to be solved to everyone's satisfaction. Daly states that Balanchine's idealized woman has patriarchal foundations; and certainly his statement, "I'm a man ... The woman's function is to fascinate men", places him in

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268 Hanna 1988, p 126

269 Mayer in *Theatre Quarterly* 1974, p 56

270 In the ballet the fashion for *danseuse en travesti* was related to a contemporary fascination with the concept of the hermaphrodite:

> "In addition to the Spanish element and the *cachucha*, *Le Diable boiteux* thrilled and appealed to audiences because for half the ballet Elssler appeared disguised as an officer. Even if the Romantics had rejected male dancing, they still found something tempting, almost diabolical, in the idea of toying with the transition between the two sexes. The concept of the hermaphrodite fascinated the Romantics and was treated in several works of French literature at the beginning of the 1830's" (Aschengreen in *Dance Perspectives* 1974, p 22)

271 Mayer in *Theatre Quarterly* 1974, p 61

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107. *The Corset Seller*, an engraving of about 1830 showing a long corset fastened in front.

108. The pubescent principal boy, rather androgynous in shape: Eliza Poole as Joseph the Miller's son in *Puss in Boots*, Covent Garden, 1832. The dame is a witch.

109. The mature, ripe appearance of the later 'principal boy', with an exaggerated hour-glass figure.

a similar category as Gautier in his attitude to female dancers. An iconographic hangover from the nineteenth century, the Balanchine ballerina now serves as a powerful but regressive model in a social milieu where women are struggling to claim their own voices. Both the Romantic ballerina and the Balanchine ballerina were seen as dominant because they were worshipped and celebrated. However, this myth has now been debunked. The Romantic ballet belonged only superficially to the ballerina; it was an expression of masculine society's desires. Although *La Sylphide* and *Giselle* are named for the female lead characters, the heroes bear the problems and make the choices. The dilemma's are theirs; they act, while the heroines are acted upon. The paradox is noted in which the Romantic ballerina is adored while occupying a low status in the social order; the female, who was elevated to the position of a goddess, was demeaned to the status of a possession or a sexual object. This concept relates to the actual choreography: By arranging and rearranging the ballerina's body, the man (first the choreographer, then the partner, and voyeuristically the male spectator) creates the beauty he longs for.[272]

An article in *Dance Research* entitled "Spontaneity and Control" examines this concept of the male watcher in relation to the Romantic aesthetic:

> A characteristic Romantic experience is that of watching from the outside while desiring reabsorption. Therefore, an essential paradox of Romanticism is that of the mind longing to be like the body, but in longing only confirmed in its difference.
>
> Contemplating dance, from a distance, is thus an exemplary Romantic activity. The watcher admires, from a detached vantage point, what is apparently a realisation of the complete integrity of mind and body ... This inevitably coincides with the ubiquitous and pervasive cultural idea of woman as in a more natural, less estranged condition than man, being less self-conscious, less fitted for intellectual abstraction.
>
> The dancer is a woman, the watcher is a man.
>
> What the woman dancer symbolizes then, is the self wholly integrated with nature. Dance means freedom, in that the movements of the body are continuous with those of nature ... women were seen as instinctive and subject to the moods of Nature rather than exercising the control of reason.[273]

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272 Daly in *Drama Review* 1987, pp 8 to 21 Daly notes that the ethereal look is not an anatomical given. Many aspiring ballerinas practically starve themselves to achieve the ballerina image, turning into anorexics and bulimics in the process. (p 17)

273 Scanlon & Kerridge in *Dance Research* 1988, pp 32 & 33

The Romantic experience involves encountering the Infinite, but as this is strictly beyond the scope of the human mind, there exists a constant threat of chaos. Spontaneity might dance itself into chaos and exhaustion. Dance, beauty and freedom were beguiling and intoxicating; for the nineteenth century male onlooker the female dancer was a source of temptation and danger, in the ancient tradition of Salome and Helen of Troy.[274]

It is of importance to note, when discussing actresses and dancers in the nineteenth century, that 'actress' was a common police-court euphemism for 'tart'.[275] During Fanny Elssler's American tour, the social prejudice against the theatrical profession was so ingrained that many people who met Fanny were astonished to discover how refined she was. Fanny Cerrito, with her very respectable middle class background, was held in much greater esteem than most of her sister artistes. Lady Dorothy Neville remembers both Taglioni and Cerrito in her memoires: "Taglioni, of course, was not generally received", but she did meet her once at a party. Her reaction to Cerrito was much warmer: "I was introduced to this famous dancer, who looked very pretty and demure and made an excellent impression on everyone."[276] In general, as has been noted, young female dancers on the public stage were a source of sexual titillation and even gratification, and the term 'Ballet girl' had negative connotations until the twentieth century. For poor girls dancing was an avenue of social mobility, an alternative to factory, sweat shop, agriculture and domestic service. Certainly talented women who achieved acclaim and wealthy admirers were envied by respectable wives, who were often sexually cowered and suffered the burden and hazards of annual pregnancies. "But respected, in the sense of the dominant culture's view of the proper female role, dancers were not. Ballerinas were branded by the stigma of working class origins and sexual impropriety."[277]

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[274] Scanlon & Kerridge in *Dance Research* 1988, pp 36 to 41 provides further detail.

[275] Chesney 1976, p 410

[276] Guest 1974, pp 96 & 87

[277] Hanna 1988, pp 124 & 125

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110. Male costume, which emphasized the man's dignity and bourgeois prosperity as a 'pillar of society'. Fashion plate, 1849.

111. A satirical drawing by Cruikshank of the effects of female emancipation. Agitation for various womens' rights grew in strength and effectiveness during the nineteenth century.

112. Paul Gavarni *In the Wings*. An entirely unromantic interview which captures the moral climate of the time. The ballet girl's gauzy skirt reveals everything of her limbs, and we may assume that the gentleman's interest is not only in her dancing.

> Hobsbawm comments on "the rising social status of the stage, which was eventually to produce ... the linked phenomenon of the knighted actor and the nobleman marrying a chorus girl. Even in the post-Napoleonic period they had already produced the characteristic phenomenon of the idolized singer (eg. Jenny Lind) or dancer (eg. Fanny Elssler) and deified concert pianist (eg. Paganini or Franz Liszt)[278]

Several artists and personalities of the day reacted vehemently to the prevailing attitude to women. As one would expect, the radical visionary William Blake made an early contribution. In his earlier prophetic works Blake was inspired by current affairs: a radical in politics, he celebrated the independence of the American colonies and the French Revolution, and in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, 1793, he denounced the subordination of women.[279] Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft was one of a group of radicals, which included William Blake, whose hopes of the French Revolution included freedom for women in society, and especially freedom from subordination in marriage. In 1792 she published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* which is one of the milestones in the history of feminism.[280] Mary Wollstonecraft felt strongly that gallantry was mere condescension, a way of keeping inferiors happy. Contemporary women were at once protected and deprived, idolized and despised:

> Never properly educated and insulated from the real world, they rarely think - and feel very little either. Rather, they learn to arouse feelings in others, for it is only through their address to excite emotion in men that pleasure and power are to be obtained. All possibility of individuality is lost; all women are to be levelled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance. And with so much importance placed on externals, seeming is more important than being, and a woman must always playact at being a woman. The most impeccably feminine woman is in a sense the most masculine, for she consumes her life in fulfilling male fantasies. She exists only in and for male admiration.[281]

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[278] Hobsbawm 1988, p 232

[279] Lamont in Rogers 1987, p 283

[280] Lamont in Rogers 1987, p 316

[281] Wollstonecraft in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, p 317

John Stuart Mill, a pillar of the Liberal party, was described as eccentric only in his desire to extend "incorporation to the half of the population whom politics ignored - women.", whose slow progress to civil and legal equality started to accelerate during the 1850's.[282] John Stuart Mill's essay *The Subjugation of Women*, 1869, was written at the height of Victorian repression.[283] Painters too, were sympathetic. Delacroix painted his *Algerian Women in their Apartment* in 1834, two years after *La Sylphide* opened in Paris. "Baudelaire recognised in them a thoroughly contemporary claustrophobia: that of the nineteenth century Parisienne pent up in her bourgeois domesticity."[284]

And choreographers also made a contribution. In general, women's ballet roles did not depict independent women but untouchable illusive sylphs, vengeful Wilis who condemned the unfaithful male to dance to death, or earthy sexy peasants. Perhaps the role of sylph symbolized the idealization of the female as 'lady' in compensation for middle class women's loss of a key economic role in the family with the onset of the industrial revolution. There was certainly some awareness among choreographers and librettists of problems inherent in the role of women in contemporary society. A number of ballets seem to reflect this interest in female emancipation, although the subject was not always taken particularly seriously. Even Marie Taglioni, usually the incarnation of feminine spirituality, also appeared in martial array in ballets like *La Révolte au Sérail*, 1833 (the title was changed from *La Révolte des Femmes au Sérail* at the last minute) and *Brézilia*, 1835. I was interested to discover in the *Royal Opera House* Archives, Covent Garden, a number of playbills advertising *The Revolt of the Harum*, which seemed to have been tremendously popular in London in the 1830s. It is described as a 'Grand Fairy Ballet', and in 1835 the programme included an item entitled, intriguingly, the "Grand Evolutions of the Female Army":

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282 Morgan 1985, p 416

283 "... he had a clear perspective on the argument that maddened the earlier writers, that women's characteristics and social status were 'natural': 'what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing - the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others, and, so true is it that unnatural generally means only uncustomary, and that everything which is usual appears natural, that the subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally feels unnatural.'" (Mitchell in Mitchell & Oakley 1986, pp 393 & 394)

284 Vaughan 1988, p 253 [Plate No. 113]

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113. Delacroix *Algerian Women in their Apartment*, 1834. "Baudelaire recognised in them a thoroughly contemporary claustrophobia: that of the nineteenth century Parisienne pent up in her bourgeois domesticity." (Vaughan)

114. The ideal of the young Victorian woman - beautiful but demure, domestic in her interests but romantic in her environment - is stylishly represented in this portrait by Sir Francis Grant, c1850.

115. (overleaf) Alfred Edward Chalon. *At the Opera* Engraving, 1839. The nineteenth century idealized middle class images of the ballerina on stage and the young woman in the box.

> ... certain works of the period gave the sociologist or psychologist much to ponder. Take Filippo Taglioni's *The Revolt of the Harum*. It depicted harum wives, aided by the Spirit of Womankind disguised as a slave, rebelling against their oppressors - making it possibly the first ballet about the emancipation of women. Equally curious items are *Gemma*, a ballet about an evil hypnotist's attempt to seduce a girl through mesmeric suggestions, and *La Volière*, the story of an older woman, unlucky in love, who tries to raise her younger sister in total ignorance of the male sex. When at last a man does appear, she tells the girl he is a kind of bird and must be caged. Interestingly enough, both works were choreographed by women.[285]

I have been unable to discover much of interest about *Gemma* to date, but *La Volière* made quite an impact when first performed in 1838 by Fanny and Thérese Elssler, who was also the choreographer. The dancing of the two sisters was highly praised, particularly by Gautier, who took the absence of male dancing as a sign of good taste. But the scenario by Scribe was described as silly and insipid, naive and boring, because, with a male as a bird caged by females, it inverted the conventional sex roles:

> The story of the ballet was an inverted version of La Fontaine's fable, *Les Oies du Frere Philippe*, which was itself based on Boccaccio. As Janin suggested, it might have made more sense if the audience had been given the spectacle of a man taking a pretty girl for a bird ...[286]

Guest describes the scenario as silly by any standards, and the inverted roles probably only happened by chance because of the availability and popularity of several good female dancers; but it is of interest in this discussion both because the choreographer was a woman, and because the contemporary reactions to the ballet illustrate how strong the stereotypical sex roles were in that particular society.

In his modern anthropological study, Spencer notes that "the dance reflects powerful social forces that demand some explanation."[287] The human body is common to us all; only our social condition varies. Mary Douglas investigates the body as a symbolic medium which is used to express

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285 Anderson 1974, p 44

286 Guest 1980, pp 168 & 169
(Plate No 50 shows Fanny Elssler in this ballet.)

287 Spencer 1985, p 206

particular patterns of social relationships. It is essential to understand what bodily symbols are dominating the social life. The attitude to the female body in the nineteenth century is a particularly strong example of Douglas's premise that the "social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived ... As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression. The forms it adopts in movement and repose express social pressures in manifold ways."[288] The illustrations in this thesis give numerous examples, particularly of the modest demure middle class 'angels in the house', and their heightened form in theatrical dance, the Romantic ballerina.

The nineteenth century middle class attitudes to sex, gender and class that produced the twin concepts of the 'angel in the house' and the 'priestess' on the stage meant that contemporary ballet critics had great difficulty in expressing the middle road between whore and saint, between Eve and Mary. Descriptions such as 'chaste and refined seductiveness' and 'indefinable provocativeness, but a modest provocativeness withal' [289] went at least some way towards expressing the reality; what J B Priestley calls "Eros, as the symbol of natural, loving sexuality."[290]

Judith Lynne Hanna provides a useful perspective on the marginality of dance since the French and Industrial Revolutions when, amongst the sociopolitical elite, activities of the body became associated with sexual arousal, moral laxity and impediments to economic productivity:

> Already implicated in sin and deemed the enemy of spiritual life, the body became the foe of economic productivity. (Kern 1975) Because the emergent French bourgeoisie attributed the collapse of the French monarchy in part to moral laxity, they transformed the body from an instrument of pleasure to an instrument of production. In this way the middle class could protect its power. Self-control meant control of the body and, further, control of the people who were primarily of the body. Similar attitudes developed with the rise of Protestantism and the machine age in England. Consequently, the dance profession received low financial remuneration and career interest from dominant culture males.[291]

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288 Douglas 1970, p 65

289 Guest 1980, pp 209 & 211

290 Priestley 1974, p 37

291 Hanna 1988, pp 123 & 124

It becomes obvious that middle class male values and attitudes and restricted view of the body were also increasingly in control of developments in the art of ballet. Male choreographers, like Perrot and Taglioni, ensured that the dancer's image was adapted and manipulated to suit contemporary sex and gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures. Men were virtually excluded as dancers and male facilitators like Véron, and to a lesser extent, Lumley, ensured that the ballerina's function was the fulfilling of male sexual fantasies. Only occasionally, under the influence of the Romantic aesthetic, did certain ballets transcend this bourgeois dominance to give the period its title 'golden age'. These exceptional ballets have been discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

By midcentury the vogue for ballet had passed; there was a decline both in quality of performance and interest in dance. Opera became the fashion and Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale, became the new object of worship. Dance was to be banished to music halls and spectacles in operas, until Diaghilev reinstated ballet at the centre of artistic life early this century:

> As the mid-century approached ... the Romantic ballet began to lose its impact ... the ballet seemed to have abandoned the Romantic period's poetry and expressiveness - its appeal to the heart - in favour of a more superficial concentration on technical virtuosity and visual spectacle ... Ballet seems to have lost its creative momentum, and the public had ceased to regard it as a serious art form ... It was no longer a mainstream art, as it had been in the 1830's and 1840's, it had lost touch with the times.[292]

The growing ascendancy of the middle classes made a dual contribution to this decline. Firstly, as has been noted, the increased dominance of the bourgeoisie gradually reduced the arts to marginal status; "in the centres of advancing bourgeois society, the arts as a whole took second place to science ... Science and technology were the muses of the bourgeoisie."[293] Secondly, the

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292 Au 1988, p 57 to 59

293 Hobsbawm 1988, pp 329 & 330
The dominance of the spoken language is part of this concept; "If verbal language ... contributed substantially to the evolutionary success of early man, it may now be a part of the over-specialization of industrial man ... Our logocentricity ... may have caused us to neglect the expressive resources of the body as a totality, to crush certain

relationship between the Romantic movement in the arts and the bourgeoisie needs to be considered briefly. Romanticism, like all revolutions, was an extreme movement; it was in essence against the middle. Once bourgeois society had triumphed in the political and industrial revolutions, stability and material prosperity became their *raison d'etre*, and Romanticism gradually became their enemy. A "middle class grown rich through commerce and industry ... which discovered opera and ballet and patronized theatres, brought with it a wave of materialism, prudishness and hypocrisy ... Rebelling against smugness and absolute forms, young artists celebrated feeling and passion."[294] The relationship of the artist to society had also changed, as aristocratic patronage declined. The flourishing 'literary market' gave the artist independence and raised social status, but the artist and his work became, at the same time, just another commodity on the open market, subject to popular tastes and the laws of supply and demand. Gradually Romantic artists came to distrust popular taste, especially that of the middle class. A continuous warfare developed between creative minds and an ever more consumer-oriented society with superficial tastes. Like other artists of the time, Théophile Gautier hated the bourgeoisie with an articulate fury. He desperately wanted to escape from bourgeois values; on 1 January 1840 he wrote in *La Presse*:

> The Opéra is the only refuge for poetry and fantasy. It is the unique place where the verse is still perceived, the last sanctuary of the gods, sylphides, nymphs, princes and tragic princesses; where uncouth reality is not admitted; it is a little world blazing in its gold light ... there is nothing of the actual, nothing of the real, one is in an enchanted world. The word is sung, the steps are *pirouettes* ... an evening at the Opéra rests you from real life and consoles you for the number of frightful bourgeoisie in overcoats you are obliged to see during the day.[295]

Hobsbawm has noted that, through their work, artists expressed a general dissatisfaction with the kind of society emerging out of the political and industrial revolutions. The horrors of respectable bourgeois middle age haunted these artists - marriage, career, and a descent into pot-bellied

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> potentials within ourselves in the same way as we have crushed certain other cultures that appeared to us to be deficient in civilizing values."
> (Benthall & Polhemus 1975, pp 6 & 7)

294 Anderson 1974, p 43

295 Sorell 1986, p 285

116. *Ramsgate Sands* by William Frith, 1852 - 4. The prosperous and triumphant middle classes, corsetted, crinolined and overdressed, relax at the seaside.

philistinism and soulless bureaucracy. Byron was clear-headed enough to foresee that only an early death was likely to save him from respectable old age.

Bourgeois life was characterized by moderate liberalism and hard-headed materialism; it was decidedly unromantic. But eventually the all-powerful middle class adopted and trivialized Romanticism: it was no longer young, revolutionary, challenging and *avant-garde*; it became middle-aged, conservative, sentimental and comforting:

> Romanticism became comfortably fashionable, on view at the Opéra, available in the shops, visible on every menu and billboard - familiar, unchallenging and unchallenged. The *avant-garde* was now represented by a band of anarchist, bohemian eccentrics ... their aim little more than outraging dullness, scrawling clever, rude graffiti on the walls of decency ... For many others, anxious to forget that since 1789 hundreds of thousands had died that they should have liberty, there were fortunes to be made and trains to be caught.[296]

What has emerged is an image of the Romantic ballerina and of the middle class woman, that are products of the bourgeois materialistic and patriarchal value-system and attitudes of the age, particularly in relation to the female body. The new demure image of the Romantic ballerina as an idealized vision of womanhood, chaste and ethereal, was manipulated by male choreographers, facilitators, critics and audience response to fulfil two functions: the dancer's image was adapted to suit the contemporary attitude to middle and upper class women as chaste domestic undemanding sexually and protected; the more sensual side of the image was subtly promoted to fulfil male sexual fantasies.

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296 Christiansen 1988, p 246
This phenomenon has intriguing South African parallels. At the final performance and awards evening of the *Dance Umbrella* in Johannesburg in March 1990, a group of housewives Spanish-danced their way through the African national anthem. My companions and I were highly embarrassed, but the audience, particularly the black members of the audience, gave them a standing ovation. Conservative bookshops are now openly selling biographies of the Mandelas and interpretations of the Freedom Charter, which I had to smuggle into this country with much trepidation only a couple of years ago. Perhaps the process of adopting and trivializing revolutionary ideals has become a necessary stage in their acceptance and eventual success.

The reality behind these images reveals evidence of sexual and class exploitation and patriarchal structures and control. The dancers, who were mostly from the poorer classes, were to some extent at the mercy of their admirers in the *loge infernale* and the omnibus boxes, and learned to take material advantage of the situation. The middle class women, tightly bound and corsetted and loaded with petticoats in the fashion of the day, were forced to live decorative and useless lives administering to and dominated by the male head of the household, and having no part in the innovations and upheavals in the world outside the home. This image protected bourgeois values and class structures and male dominance by functioning as the guardian of all Christian and domestic virtues and a bulwark against revolution.

The bourgeois moral code was firmly based on the double standard that made prostitution a fact of life. The decorative protected and modest delicacy of ballerina and housewife was totally undermined by the accepted role of working class women, doing arduous and degrading work as prostitutes, domestic servants and mine labourers. The decreased importance and popularity of male dancing was part of the same value-system. As dance became marginal in the technological age of the industrial revolution, the male pillar of the community could not be permitted to disport himself in public. As the woman was regarded as of subservient status, it was proper and fitting for her to function as a subtle representative of male sexual fantasies. Modern studies of the male control of female sexuality and the Christian heritage in terms of gender attitudes, as well as women's illnesses and the vogue for the plump or slim female body, provide interesting additional perspectives to support the argument.

One must conclude, from all this evidence, that the Romantic ballet during its 'golden age' belonged only superficially to the ballerina; it was manipulated by middle class male facilitators into an expression of masculine society's desires and fantasies. These materialistic bourgeois attitudes contributed directly to the decline of the ballet, as they distorted sexuality and the view of the female body, and trivialized Romanticism until it became banal, unchallenging and comfortable.[297]

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[297] See Christiansen 1988, p 246 - 250 for further details

CONCLUSION

An holistic approach to a research project like this implies an imaginative and dynamic involvement with the art form and its complex environment, rooted in academic objectivity. The period is investigated on as broad a front as possible, but the necessary act of selection will inevitably narrow the focus to specific themes and developments that the researcher perceives to be significant. The crucial issue at this stage of the investigation is the examination of the superlative description 'golden age', as applied to the Romantic ballet in Paris and London during the period 1830 to 1850. Was this in fact a 'golden age'? The material examined and discussed in this thesis provides irrefutable evidence of the irony in the use of this evaluative term; the age can only be regarded as 'golden' if the researcher isolates the two great extant ballets, *Les Sylphides* and *Giselle*, from their context and their times, and totally ignores the social, economic and sexual issues, implied and inherent. As Lynn Garafola states, in the preface to her study of the *Ballets Russes* in the early twentieth century, it is imperative that "ballet take heed of the world around it and express a subjective vision";[298] and these two Romantic ballets, together with the *Pas de Quatre*, identify, often unconsciously, the ethos and priorities of the specific time and space in which they were created.[299]

The environment in which this dance form reached its greatest heights was an age of revolution and change. Society was in transition: politically, explosive and insecure with reactionary responses to the threats of revolution and innovation; economically, forging ahead at an unprecedented

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298 Garafola 1989, p xi

299 Although it is not nearly as popular as *Les Sylphides* or *Giselle*, *Pas de Quatre* has been reconstructed this century. As a young child, I have clear impressions of a performance experience, and of asking 'What is the story?' and being told 'There is no story. It's about dancing.' The costumes were identical to the Chalon lithograph, and the impression was one of graciousness, old world charm and femininity. Information on later reconstructions and interpretations of this ballet can be found in Robertson & Hutera 1988, p 23.

pace into the scientific and industrial age; and socially, leaving crises of poverty disease exploitation and overcrowded urban slums in its wake.

The dominant factor emerging from this environment was the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, who gradually entrenched themselves and their middle class values and mediocrity during the course of the nineteenth century. This emergent class played a decisive role in the development of the Romantic ballet in terms of facilitators, choreographers, audience response and prevailing value-system.

The other vital influence was cultural: Romanticism was artistic insurrection against classical restraint; it was characterized by spontaneous emotional responses, subjective imagination and poetic vision. Ballet was completely transformed by Romanticism: as a synaesthesia of painted scenery, music, poetic atmosphere and transformed ballet technique and style, the dance form was ideally suited to express the escapist fantasy and poetry that offered a protest against the sordid and frightening reality of the times. Important contributory factors in the argument are the developments in technology, such as gas lighting, scenic machinery to create illusion and spectacle, and printing and journalism. Innovations in ballet technique and training methods were also ready for the aesthetic fusion and artistic achievements in the Romantic ballet during this period.

The striking contrasts, the wonders and horrors of the age, have been an important theme developed through this investigation, and this duality has provided the essential characterizing image of the times. It is expressed as the central theme in both *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*, and in the ballet technique and dance styles themselves, the spiritual *danse balloneé* of Taglioni contrasting with the sensual *danse tacqueté* of Elssler. I find it particularly interesting that this essential duality is strongly reflected in the two most powerful influences on the ballet. The predominantly negative influence of bourgeois facilitators and audience values, fears and attitudes, which was occasionally counteracted by the decidedly positive effects of the spirit of Romanticism. This dominant aesthetic of the period, together with developments in technology and in the classical ballet technique, enabled the three great

ballets of the age, *La Sylphide*, *Giselle* and *Pas de Quatre*, to transcend the limitations of their times and context as artworks with intrinsic and autonomous value - they were truly golden in a dark and confusing age.

There is little evidence to suggest that the other ballets of the period achieved similar standards, and as the performance experience is no longer available to us, we cannot really comment critically on them. They almost certainly reflected Louis Véron's stated criteria which indulged bourgeois tastes for ballet with visual and sensual appeal. His successor at the Paris Opéra, Henri Duponchel, and Benjamin Lumley, Manager of Her Majesty's Theatre London during the 1840's, were all similarly motivated by box office economics. Lynn Garafola stresses the importance of economic factors when studying an historic period with hindsight.[300] The Romantic ballet did not exist as a rarefied art form in a vacuum of ideal conditions. These companies were not government subsidised; they were financed by the theatre managers as capitalist private enterprises, and the tastes of the audiences were vitally important in their survival and success. Advertising skills were fairly rudimentary at the time; word of mouth attracted audiences to the theatre where social tastes and the ballets themselves had a reciprocal effect on one another. The image of the ballerina set fashions for clothes and hairstyles *a la Taglioni*, and the gracious modest female image was reinforced on stage and in the auditorium. As always, the nature of the audience played a role in defining the social identity, in influencing the artistic identity, and in shaping the ideology of the enterprise.[301]

Powerful social forces and contemporary attitudes to sexuality, gender and class were strongly reflected in the image of the ballerina. The male-dominated society, via the bourgeois theatre managers, predominantly male choreographers and prevailing audience attitudes, ensured that the Romantic ballerina was a heightened theatrical form of the gracious and decorative 'angels in the house'; and the relative state of undress of the diaphanous tutu and the qualities of 'refined seductiveness' and 'modest provocativeness' would covertly fulfil male fantasies and desires. There

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300 Garafola 1989, p xi & xii

301 See Garafola 1989, preface, for further details

are repeated examples of the undoubtedly negative influence of middle class norms and values on the development of ballet during this period. Facilitators like Véron and choreographers like Taglioni were unable to repeat their few artistic successes, because they were incapable of comprehending the exact nature of the exceptional achievements to which they made some, often seemingly unwitting, contribution.

However uninspiring the contribution of the bourgeoisie, there is no doubt that the *ballet poetique* was wonderfully in tune with the contemporary Romantic asethetic: subjective emotional lyrical sensual, aspiring towards the infinite as the ballerina *en pointe* extends her personal space. This period witnessed the evolution of a lyrical and poetic ballet style, and an airily delicate image of the ballerina, which remain popular to this day. And danger and erotic challenge lurked just beneath the surface[302] It was an expression of humanity's dual nature reflected in the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, ideals and reality; and it echoed the mood of the time, yearning for the unattainable, nostalgia for past glories, resignation and infinite longing to be transported into a world of colour and fantasy, away from grimy and frightening reality and daily trivia. The ballet's interaction with its times was dynamic and infinitely subtle, and an essential element in its appeal as popular theatre. For the unique quality of this art form, the secret of its success, was the astonishing ability of the Romantic ballet to appeal on several different levels at once. It was almost Shakespearean in its range of appeal and broad cultural context; from exotic spectacle to escapist fantasy, from pretty girls' legs to poetic heights of Romantic lyricism, the full range of audience needs and expectations were equally satisfied.

And this apparent universality of appeal was to survive national boundaries and changing times into the present. The thought occurs to me that the popularity of the nineteenth century classics, and their acceptability as appropriate forms of art, may provide a comment on our own society, which is still patriarchal, capitalist, industrial, rational, with similar philistine bourgeois

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302 This key element of erotic danger and challenge no longer applies, so there is a slight imbalance in our perception of the Romantic ballet, towards the lyrical beauty of the genre, and away from the nightmarish and dangerous qualities that would have had an equal, if covert, impact in its day.

businessmen and technocrats in control of events in the western world. Perhaps an indictment of our own values and attitudes is indicated here. Have we progressed as far as we would like to believe, since the nineteenth century? This might suggest a further area of study concentrating on the reasons for the popularity of the Romantic ballet today. In the first half of the nineteenth century in Paris and London, an age dark with political economic and social confusion, the great extant Romantic ballets stand out as enduring and 'golden' examples of the Romantic aesthetic; and they reveal the many subtle nuances and the essential duality in the social, sexual, gender and class issues of the day.

AFTERWORD

The aim of this afterword is to consider how this investigation may function as a stimulus for ongoing research in South Africa during the 1990's, and to suggest possible areas of exploration. I would like to begin by commenting briefly on the use of the term 'ethnic', and on the marginality of dance.

Current dance scholarship has pointed out the glaring ethnocentricity in many dance histories; the term 'ethnic' is applied disparagingly, apologetically or patronizingly to minority and peasant cultures, which seem far removed from the complex and sophisticated western dance heritage. To these writers 'non-western' becomes as secondary as 'non-European' and as colourless as 'non-green'. This prejudice denies the equal right to a valid existence of cultures other than one's own. Anthropologists suggest that the concept of ethnicity should be applied objectively to all dance, including western forms,for all forms of dance inevitably reflect the cultural traditions within which they developed. To the white English-speaking South African an understanding and acceptance of the broad objective concept of ethnicity is extremely important. A detailed examination of the implications avoids lip-service liberalism by demanding an honest acknowledgement of the basic and equal right of every culture to an autonomous and valued existence. In theatre dance, this usage of the term 'ethnicity' also reinforces the relationship between the dance product and the individual choreographer interacting with his or her sociocultural environment.

> It must be true that to teach or practise the art of Dance without an awareness of its wider and deeper roles in various cultures must diminish its value in society and in education. In a multi-ethnic society this may be divisive. Certainly the culture is impoverished.[303]

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303 Murphy in *8th Commonwealth Conference* p 99

D. Gordon, in his paper on achieving a multicultural education, offers this suggestion as a possible starting point:

> A shift in the purpose of education, from solely transmitting culture and knowledge to the next generation, to equipping the individual to live in thought in the wider world.[304]

There is an urgent need in this country for education to begin to move in this radically different direction, and dance, as a near universal phenomenon that is also ethnocentric and culture-specific,[305] may have a significant role to play.

The recent contribution of sociology and anthropology to dance scholarship becomes of critical importance in tackling the problem of marginality. In modern industrial society the arts are marginal, and dance is a marginal art. Science and technology are the central concepts in Industrial and Post-Industrial Society; "... science (was) the key to the future direction and organisation of society."[306] There are major contributions to dance scholarship to be made, not so much by artists, historians and critics, but by dancer/social scientists. There is some hope that, in this way, dance may be moved from the margins towards the centre of our science-oriented society. In this sense an understanding and acceptance of the concept of ethnicity and all it implies, becomes not only useful, but pivotal:

> Anthropology ... suggests that dance can be an important tool in the analysis of society. If that is so, it is not peripheral, but central to the study of society and the education of its citizens.[307]

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304 Gordon in *8th Commonwealth Conference* p 148

305 Grau's terms in *Dance Research* 1983, p 32

306 Kumar 1983, p 26

307 Spencer 1985, p 212

Chapter One of this thesis explores the first industrial revolution in Britain and France and its social consequences and emergent class structures, as part of the context of the Romantic ballet 1830 to 1850. The many parallels between this period and the relationship between the white middle class and black proletariat in South Africa during my adult lifetime, 1960 to 1990, functioned as a stimulus for research into our industrial revolution. This resulted in the parallel and preliminary investigation into the African urban dance form, the gumboot dance, in its political, socio-economic and cultural context on the Reef gold mines, which appears in Appendix B. As I could find no trace of any previous published work in English on African dance forms from South Africa in relation to their specific contexts, this forms a large potential area of ongoing research.

Chapters Two and Three may be extended into an investigation of the classical ballet in South Africa, and I have begun by conducting interviews and distributing questionnaires to ballet experts, and to those culturally involved in South Africa in fields other than classical ballet. Two questionnaires have been compiled: the first asking for comments on the past, present and future of classical ballet in this country; and the second inquiring about Frank Staff's *Raka*, 1967, and its status as an example of the reworking of an elitist European dance form in a South African context. One of the complications with a great Romantic ballet like *Giselle* and most of the old favourites of the classical ballet tradition, is that they seldom respond well to being tampered with or adapted, and one meddles with them at one's peril. *Giselle* is a period piece, a synaesthesia of the Romantic spirit, and any current production must fully comprehend and be totally true to its authenticity of feeling, Romantic mood and poetic reality. This provides a challenge in terms of the precise nature of the contribution that this art form will make in the South Africa of the future. A third questionnaire on *Giselle* asks the ballet community to contribute some ideas in this area.[308]

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[308] The work of the black American classical ballet company, the *Dance Theatre of Harlem*, may be of interest here. I saw an exciting interpretation of the *Firebird* by this company in London (choreography by John Taras, 1982), which successfully transposed the setting of the ballet to tropical Africa; and I believe that an equally well-received reworking of *Giselle* was recently presented in the American South.

> Robertson & Hutera comment on this production in the *Dance Handbook*, 1988: "An intriguing and successful re-interpretation of *Giselle* occurred in 1984 when Arthur Mitchell created an all-black version for his *Dance Theatre of Harlem*. Without modifying the choreography, Mitchell transferred the ballet to the Louisiana plantations

Chapter Four provides a springboard into a study of the different images of the dancing woman in South Africa, and the implications behind the images in terms of sex and gender stereotypes, class and status within each specific culture. Inquiries in questionnaires have also begun the exploration of this field.

We in South Africa, with our combination of first and third world cultures and attitudes, are possibly in a unique position to make a useful contribution to dance scholarship, for there are members of our multicultural society who regard dance as organic and significant to their communities. The fact that dance is independent of language barriers is also a contributory factor in its potential role in the South Africa of the future. The challenge to South Africans in the 1990s is to find an inclusive South Africa identity that encompasses all the cultures and aspirations of the people living here, and the challenge to dance scholars and practitioners is the search for a singularly South African dance form, which may, as David Coplan suggests, be created by a process of syncretism: "the blending of resources from different cultures in order to produce qualitatively new forms in adaptation to changing conditions."[309] The first stage in this process is to counteract the apartness of the past by investigating, comprehending and experiencing the rich variety of cultures that exist in this land. Research into the interrelationships between dance forms and their sociocultural contexts provides one way of achieving this end. The rapid political changes that have begun to occur in 1990 provide a sense of excitement, of purpose, and of urgency.

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and bayous of the 1850's. Here the barrier between Giselle and the Count Albrecht is no longer the traditonal one of peasant and aristocrat, but is based on the elaborate Creole caste systems operating at that time. The *vendange* becomes a sugarcane harvest, the haunted woods of the Rhineland are transformed into the swamps of the Mississipi delta and Giselle emerges from one of the spooky raised mausoleums typical of Louisiana cemeteries. These resonances have provided a new immediacy and meaning for American audiences." (p 22)

[309] Coplan 1985, p 270

APPENDIX A

1. A chronological list of selected Romantic ballets, ballerinas and choreographers referred to in this study, with brief plot summaries of certain ballets and short biographical notes on important contributors.

1789 **La Fille Mal Gardée** Grand Théâtre, Bordeux Choreography: Jean Dauberval

1796 **Flore et Zéphyre** King's Theatre, London
Choreography: Charles Didelot

1831 **Robert le Diable** Paris Opéra, Director Louis Véron

Opera by Meyerbeer featuring the *Ballet of the Nuns* and starring Marie Taglioni as the Abbess Helena

Choreography: Filippo Taglioni
Libretto: Eugene Scribe
Music: Giacomo Meyerbeer
Decor: Pierre Ciceri
Costumes: Lami

The *Ballet of the Nuns* from this opera initiated the Romantic ballet movement. The wicked hero, in search of a talisman that will help him win the princess he desires, comes to the medieval cloister of Sainte-Rosalie where the nuns who violated their vows are buried. They are summoned from their graves, and Helena, their abbess, commands them to wake and wallow in voluptuous pleasure.

1832 **La Sylphide** Paris Opéra, Director Louis Véron (London 1832)

starring Marie Taglioni as the Sylphide

Choreography: Filippo Taglioni
Libretto: Adolphe Nourrit, based on a tale by Charles Nodier
Music: Schnietzhoffer
Decor: Pierre Ciceri
Costumes: Lami

The first act is set in the Scottish countryside. James, a young Scotsman who is engaged to Effie, is attracted by the image of a sylphide. As he is about to place his ring on his fiance's finger the sylphide appears, snatches the ring away, and disappears out of the farmhouse window followed by James. The ethereal second act opens with the witch, Madge, casting a spell over a scarf. James enters, searching for his sylphide. When he finds her in a forest glade with her fellow spirits, the witch gives him a scarf, telling him that it will make the sylphide lose her wings and she will be his forever. When he places the scarf around her shoulders the wings do fall off, but she then dies, and is borne away. While James is left

alone with his grief, Effie's bridal procession passes in the background. She has married his rival.

1836 *La Sylphide* Royal Theatre, Copenhagen

Starring Lucile Grahn as the Sylphide
Choreography: August Bournonville, after Taglioni

1909 *Les Sylphides* Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris

starring Anna Pavlova, Tamarra Karsavina, Vaslav Nijinsky

Choreography: Mikhail Fokine
Music: Frédéric Chopin
Decor and Costumes: Alexandre Benois

1836 **Le Diable boiteux** Paris Opéra, Director Henri Duponchel
(*The Devil on Two Sticks*) (London 1838)

featuring a balleticized Spanish dance, *La Cachucha*, starring Fanny Elssler and based on Le Sage's novel

Choreography: Jean Coralli
Music: Casimir Gide

1841 **Giselle** Paris Opéra, Director Henri Duponchel (London 1843)

starring Carlotta Grisi as Giselle

Choreography: Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot
Libretto: Théophile Gautier and Vernoy Saint-Georges, inspired by Heinrich Heine's *D l'Allemagne* and Victor Hugo's *Orientales*.
Music: Adolphe Adam
Decor: Pierre Ciceri
Costumes: Paul Lorimer

Act One is set in an imaginary Rhineland vineyard. Giselle, a peasant girl who loves to dance, is unaware that her lover, Albrecht, is a Count, and engaged to the aristocratic Bathilde. Albrecht loves Giselle in return, but he arouses the jealousy of the gamekeeper, Hilarion, whose love for Giselle is not returned. At a hunting picnic given by Bathilde's father, Hilarion reveals Albrecht's identity and intended marriage. The shock drives Giselle mad, and she dies. Act Two is set in a moonlit forest glade, where both Hilarion and Albrecht come in turn to worship at Giselle's grave. Hilarion is driven to his death in the lake by the ghostly Wilis, spirits of brides who died before their wedding day. The Queen of the Wilis condemns Albrecht to death, but Giselle saves his life by dancing with him until dawn, when the magic fades and the Wilis must return to their graves.

1844 **La Esmeralda** Her Majesty's Theatre, London, Manager Benjamin Lumley.

starring Carlotta Grisi (toured Europe but not Paris)

Choreography: Jules Perrot, adapted from Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*
Music: Pugni

1845 **Pas de Quatre** Her Majesty's Theatre, London, Manager Benjamin Lumley

starring Marie Taglioni, Carlotta Grisi, Fanny Cerrito and Lucile Grahn

Choreography: Jules Perrot, the first plotless abstract ballet
Music: Pugni

Marie Taglioni (1804 - 1884)

Swedish/Italian dancer, trained by her father into his ideal of the first great Romantic ballerina. Debut in Paris in 1827, her highly individual technique integrated *pointework* into artistic interpretation and enabled her to create an elevated spiritual and poetic new style. She toured extensively in Britain, Europe and Russia.

Fillipo Taglioni (1777 - 1871)

Italian dancer and choreographer, father of Marie. Toured Europe with his family, then dedicated his life to furthering his daughter's career. He created many ballets, including *Ballet of the Nuns* and *La Sylphide*, and was admired by his contemporaries for inaugurating a rigorous training programme for dancers, and a new style characterized by lightness, purity and elevation.

Fanny Elssler (1810 - 1884)

Viennese dancer. In contrast with Taglioni's spirituality, she represented the sensual side of Romanticism. Her *Cachucha* was as famous in its day as Pavlova's *Dying Swan*. She popularized exotic foreign locales and was renowned for her powerful dramatic characterizations. She toured widely in Britain, Europe, Russian and Cuba, and was the first leading ballerina to visit the United States of America.

Jules Perrot (1810 - 1882)

French dancer, choreographer and ballet master, he was regarded as one of the most dramatic and expressive choreographers of the Romantic movement. He partnered Taglioni, and became lover and choreographer to Carlotta Grisi whose dances he created in *Giselle*. He was ballet master at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, under the Management of Benjamin Lumley, from 1842 to 1848, where he made many ballets including *La Esmeralda* and *Pas de Quatre*.

Jean Coralli (1779 - 1854)

Italian dancer and choreographer, appointed resident choreographer at the Paris Opéra in 1831, where he created several ballets including *Le Diable boiteux* for Fanny Elssler and *Giselle*, with Jules Perrot.

Carlotta Grisi (1819 - 1899)

Italian dancer with a long association with Perrot, who created *Giselle* and *La Esmeralda* for her. She danced regularly in Paris, London, Europe and St Petersburg. Gautier said of her that she was possessed of a strength, lightness, suppleness and originality that placed her between Taglioni and Elssler.

Fanny Cerrito (1819 - 1909)

Italian dancer, spirited and skilful, popular leading ballerina at Her Majesty's from 1840 to 1847. She worked throughout Europe, and died in Paris while the *Ballets Russes* were rehearsing their opening performance.

Lucien Petipa (1815 - 1898)

French dancer, choreographer and ballet master. His debût was in *La Sylphide* and he created the role of Albrecht in *Giselle*. He was overshadowed by his brother, the great choreographer *Marius Petipa*, who did important work later in the century in St Petersburg, including the famous *Sleeping Beauty* in 1890.

Lucile Grahn (1819 - 1907)

Danish ballerina who studied with Bournonville; he created his version of *La Sylphide* for her. She toured Britain, Europe and St Petersburg, and later worked in Munich helping Richard Wagner stage some of his operas.

August Bournonville (1805 - 1879)

Danish dancer and choreographer, he and Perrot were the two great choreographers of the Romantic period. His repertory is preserved by the Royal Danish Ballet and he is the only Romantic choreographer whose work has survived in this way. He was unusual in that he retained the importance of the male dancer in his ballets and regarded ballerinas as women rather than idols.

Théophile Gautier (1811 - 1872)

The first true dance critic; he was the most articulate exponent of *l'art pour l'art*. A great poet, novelist and journalist and leader of the late Romantic movement in France, Gautier is the author of some of the greatest dance criticism that we possess, as well as the librettist of several ballets, including the perennially popular *Giselle*.

This biographical information is taken from Koegler 1982, Cohen 1977, Clarke and Crisp 1977, and Sorell 1986.

2 A brief description of the European classical ballet tradition and the artistic heritage of the Romantic ballet.

The word 'ballet' comes from the Italian, *ballare* - to dance, and the form emerged in the extravagant spectacles of the rival princely courts of Renaissance Italy; here song, dance, speech and lavish visual displays were combined to reflect their patron's power, wealth and taste. The court ballet was both entertainment and political propaganda; many arts were combined for maximum impact, and the form was flexible enough to be adapted easily to particular themes, all centred on the policies and preferences of the royal head of state who ruled by divine right.

Most ballet terminology is French and much of its early development took place in France. The fashion was popularized by Catherine de Medici, who appreciated its artistic merit and fully realised its political value. After the death of her husband, Catherine virtually ruled France for thirty years through her three weak sons who were consecutively kings of France. She actually used ballets and other entertainments to distract her sons from affairs of state, thereby consolidating her personal power. She commissioned the first coherent choreographic spectacle, *Ballet Comique de la Royne Louise* in 1581.[310]

The Court ballet reached great heights during the reign of Louis XIV, whose court was a splendid theatrical spectacle. Louis first appeared as the rising sun, *Le Roi Soleil*, at the age of fifteen in *La Ballet de la Nuit*, 1653, and symbolically shed light over the whole kingdom. Louis XIV sought to organise and rationalise the teaching and presentation of music and dance through the foundation of academies, which led to the transfer of much dance activity to the professional stage. Lully and Beauchamp were the King's dancing masters; Richelieu's Palais Royale, with its Italian proscenium arch stage, provided the setting that led to the development of the turn out of knee and foot, which became the basis of the five ballet positions recorded by Beauchamp.

The first formal recognition of ballet as an independent art form was Diderot's definition of dance in his *Encyclopedia* of 1751: he defined ballet as "an action explained by a dance ... A dance is a poem. This poem should have its independent representation which presupposed the collaboration of poet, painter, musician and pantomime-dancer."[311]

In the eighteenth century dance dynasties proliferated. The Paris Ballet School, which opened in 1713, often nurtured star talent such as Louis Dupré, who was famous for his majestic presence and

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310 Clarke & Crisp 1978 (a), p 26

311 Sorell 1986, p 187

stateliness. Experience and technique were handed down from one generation to the next: from Beauchamp to Pécourt to Dupré to Noverre. Another disciple of Dupré was Gaetano Vestris, whose son Auguste, taught by his father, was considered the greatest male dancer of the eighteenth century. He was a key figure in the development of classical ballet technique, a virtuoso famed for his jumps and turns who became a renowned teacher after his retirement in 1816. Two great ballerinas of the period were Marie de Camargo, a technical virtuoso who focused on the beauty of outward form, and Marie Sallé, a leading dramatic ballerina and choreographer famous for her emphasis on the beauty of inward feeling. Sallé was a rebel against cliché and conformity and she always ensured that each gesture and movement was motivated by inner experience.

In contrast with the *ballet à entree* or *opéra-ballet* which emphasized variety and display, a significant new form of ballet developed in the eighteenth century known as *ballet d'action*, which aimed at dramatic coherence. The *ballet d'action* furthered the artistic autonomy of dance and was fully established by the mid-eighteenth century; its leading advocate was Jean-Georges Noverre, choreographer, writer, reformer and the Father of Modern Ballet. In 1760 he published *Lettres sur la Danse et sure les Ballets* in which he campaigned, not only for physical virtuosity, but for ballet as a means of dramatic expression and communication. He provided an indictment of the sterile attitudes of the *opéra-ballet* and powerfully advocated the form of dancing which was eventually to dominate European stages. In the work of his successors, choreographers Dauberval, Viganò and Didelot, we see the triumph of the *ballet d'action* and the preparation for the next development in ballet, Romanticism and the *danse d'elevation* or *ballet poetique*.

Noverre's ideas were highly influential; later choreographers often referred to him as their model. His approach seems quite modern in several ways. Firstly, an understanding of the sociocultural context of the dance is evident in his writings: "A well-composed ballet is a living picture of the passions, manners, customs and ceremonies ... of all nations of the globe."[312] Secondly, like Marius Petipa and Serge Diaghilev after him, he felt that the arts should collaborate in the creation of a ballet, and he called for more communication between a ballet's collaborators. He also advocated wide-ranging education for the choreographer; to demand an all-round education is to put an artist in touch with his sociocultural history and background. He wrote:"A ballet master must see everything, examine everything, since everything that exists in the Universe may serve as his model."[313] Marian Winter, in her detailed and sometimes jaundiced view of Noverre's contribution, points out that "Noverre wrote masterly French prose in a period and concerning a subject in which

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[312] Noverre in Cohen 1977, p 59

[313] Chazin-Bennahum 1983, p 169

France had become the arbiter."[314] Noverre's own standard of education, the fact that he was so literate and articulate, may have been as important as his dance ideas in popularizing his writings.

The contribution of the Milan School was equally significant. This was founded by Viganò who was influenced by Noverre's philosophy. Carlo Blasis, who studied under Dauberval and Gardel, codified the contemporary ballet technique in his *Code of Terpsichore*, 1828, and provided a solid foundation for later developments in ballet training. "André Levinson, in his *Masters of the Ballet*, describes Blasis's role as a mediator between the old and new forces struggling for supremacy: ' ... His main task consists of directing the boat of the classical dance towards the shores of the Romantic ballet. He succeeded in becoming a new link in the uninterrupted chain of tradition.'"[315] When the apogee of the Romantic ballet in Paris and London was over, the classical ballet tradition was nurtured in two centres. The Bournonville inheritance was treasured, as it still is today, by the Royal Danish Ballet: "Thanks to the way the Danes have preserved them, the extant Bournonville ballets constitute the only surviving body of works by any Romantic choreographer."[316] The importance of the Danish preservation was made clear by a comment made by Karsavina at one of the performances: "Oh, to me it's absolutely fascinating because I am seeing the school I was brought up in, the old French school which Johannsen, through studying with Bournonville in Copenhagen, brought to Petersburg. I had no idea that it had been so beautifully preserved."[317]

Imperial Russia was to provide the most fertile soil of all. The Tzar's Court welcomed established dancers, teachers and choreographers, who were able to preserve the great traditions of the Court Ballet and the Romantic ballet in that reactionary society where change was not welcomed.

The importance, strength and continuity of this long European tradition in classical ballet cannot be overemphasized. Noverre worked with Antoine Bournonville, Charles Didelot and Gaetano Vestris. Gaetano's son, August Vestris, trained four key dancer/choreographers who found their way to Russia: August Bournonville (via Johannsen), Charles Didelot, Jules Perrot and Marius Petipa. Carlo Blasis worked with Viganò at the Milan School, from which were to emerge two key dancers who influenced the Russian ballet. Famous ballerina Virginia Zucchi dazzled the young artist and designer Alexandre Benois and others with her dramatic expression and virtuoso technique, and

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314 Winter 1974, p 112

315 Sorell 1986, p 235

316 Lawson 1976, p 46

317 Karsavina in Williams, *Dance and Dancers* 1979, pp 16 & 17

Enrico Cecchetti danced in Petipa's *La Belle au Bois Dormant (Sleeping Beauty)*, 1890, and was later permanent ballet master to Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*.

> Various elements contributed to the magnificence of the Russian style of dancing at the end of the nineteenth century. Petipa's own French training was part of the continuing reliance upon French ballet masters; also, the presence in Russia of Christian Johannsen had brought the Bournonville school to Russia ... The tradition whereby Italian virtuoso ballerinas, many of whom were products of the Blasis School, were invited to St Petersburg and Moscow to appear as stars for the season during the latter years of the century, meant that Milanese virtuosity was also to be a contributory influence.[318]

La Belle au Bois Dormant (Sleeping Beauty), 1890, the collaborative achievement of Petipa and Tchaïkovsky, was the last and greatest work in the *ballet de cour* tradition, which used dance as an organ of social control to reinforce the absolute power of the Sovereign. At a time of political unrest preceding the Russian revolution, this ballet reinforced the illusion of stability in the autocratic and retrogressive Romanov Court. As Spencer says in *Society and the Dance* "dance can either be a conservative or a progressive influence, depending on the social context, either reinforcing existing ideas or stimulating the imagination."[319] The influence of this work is quite astonishing. The link with past traditions was particularly strong: the choreographer's brother, Lucien Petipa, had partnered Carlotta Grisi in the great Romantic ballet of the 1840's, *Giselle*. *La Belle au Bois Dormant* was to inspire artists like Fokine and Benois, who were to feature prominently in the *Ballets Russes*. "The *Ballets Russes* themselves would never have seen the light of day had not the *Belle au Bois Dormant* awakened in a group of Russian youths a fiery enthusiasm that developed into a kind of frenzy."[320] The influential Italian dancer and teacher, Enrico Cecchetti participated in the original production; George Balanchine, creator of the American classical ballet style, performed as a child dancer in this ballet in Russia; and his fellow expatriate and collaborator, Igor Stravinsky, who was also promoted by Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, had watched as a child while Petipa rehearsed *La Belle au Bois Dormant*.

In the early twentieth century, the *Ballets Russes*, Diaghilev's alternative ballet company, consisted of a collection of geniuses orchestrated by Diaghilev, who had a profound influence on the cultural life of the times. The company reintroduced the European classical ballet tradition to Europe, refreshed, reworked and revitalized:

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318 Clarke & Crisp 1978 (b), p 13

319 Spencer 1985, p 211

320 Benois 1945 p 127

... the thrill of revelation which aroused Paris on that May evening in 1909 when the Diaghilev ballet gave its first performance was an experience of rediscovery for the French ... For *Les Sylphides*, which Paris then saw for the first time, drew its inspiration directly from the golden age of the Romantic ballet. In the moonlight mystery of Benois' scenery, in the dreamlike melodies of Chopin, in the sublimely poetic choreography of Fokine, recapturing in mood and feeling the magic of Taglioni, was instilled the very essence of that revival. This was the great discovery: the Romantic spirit which for a brief while many years before had brought an enhanced poetry to the dance, and was now to raise it, more enduringly, to the standing of a major art.[321]

The *Ballets Russes* was the parent company from which much of the later twentieth century classical ballet activity descends, particularly in Britain, Europe, Australia, North America and South Africa.

Also important in the preservation of the great tradition of classical ballet was the contribution of Nikolai Sergeyev, Regisseur of the Maryinsky Theatre, who worked with Diaghilev on classical revivals, and who brought out of Russia Stepanov's notated details of the great ballets. He worked closely with Ninette de Valois' dancers during the 1930's. Ninette de Valois and Marie Rambert worked with Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* and they were to have a significant impact on ballet in Britain and later in South Africa. De Valois was determined to establish a national repertory ballet company in Britain. In 1931 she moved her school to the Sadlers Wells Theatre and her Company became the Vic-Wells Ballet. In the early years Alicia Markova became the first British ballerina to dance *Giselle*, her performance being based on the Russian tradition taught to her by Sergeyev. Markova brought this performance to South Africa when the first full-length production of *Giselle* was staged in Cape Town in 1949. Markova says of this production:

"... the whole object of this experiment was to take *Giselle* into uncharted country, to give South African ballet some structure on which it could build, and to help inspire and develop its young dancers."[322]

De Valois's company became the Sadlers Wells ballet and eventually the Royal ballet at Covent Garden, sustained by the Royal Ballet School. Polish born Marie Rambert trained with Dalcrose and worked with Diaghilev; she opened a school in London in the 1920's which emerged as the Ballet Rambert in the 1930's. The function of this company seemed to be to discover and nourish talent which would then go on to larger things; such as Frederick Ashton, Anthony Tudor and Frank Staff who choreographed for several years in South Africa. An important contributor to the

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321 Guest 1980, p 263

322 Markova 1960, pp 125 & 126

development of ballet in this country is Dulcie Howes, who also worked in London with Karsavina and Pavlova. Dr Howes, who is regarded by many as the doyenne of South African ballet, founded the UCT Ballet School in 1934 and became the first artistic director of C.A.P.A.B. Ballet Company in 1965; she retired as principal of the U.C.T. Ballet School in 1972 and is still actively involved with dance in 1990.

In South Africa, our immediate slice of this heritage, ballets like *Giselle*, *Les Sylphides*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* are used by the Performing Arts Councils to provide a yardstick in terms of standards, and to fill houses. As Ashley Killar of N.A.P.A.C. Dance Company put it: "They pay the rent."[323] They form an evergreen, popular classical tradition for all ballet lovers. What role these classical ballets will play in the South Africa of the future, is an area of ongoing research.

323 *The Star TONITE!*, 1 March 1989, p 2

APPENDIX B

The Gumboot Dance

THE GUMBOOT DANCE

AN HISTORICAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF GUMBOOT DANCING

IN ITS CONTEXT IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY

JANE OSBORNE

This article, which was published in The South African Theatre Journal Vol. 4 no. 2 in September 1990, provides an example of ongoing research in the South African context.

Abstract

THE GUMBOOT DANCE

This preliminary investigation focuses on the African urban art form known as gumboot dancing in its historical, socio-economic and cultural context in South Africa. Available sources for research and theories about the origins of the dance are discussed in the introduction. The main body of the article examines the violent nature of the African experience of South Africa's industrial revolution; particular emphasis is placed on the migrant labour system and the coercive and often dangerous lifestyle in the gold mine compounds, which provide the specific context of the gumboot dance. It was one of several mine dances which played a role in helping migrant workers to orientate themselves in an impersonal modern world, to release tension and to develop new relationships and forms of recreation. Based on rural traditions, and influenced both by the vibrant life of black Johannesburg and the authoritarian nature of the compound system, gumboot dancing developed as an urban dance form. Significant features of the dance, such as the military and authoritarian elements, are examined in some detail. The conclusion sums up the importance of this dance form, both in terms of its nationwide popular appeal, and in terms of the powerful social forces and uniquely South African environment that it reflects.

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[324] **<u>Appendix B title page : key images</u>**

The top two photographs provide images of the context in which the gumboot dance developed: migrant labourers on the South African goldmines.

Top left: Cover photo to the text of *Egoli, City of Gold* by Matsemela Manaka. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979; with John Moalusi Ledwaba and Hamilton Mahonga Silwane.

Top right: Cover photo to the text of *The Hungry Earth*, by Maishe Maponya, in Hauptfleisch & Steadman 1983, p 149; with Sydwell Yola, Dijo Tjabana and Maishe Maponya.

Centre: Children in Soweto playing gumboot, from the *Dance Journal* Vol 1 no. 1, March 1990, ed. F Hagemann, p 15. Thabasile School Dancers,Soweto, Photo Frank Black.

Bottom: Dancers slapping their boots in the 'Isicathulo' Boot Dance. The Robinson Deep Team have their guitar player standing to the right. In the background is a typically Zulu hut erected as an exhibition hut in a sanitised environment for tourists at the Dance Arena, Robinson Deep Mine. Tracey 1952, p 52.

INTRODUCTION

"In a very important sense, society creates the dance, and it is to society that we must turn to understand it." [325]

Gumboot dance, or *isicathulo* [326], has developed from traditional roots into a working class, urban, African art form with universal popular appeal. It can be classified as a performance experience or theatre dance in terms of the following definition by Marcia Siegel and Judith Hanna:

> 'Theatrical dance exemplifies aesthetic phenomena that are explicitly and primarily designed to provide an aesthetic experience in the observer and performer.' Features which stimulate aesthetic awareness lie in the culturally patterned form and style of the dance.'[327]

The environment in which this dance form developed is the African experience of South Africa's industrial revolution. It is one of the many new cultural forms that emerged as a result of the traumatic process of urbanisation. David Coplan, in the introduction to *In Township Tonight!*, describes how Africans have composed and selected performance materials from diverse sources to express, celebrate and comment upon their experience, needs and aspirations in a world of insecurity and change.[328]

This preliminary investigation focusses on the context of the dance, and on how that context may have influenced its development. This introduction examines the sources available for research, describes the principal features of the dance, and discusses theories about its origins. In the main body of the article, the historical, socio-economic and cultural context is investigated, together with those elements of the dance that reflect the influence of this environment. The conclusion sums up

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[325] Spencer, 1985, p 38

[326] I use *isicathulo* to refer to the gumboot dance itself. There are some variations in this usage: for example, the word is also used to describe an earlier form of gumboot dancing, as well as a womens' variation of the dance.

[327] Hanna in Blacking & Kealiinohomoku, 1979, p 35

[328] Coplan, 1985, p 3

the essential points in the argument, and looks at why gumboot dancing is important and worthy of research.

Sources

My approach in this article is basically holistic, in that it assumes that "dance is essentially meaningful in its sociocultural context,"[329] and the perspective is primarily historical. An anthropological viewpoint is provided by Margaret Larlham in her unpublished thesis, *Contemporary Urban Black Dance in Durban, an Holistic Approach*, 1986, which examines gumboot dancing in some detail and gives a very clear analysis of the performance features. Carol Muller and Janet Topp had the unique experience of participating as dancers in a gumboot team, which makes their comments of particular interest. I have used their unpublished thesis, *A Preliminary study of Gumboot Dance*, 1985, extensively for reference. These seem to be the only two sources available in English which examine the gumboot dance in some detail. Very little has been published to date.

A few direct references are made by Hugh Tracey in *African Dancers of the Witwatersrand Gold Mines* 1952 and by David Coplan in *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*, 1985. Coplan provides an excellent analysis of the black urban sociocultural environment on the Witwatersrand. Additional useful background information can also be found in *Black Theater, Dance and Ritual in South Africa*, 1985, by Peter Larlham.

This relatively small volume of direct source material has been supplemented by publications providing an historical, economic and anthropological perspective, which are listed in the bibliography. I have found several chapters of interest in Marks and Rathbone's absorbing book, *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa, African class formation, culture and consciousness 1870 - 1930*, 1985. The three volumes of *Source Material on the South African Economy 1860 - 1970*, 1972 and 1973, edited by Houghton and Dagut, have been particularly useful. They offer direct access to

[329] Hanna in Blacking and Kealiinohomoku, 1979, p 19

contemporary Laws and Acts and to the recommendations of Commissions and Reports, which give a clear indication of the attitudes, ambitions and fears of the whites in control of economy.

For the very different perceptions and reactions of the black miners and migrant workers, I have turned to literary works, such as *Mine Boy* by Peter Abrahams, 1956. The plays *Egoli* by Matsemela Manaka, 1979, and *The Hungry Earth* by Maishe Maponya, 1980, are critically assessed by Ian Steadman in his thesis, *Drama and social consciousness: themes in black theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984*, 1985, which has also been of great interest. Another unique and useful source is an unpublished B.A. Thesis from the University of Lesotho, entitled "What do the Miners Say?", which presents the opinions of sixty miners from Lesotho on the South African mines and migrant labour system, in their own words. An interview with Andrew Tracey, Director of the International Library of African Music (ILAM) provided invaluable information about traditional African music and dance. Three Rhodes drama students, who have strong and enthusiastic links with gumboot dancing, gave me the viewpoint of the younger generation. And further insights were provided by participants in the 1990 Dance Umbrella at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Principal Features

What would one see and hear at a performance or competition featuring gumboot dancing? A description of a typical performance follows:[330]

Several dancers, uniformly dressed and wearing Wellington boots, enter in a line and circle the performance area. They tune in to the rhythms of the guitar accompaniment, while the leader and the two musicians move to one side. The basic rhythm is a quick left-right mark-time movement which constitutes the waiting periods of the dance. Within this structure, spectacular pre-planned routines are characterised by percussive use of the boots against the floor, against each other, and against the

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330 I have used two unpublished theses as sources for this description: Muller & Topp, 1985, pages unnumbered; Larlham, 1986, pp100 - 117

hands, interspersed with hand clapping and kneeling. In the main body of the dance, and often depending on audience response, the leader decides on the order of these sequences and calls for them by name. The dancers respond and the sequences are executed at a furious pace, in unison and in line formation. When he deems the moment appropriate the leaders calls for singles, and individual dancers come forward and improvise in the manner of jazz soloists, while the rest of the team maintains the rhythmic pulse with small individual movements. The basic elements of the structure of the dance are therefore marking time and rapid sequences and singles initiated by the leader; the basic pattern is one of call-and-response; the basic spacial formation is the line; and the basic focus of attention is on maintaining the complex rhythmic structure in unison. The dance ends as it began, with a processional circling of the performance area in a follow-my-leader formation, and exit. In competitions mistakes are easily spotted by the spectators, who shout *ihashi* (horse) and the dancers have to stop and make way for the next team. The team with the fewest mistakes is the winner.

In addition to the spectacle and rhythmic build-up of excitement, a most outstanding feature of the dance is its military-like regimentation. The straight lines, shouted commands, basic element of marking time, and set sequences like military drills, contribute to this quality in the dance.

Origins

Several theories have been suggested about the origins of the gumboot dance. Hugh Tracey describes it as a kind of step dance developed by the Zulus from the southern part of Natal. He also associates the dance with Zulu pupils at mission schools, and much later, with Zulu dock labourers in Durban who were issued with boots as protective clothing.[331] The name of the dance is derived from *isicathulo*, meaning western style boot or shoe.

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331 Tracey, 1952, p 3

Margaret Larlham quotes Tracey in her thesis[332] and David Coplan identifies basically the same sources: mission schools, Durban dock labourers and from there to the mines on the Witwatersrand.[333]

Muller and Topp's sources include their fellow team members, middle aged male dancers with many years experience, and a Mr Sangweni, the principal of Ohlange High School which had a gumboot team. All these informants were quite adamant that the dance originated with the Bhaca people on the mines of the Witwatersrand. The Bhacas are part-Zulu and of Swazi origin. During the Shaka upheavals they were displaced and are now found between the Zulus and the Xhosas, based at Umzumkulu. The Bhacas, Zulus, Swazis and Xhosas are all members of the Nguni clan, whose society is relatively authoritarian and male-dominated.[334] Muller and Topp comment:

> It seems that the emergence of gumboot dance was synonymous with the processes of industrialisation and labour migration, all these occurring at roughly the same time on the Witwatersrand.

One of their team members gives 1896 as the year of the first gumboot dancing, ten years after the discovery of gold.

A publication issued by the Chamber of Mines in 1968 contributes the following information:

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332 Larlham, 1986, p 100

333 Coplan, 1985, p 78

334 Andrew Tracey, interview, 1989. All references to Andrew Tracey refer to this interview and a seminar given in the same year.

> BHACA (Transkei) *isicathulo* boot dance
> This dance is said to have been created when a missionary in Natal forbade his pupils to dance traditional pagan dances. It resembles an Austrian folk dance, and may have been learnt from immigrants.
> Later, Bhaca dock labourers at Durban were given Wellington boots to protect their feet, and they quickly saw the possibilities of developing the mission dance yet further.[335]

Interviews with the three Rhodes students, two of whom had led gumboot teams while at school, confirmed the strong association with migrant labourers on the mines and with the Nguni peoples. However, Louisa Mokwena introduced what appeared to be a new element. She associated gumboot dancing with the portable bucket toilets, once found in the black townships in the Pretoria area where she lives. Mokwena stressed the reference to buckets, emptying and cleaning that appeared in some of the sequences. Siphiwe Sithole confirmed this as a dominant theme: her team included a sequence entitled *'Thuth'amabhakethe'* (Carry the buckets). This appeared to be a possible alternative origin, but discussion with Andrew Tracey revealed that the Bhaca people have the monopoly on rubbish and night soil disposal on the Witwatersrand. These examples, therefore, serve to confirm the link to Bhacas. A sequence entitled *AmaBhaca* is presented by Pepper Lekabe's gumboot team; it provides one of the less depressing moments among the tired and hackneyed money-making 'African Dance' routines presented for tourists at Gold Reef City, which seem to confirm Fredrick Hagemann's assertion that the white view of indigenous dance forms is, for the most part, "one of curio interest."[336]

Interviews conducted in Johannesburg during the Dance Umbrella provided further information: contemporary dancer Lucky Diale has childhood memories of weekend dance competitions associated with the migrant labour hostels next door to his home. And poet and playwright Maishe Maponya recalls garbage collectors dancing in the streets over the weekends to augment their meagre salaries. Maponya greatly regrets that no written record exists of the early history of the mine dances, to

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335 Chamber of Mines, 1968, p12. Gumboot dancing is so strongly rooted in African tradition that the reference to 'immigrants' can be ignored.

336 Hagemann in *The Dance Journal*, 1990, p 3

establish their context and meaning. He suggests an intriguing theory of a possible origin of gumboot dancing: perhaps, after a long days' travelling from street to street, a group of dancers began slapping the dust off their trousers, and discovered an interesting rhythm....[337]

Of particular significance is the strong association with the migrant labourers' compounds on the gold mines, which provide the environment in which this dance developed; it was one of the many dances performed on the mines. Mine management made a positive contribution by facilitating dance competitions. Hugh Tracey pays tribute to Lewis Hallett, who had the first semicircular area for the dancing constructed at Consolidated Main Reef Mine in 1943, to Hugh Tracey's designs.[338]

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Gumboot dancing was just one of a rich variety of cultural forms which emerged as a result of the painful process of urbanisation; its socio-economic context is the industrial revolution in South Africa, and particularly the migrant labour system and the mining compounds of the Gold Reef. A brief examination of the historical background will illuminate the setting in which this dance form developed. Marks and Rathbone offer this introduction to South Africa's industrial revolution:

> Conquered and colonised, black peasants and workers have experienced changes at least as harsh and disruptive as those in early industrial Britain. Before 1870, the majority of Africans in southern Africa lived in independent chiefdoms, though few were untouched by the coming of the merchant, missionary and settler.... Less than fifty years later .... African chiefdom, British colony and Afrikaner republic had been swept aside; south of the Limpopo, all had been meshed into a single capitalist state dominated by whites.
>
> Yet we know remarkably little of what these dramatic events meant for black South Africans, whether in terms of the changes wrought in their material conditions, or how these changes were shaped by, and in turn reshaped, their culture and consciousness.[339]

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337 These interviews were conducted in March 1990 at WITS University. All future reference to Diale and Maponya relate to interviews, discussions and workshops at this Dance Umbrella, except where otherwise stated.

338 Tracey, 1952, p 1

339 Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 1

The pioneers of the urban black experience in South Africa were the earliest arrivals at eDiamani, Kimberley City of Diamonds (1867), and eGoli, Johannesburg City of Gold (1886).

The momentous discovery of the first diamond in 1867 lured numbers of optimistic prospectors from all over southern Africa to the Kimberley diggings. "Africans flocked to the diamond fields but as labourers: they were not permitted to hold digger's licenses"[340]. In the early days a labour pattern was emerging of low paid black migrant workers from all over the country who were housed in rigorously supervised closed compounds to prevent diamond theft. Davenport states that the diamond industry had a decisive influence on the growth of labour patterns by "helping to reinforce the socio-economic stratification between the races, which had already begun to develop into a rigid pattern on the farms."[341]

An open compound system was adopted by the Durban Municipality and on the Witwatersrand gold mines to control what was regarded casual labour. The gold law of 1886, as amended by the Volksraad, established the following: "No coloured person, Coolie or Chinese can hold a license or be in any capacity engaged in working the goldfields, otherwise than in the service of white men".[342] The setting up of the Chamber of Mines in 1887 "resulted in a high degree of uniformity between the mining houses on the matter of labour policy."[343] Pass laws were in effect by 1896 and there were a host of other restrictions.[344] The artificial reservation of skilled work for white workers gradually became entrenched in the system, and white employment often depended, as on the gold mines, on Africans doing the heavy and dangerous groundwork. In 1889, K.F. Bellairs perceived this reality and expressed it succinctly in the terminology of his day: "Johannesburg would not be Johannesburg were

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340 Houghton & Dagut, Volume 2, 1972, p 223

341 Davenport, 1977, p 356

342 Houghton & Dagut, Volume 2, 1972, p 15

343 Davenport, 1977, p 356

344 Coplan, 1985, p 58

the nigger unknown. He is the backbone of the country."[345] In their introduction, Marks and Rathbone sum up the characteristic nexus of South Africa's labour controls that had emerged by 1900: "the compound system based on cheap migrant labour, revamped and far more stringent masters and servants laws, pass laws controlling worker mobility, and a colour bar defended by racist discourse."[346]

The Anglo-Boer War ended with the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902. Access to political power was blocked by Article 8 of the Treaty which made enfranchisement dependent on white consent. Lord Milner, who became Governor of the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony, "placed blacks low on the Great Chain of Being, as people to be 'well-treated' and 'justly governed.'"[347]

Milner's post-war policy of reconstruction accelerated the process of industrialisation and put pressure on the mine capitalists and agriculturalists and on all sectors of the economy. The shortage of African labour now became critical as demand greatly outstripped supply. Mitchell, commenting in 1961 on the sociological background to African labour in what was then Southern Rhodesia, quotes the historian Macmillan: "The history of European dealings with the African labour is a constant struggle to resolve the paradox of actual shortage in the presence of the deceptive appearance of plenty."[348] In the agricultural sector, the colonising process had absorbed large tracts of land formerly occupied by African communities, who had always been pastoral and agricultural. Except in times of drought or natural disaster, Africans were, on the whole, able to supply their own needs on the large areas of arable land still available to them; there was little real incentive to sell their labour to white farmers or mine capitalists.[349] On the mines the rhythm of pre-war labour

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345 Houghton & Dagut, Volume 1, 1972, p 302

346 Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 14

347 Davenport, 1977, p 152

348 Mitchell, 1961, p 76

349 Houghton & Dagut, Volume 1, 1972, pp 85 - 101

recruitment had collapsed, and the Chamber's policy of wage reductions together with poor conditions in the mine compounds had caused resentment.[350]

> The representatives of Agriculture stated that the dearth of labour was severely felt in every department of their industry and the testimony of the Mining representatives was even more emphatic. It is established that the progress of every industrial enterprise in the Transvaal is arrested by the want of labour.... There is a mass of independent and competent testimony that the expansion of South African industries has in fact, far outstripped the labour supply.[351]

This quotation formed part of the findings and conclusions of the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-5. Of interest to us in this study are the Commission's recommendations to solve these problems; these were partially responsible for a gradual policy of compulsion and coercion to force black South Africans to sell their labour at the lowest cost and in the greatest numbers. Marks and Rathbone stress: "We should not underestimate the violence with which this workforce was created."[352] This policy made a considerable contribution to the kind of setting in which gumboot dancing developed. "The working and living environment of African labour tended to be circumscribed in a large measure by the directly coercive and ubiquitous compound."[353]

The recommendations of the Commission of 1903-5 included: imposition of a rent on natives living on Crown land; suggested methods of redistributing the potential labour force among white-owned farms; laws forbidding 'vagrancy' in municipal areas and locations and 'squatting' on 'uninhabited' land were to be strictly enforced to deal with those who were not employed by whites. Witnesses had proposed to the Commission a modification of the system of native land tenure to improve the labour supply and "compel the native to work".[354]

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[350] Davenport, 1977, p 357

[351] Houghton & Dagut, Volume I, 1972, p 90

[352] Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 12

[353] Richardson & Van-Helton in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 91

[354] Houghton & Dagut, Volume I, 1972, p 152

For various reasons and at certain times, there was evidence of an improvement in the labour supply, particularly in times of drought or crop failure. Davenport notes that, by the time of Union in 1910 there were 183, 793 Africans at work on the gold mines - double the number employed by 1899.[355] But the supply of labour was not secure and the capitalists on the farms and mines needed to bring the labour resources more directly under their organisational control. White job reservation was also an important consideration. In the year after Union in 1910, H. Hamilton Fyfe bluntly summed up the problem:

> 'What are we going to do about the natives?' That is what everyone asks in the Union and in Rhodesia. Are they to be shut off by themselves in reserves? No, because the country cannot do without their labour. Are they to be taught to work with their hands at technical trades? No, because that would bring them into competition with the white man ...'[356]

A solution was found in the form of a number Laws and Acts following the trends discussed above, and culminating in a crucial piece of legislation, the Native Trust and Land Act of 1913. This may be regarded as specifically responsible for accelerating townward migration by "confining African land ownership to 'native reserves' covering only one-seventh of the country".[357] The Act laid the foundation of a policy of territorial segregation and helped to define the place of Africans in the South African economy.[358] The immediate effect was a spate of evictions of black tenants from white-owned farms. It laid down that all black tenants were to be defined, not as partners in the economy, but as servants.[359] Although in practice the effects were sporadic and gradual, Marks and Rathbone describe this as a "piece of legislation which still underpins South Africa's political economy".[360]

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355 Davenport, 1977, p 358

356 Houghton & Dagut, Volume 2, 1972, p 152

357 Coplan, 1985, p 60

358 Houghton & Dagut, Volume I, 1972, p 79. In 1990 the Nationalist Government under F.W. De Klerk declared that this act was to be reviewed in the near future.

359 Keegan in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, pp 204 - 206

360 Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 24 for further details

It now becomes obvious that the most potent symbol of upheaval in our industrial revolution is the migrant labour system. The pattern of South African industry had been set by the mines. Margaret Larlham, writing about the Durban area, defines the term 'migrant' as referring to:

> ... Men born in the rural areas who later seek employment in the cities where they are given temporary residence and accommodated in specially created "hostels". These are situated for economic rather than political reasons in or near the industrial areas. Though most migrants' lives are spent in the urban environment they maintain links with family and kin in the rural area. The migrants occupy an unusual cultural position in that they straddle yet belong to neither of the lifestyles - rural or urban.[361]

The chief advantages of this system of migrant labour and compound housing for the mine owners was that it undercut workers bargaining power, and employers were not involved in the expense of providing family accommodation.[362] The cost of dependency due to factors like old age, invalidism, disability and unemployment were in the main borne by the tribal community.[363]

The patronising attitude of the Mine Management to the work force is strongly evident in the 1968 Chamber of Mines publication, Tribal Dancing on the Gold Mines:

> Nearly all (the men working on the mines) are young, most of them are unmarried, keen to see the world and earn enough money to set themselves up for life in a small way, with a wife or two, some cattle, and perhaps a bicycle, a plough, some bright clothes and a guitar-or that transistor ....
>
> From the moment the tribesman begins training at the mine he begins an introduction to modern western society shorn of many of the evils normally associated with the transition from an agricultural to an industrial environment in other parts of the world, He does not encounter slum housing, malnutrition and disease, which are only too often the lot of tribesmen who stream to the cities on their own to seek their fortune...
>
> The migratory labour system of the mines has provided Africa in the last 50 years with its broadest and quickest step into the western world's 20th century.[364]

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361 Larlham, 1986, p 41

362 Davenport, 1977, p 359

363 Mitchell, 1961, p 83. There was some degree of compensation for disability caused by accidents on the mines.

364 Chamber of Mines, 1968, pp 3, 4 and 5

The perspective of the Migrant Worker

The very different perspective of the migrant worker is graphically and sensitively presented by two playwrights whose work is critically assessed by Ian Steadman. He describes *Egoli* by Matsemela Manaka (1979) as "a unique theatrical metaphor for Manaka's vision of the social and economic 'dispossession' of the black migrant labourer. John and Hamilton are chained to the economic system which exploits black labour and creates golden cities on the backs of that labour".[365] The vicious circle in which these workers are trapped is described in Act one:

> Egoli, city of hatred, city of misery ...
> Egoli. We run. We escape. We go back to the women and the children. We watch them starve. We come back again to breathe dust for them.[366]

The Hungry Earth by Maishe Maponya, 1980, is also based on the destructive effects of the migrant labour system. Steadman describes this as a fruitful theme for theatre practitioners, with demographic distortion, social upheaval, marital breakdown and adverse effects on children as important elements. "What is important about the dramatic portrayal of these issues is the view from inside which theatre provides."[367]

The play ends with this epilogue song, which gives the womens' viewpoint:

> WHERE HAVE ALL OUR MEN GONE
> THEY HAVE ALL GONE DOWN INTO THE MINES
> THEY WILL NEVER EVER RETURN AGAIN
> THEY HAVE BEEN SWALLOWED UP BY THIS HUNGRY EARTH.[368]

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[365] Steadman, 1985, p 387

[366] Manaka, 1979, p 5

[367] Steadman, 1985, p 387

[368] Maponya in Hauptfleisch & Steadman, 1984, p 165

'Randlords and Rotgut'

As a result of the conditions of coercion and stress on the mines, many deserted. Patrick Pearson, in his paper entitled *Authority and Control in a South African Goldmine Compound* gives further details:

> Evidence of reactions to exploitation of workers in the form of desertions, absenteeism, theft and sabotage of equipment and perhaps even personnel comes to light frequently in the mine examined. While actual confrontation of management by workers has been rare.[369]

Those who remained found relief in liquor, which was traded illegally in great quantities. Sean Moroney, in his research into the compound as a mechanism of worker control, identifies alcohol and faction fighting as forms of relief and redress: "Sunday revelry sometimes developed into inter-tribal or inter-compound clashes".[370] The general atmosphere of violence is confirmed by interviews with Lesotho miners in *What do the Miners Say?*.[371] Van Onselen, in a chapter graphically entitled *Randlords and Rotgut* examines the role of alcohol in the development of European imperialism with reference to black mine workers.[372] The discovery of gold converted the Witwatersrand into a fast-growing market. Afrikaner farmers, who sold their surplus grain for distillation, and the new industrial bourgeoisie, who owned the mines and distilleries, both profited from this massive new source of revenue. Initially, an acquired taste for alcohol had been useful to the employers, because workers had to sell their labour in order to earn cash to buy liquor; but the resulting drunkenness seriously undermined productivity. In 1902 the Commissioner for Native Affairs reported:

> It was estimated that from Saturday to Monday before the war something between 20 and 30 percent of the labourers were under the influence of drink and out of action, and during the rest of the week a lesser percentage.[373]

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[369] Pearson, 1974, p 17

[370] Moroney in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1978, p 34

[371] Sebile, 1976

[372] Van Onselen, 1982, pp 57 - 96

[373] Houghton & Dagut, Volume 2, 1972, p 30

At various times liquor was prohibited, but there was a thriving legal or illicit liquor trade both in the Transvaal Republic and under the British flag, and alcohol remained a factor in compound life. With drinking and faction fighting prevalent, it is not surprising that management chose to reinforce the third and most positive reaction to mine and compound conditions, dancing. And dancing as a relief from stress becomes highly significant when one considers the coercive nature of the compound system. It was an "institution which simultaneously organised and subordinated the mine labour force to capital".[374]

The compound system

The nature of the compound system was partially defined by its history on the Kimberley mines, where it's introduction consolidated the colour bar. Illicit Diamond Buying (IDB) was a problem, and white workers succeeded, where black workers failed, to resist personal searches for concealed diamonds. The whites defended their liberty by effective strike action and refused to be compounded; the black workers were obliged to submit to a regime of closed compounds from 1885 onwards. This enabled the mining companies to provide amenities and health care, but the close supervision and control meant considerable loss of liberty.[375] Pearson, in research undertaken in the 1970's, describes how the system strips a worker of individuality so that he becomes a uniform entity along with his fellow inmates:

> His fingerprints and his number become the most important means of identifying a man, and in the vast majority of interactions with the authorities his name, his most distinctive personal characteristic, is never used. To maintain uniformity obedience is necessary, so that a high degree of intervention by the authorities is practiced.[376]

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374 Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 45

375 Davenport, 1977, p 355

376 Pearson, 1974, p 10

IDB was used to enforce and enact legislation to tighten labour control, such as the Pass Laws, which discriminated against the black labour force.[377] In this way the system of compulsion and control was buttressed by the state. The element of compulsion was central to the whole migrant labour system:

> Compulsion was, for the majority, of the essence, and that compulsion ranged from the insistence of chiefs and homeland heads and the perception of an escape from the constraints of an ascriptive society, to indebtedness to traders and the operations of recruiters and the demands of the state for forced labour and tax.[378]

Equally central to the system was the element of violence. Sean Moroney's article on the development of the compound as a mechanism for worker control gives details:[379]

> Within the mines widespread violence and coercion was employed to ensure the continued subjugation and productivity of the workers. The compound was the social pivot of this system of labour repression.[380]

Moroney discusses the importance of day to day survival in the debilitating compound environment, where structures of control included the use of sjamboks and detention rooms known as 'stocks' as well as abuse by 'bossboys' or indunas, compound police and white miners. Obviously there was considerable variation in conditions on the different mines: on certain mines no harsh treatment was tolerated, but on others it was either passively ignored or actively condoned. "There is a limit to what can be done within the system, so that its authoritarian character tends to remain in spite of efforts by the management."[381] The compound system could provide cover for violence at all levels of the labour extraction process. "Compound society was regulated by its rules and survival necessitated compliance and subjugation."[382]

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377 Turrell in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 67

378 Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 13

379 Moroney in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1978, pp 29 - 50

380 Moroney in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1978, p 30

381 Pearson, 1974, p 2

382 Moroney in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1978, p 40

"What do the Miners Say?"

Evidence for all these factors can be found in the two plays already mentioned, and in Peter Abraham's novel *Mine Boy*, published in 1946. But the most disturbing evidence is found in a short unpublished B.A. thesis from the University of Lesotho entitled *What do the Miners Say?* Sixty miners from Lesotho, of different ages and levels of education, were interviewed in the mid-seventies about their experience on the South African mines. Poor economic conditions in Lesotho drove them to seek work in South Africa; some also went to prove their manhood and because it was expected of them. From the recruiting office stage they were bullied and shouted at and they fought and bullied each other in turn. All agreed that the work underground was very arduous but some took pride in the strength and toughness it required. Men described working twelve hours in heat, dust and cramped conditions "under the pressure of the 'Boss boy' or some white inspectors who hit, kick and inflict all kinds of physical and emotional torture to anyone who happens to take a moments pause to straighten the strained, much-bended back."[383] Some complained about the insecurity felt above the ground in the compound, from the lack of privacy in the sleeping dormitories, from fear of theft or from fights that could lead to murder. General discontent was expressed about long hours, poor conditions and low wages. And "above all is the feeling of alienation as a result of the absence of their families."[384] Retired miners suffered after-effects like T.B, deafness and the strain of coping with loss of limbs etc as a result of accidents; and they often found that their wives and children were now strangers. As the interviewer said: "I am describing a failure, a deficiency and life of frustration that all miners know."[385] Reactions ranged from resigned acceptance to anger and resentment and violent protestation. Mr Mosolotso, a former policeman, was intensely bitter about how the workers were treated:

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[383] Sebilo, 1976, p 25

[384] Sebilo, 1975, p 26

[385] Sebilo, 1976, p 28

> We are handled like unthinking animals. We are not regarded as people who bring such wealth to South Africa.... Look at the towering buildings of Johannesburg and recall that they were built by the sweat and blood from your ancestors, but you don't even have a place to raise your head in them. The most painful part of it, is the knowledge that the very man standing by you pointing his finger where you should dig gets a salary that quintuplicates yours. Yet he does not recognise your job as important to him.... I believe we need them as much as they need us. And this act they put up to make us feel that we are pests that trouble them in their country is nerve wrecking and intolerable.[386]

Matsemela Manaka gives this response a dramatic form at the end of Act one of *Egoli*:

> HAMILTON: Poor Boy. A mine worker from the living grave. Look at his face, glittering with sweat, full of dust. This whirlwind within his muscles is turning Joburg into skyscrapers, pyramid-like buildings piercing into the sky, castles and temples. Look at his sweat, if this sweat could quench his thirst! We must beautify the presence of the men who sweat for this godforsaken country. This man is tired of living. He is not enjoying the fruits of his sweat. He is praying for death to come his way. He is dreaming.[387]

I'd like to end this section on historical background and socio-economic context with a comment: industrial revolutions in their early stages are everywhere associated with terrible human suffering and upheaval, partly because this was a new phenomenon with no precedent in human history.

> The mill and the mine were respectively the sources of growth of industrial wealth in Britain and South Africa. If the 'dark satanic mill' was the abiding image of new social relationships in Britain, it was the repressive role played by the mine compound that came to symbolise the early development of capitalism in South Africa.[388]

In the nineteenth century, basic African wages on the Rand compared favourably with those paid to agricultural workers in Britain. And European industrialists did not hesitate to exploit women and children directly and to provide both working and living conditions that were inadequate.[389]

> The South African experience has not been unique, although its particularity - the combination of colonial conquest and rapid industrialisation, of imperial capital and colonial bourgeoisie, of an explosive mixture of race and class stratification, of the continuation of

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386 Sebilo, 1976, p 33

387 Manaka, 1979, p 15 & 16

388 Turrell in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 45

389 Harris in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 143

> forms of coerced labour - adds a challenging dimension to the analysis of comparative industrialisation.[390]

We are no longer in the early stages of industrialization. The two plays and the Lesotho study quoted belong to the nineteen seventies and eighties, and yet reveal conditions some of which would be familiar to Dickens. This is the unique and retrogressive context in which gumboot dancing evolved into one of the urban art forms of the coerced and disenfranchised mine migrant worker. It is in this light that specific features of gumboot dancing should be considered in a later stage of this argument.

THE REFLECTION OF THIS ENVIRONMENT ON THE GUMBOOT DANCE

Some basic features of traditional music and dance

Africans entered the workforce profoundly influenced by the traditions and value-systems of their own particular precapitalist societies.[391] If we are to consider the emergence of gumboot dancing as one of the new cultural forms that developed as a result of urbanisation and industrialisation, we must be aware of some of the basic features of traditional music and dance, on which the new form was based.

The Chamber of Mines publication comments on the social background to 'tribal' dancing on the gold mines:

> The tribal dances performed on the gold mines reflect the synthesis of old and new that is the life of the migrant labourers. Some dances, such as .... the Bhaca gumboot dance, *isicathulo*, were devised directly as a result of peoples' experiences of "western" life .....
>
> It is neither the incentive to perform publicly on Sunday mornings nor the encouragement of mine officials and compound managers that drive the men to recruit dance teams and meet regularly for rehearsals. They are spurred on rather because they have learnt music and dancing as integral parts of their cultural experience, as actions which both chrystallise social

390 Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 9

391 Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 8

relations, and satisfy individuals' need to lose and find themselves in rhythmic movements, and to perfect their musical skills.[392]

At the Dance Umbrella Forum at WITS University, African dance expert Peggy Harper said that African dance always has something to say; it is an expression of the life of the people who are dancing. Indigenous dance "... may consciously express or implicitly reflect the communal values and social relationships of the people."[393]

Andrew Tracey, in a seminar presented in 1989, briefly identified some of the key aspects. In Africa the body is an instrument; the dancer sings and the singer dances. And rhythm is the basis of all African dance. Their approach is holistic: music and dance are usually an integral part of a social situation, a group experience. Two significant concepts are co-operation and conflict. Music, dance and all aspects of life are intensely integrated and co-operative; a solo means nothing except in relation to the whole, the group. The element of conflict occurs because the solo item is different, a variation of the main dance; or the movement of a dance might be in a different beat from the song and the relationship between the two provides a complex and interesting rhythmic structure. The predominant shape of a dance indicates the kind of social organisation of the community. For example, the Nguni people, with an authoritarian and male dominated social structure, usually dance in straight lines, while the more egalitarian Sotho use the circle. People of similar status dance together. Typical of South Africa is a large group doing irregular things but in perfect unison, or regular movement against off-beat singing. The dance is often initiated by a stamp: Africans have a strong affinity with the earth, and the more enthusiastic a dancer feels the nearer he moves to the ground. Most importantly dance is pleasurable and an integral part of life; it gives a sense of community and a specific occasion; it functions as a force to bind people together.

Many of the basic features of gumboot dancing can be seen to have traditional roots. It is an Nguni dance which occurs in straight lines, although a circle or processional is used on entrance and

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[392] Chamber of Mines, 1968, p 7

[393] Harper in *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 15th Edition, 1974, *African Dance* p 152

exit. It was originally an all-male dance, with spectacular rhythmic effects achieved by the complicated slapping and stamping of gumboots in unison; the two guitars, or guitar and concertina, providing an additional rhythmic element. The solos are individual variations in relation to the whole. The dance binds team members together as a group, providing a sense of both community and of the special occasion of the performance.

The essence is group participation; excitement, involvement and enjoyment are evident at traditional gatherings "where skill is a social attribute and the response of the spectators an important social interaction."[394] This traditional element of exhilaration in performance and spectator involvement is strongly evident in gumboot dancing and explains its universal appeal.

> The dances are exactly what they appear to be, movement for the love of movement, without a hidden secondary or spiritual meaning behind the physical actions ... They are, in short, an authentic example of that cosmic reality that makes men dance together for the joy of dancing and the proof of living.[395]

Anya Peterson Royce talks about the power of dance to evoke a kinesthetic response on the part of the audience and describes this as "the way in which dance communicates".[396] This is particularly true of African Dance. This is the primary experience of gumboot dancing. Research into the background and context focusses on the secondary experience. Important elements in the dance will reflect its particular urban context and environment.

> Performance expression, like other cultural forms, does not derive solely from the minds of creative individuals. It emerges as an aspect of social action and resonates with emotion and meaning among members of communities in the context of social institutions.[397]

Gumboot dancing however is primarily recreational; it is not a protest art form. Even satiric elements are presented as entertaining jokes, and the dance form offers relief and redress in this way.

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394 Larlham, 1985, p 59

395 Tracey, 1952, p 2

396 Royce, 1977, p 194

397 Coplan, 1985, pp 3 - 4

Urban black culture on the Reef

Another important part of the cultural context of gumboot dancing was the black urban performance culture on the Reef. Special passes allowed workers access from the open compounds to the vibrant social life of Johannesburg. The mining compounds were entities in themselves but they were also part of the vital and many faceted urban culture that was developing in black Johannesburg.

> ... not only were there the discrete worlds in which musical cultures could develop, as on the mines and mission stations; there was also a constant interaction between mine compound and urban location between town and countryside and between mission and all of these. The result is an immensely fertile range and versatility ... The multi-layered nature of popular culture.[398]

Coplan describes dancing as a form of mine and migrant culture:

> From the beginning, large-scale mining created a discrete social world among African miners with its own ethos, forms of cultural expression and patterns of affiliation and opposition. It was essentially a male industrial subculture, in which as early as the 1870's group dancing became a major form of recreation and a means of expressing ethnic-regional identification and rivalry. Interested in ways to keep order and healthily occupy the leisure time of their workforce, mine management in Johannesburg sanctioned Sunday displays and competitions between dance teams from the 1890's. Although the original dances were drawn from rural traditions, the urban compound environment stimulated the creation of new patterns directly relevant to life on the mines.[399]

This is confirmed in *What do the Miners Say?* where satisfaction is expressed about the recreation and entertainment provided:

> As far as conditions in the mines are in relation to their rest and recreation, the miners seem to be satisfied. They tell us that they have the best entertainments they have ever had in their lives. They are entertained by film (bioscope) on Sundays they play soccer, Volley Ball, Soft ball, Tennis and they sing and dance their traditional dances etc.[400]

Both Muller and Topp and Andrew Tracey emphasize the association of this dance with leisure hours, when workers were drinking beer together. Gumboot dancing is a more organised development of this spontaneous party dancing, with the complicated rhythms carefully rehearsed in unison.

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398 Marks & Rathbone, 1985 p 34

399 Coplan, 1985, p 360 onwards

400 Sebilo, 1976, p 29

Compared with traditional rural life where dance is an integral part of ceremonies, rites of passage etc. urban dance is essentially recreational. The dance served as an outlet of energy and a release of tension in the harsh and stressful working conditions on the mines.

Dance as a relief from stress

> Tribal society is marked by its smallness of scale in which personal relationships remain within the bounds of a local community, where religion and society intermingle inextricably, and where politics spring from the intimate bonds of kinship. Modern industrial society, however, is marked by impersonality of social contacts.[401]

Mitchell describes the lonely crowds of workmen from different cultures and countries, all of whom "had been ripped out of their intimate web of rural social relationship and projected into the cold impersonal and anonymous societies of the work centres."[402] Coplan adds that even those with experience of city life elsewhere "found it difficult to orientate themselves in the racial, ethnic and socio-economic whirlpool of the Gold Reef... (they experienced) severe stress due to the lack of organised community, family and recreational life on the Rand. The workers' need for relief and redress was expressed most readily in drinking, dancing and faction fights."[403]

Other causes of stress were the coercive environment in the compounds, discussed earlier, and, of course, and constant danger of the work underground. Peter Abrahams gives a strong sense of this fear in *Mine Boy*:

> The cages shot down. Down. Down. Down.
>
> The men were silent. It was always so. Going into the bowels of the earth forced silence on them. And their hearts pounded. Many had gone in day after day for months. But they did not get used to it. Always there was the furious pounding of the hearts. The tightness in the throat. And the warm feeling in the belly. It was so for the mine boy. They knew it.[404]

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401 Mitchell, 1961, p 86

402 Mitchell, 1961, p 74

403 Coplan, 1985, p 56

404 Abrahams, 1946, p 147

And there were in the background the more general tension of social and economic and political dispossession described by Peter Larlham: "Tensions arising from the individual's break from traditional practices without access to full participation in the economic, political and social activities of the implanted civilisation ...."[405] Again, Manaka's *Egoli* provides us with a dramatic interpretation of this sense of dispossession:

> JOHN: Egoli. Egoli. Egoli. People slave, Egoli. People die, Egoli.... The place where our people have lost a sense of respect for their own culture. They mock their beliefs. They curse their customs. They forget all about their traditions. Egoli, city of misery. City of hate, Egoli, it's Egoli.[406]

One of the themes discussed by Paul Spencer in his book *Society and the Dance*, is dance as a safety valve: the cathartic theory. I suggest that an important function of gumboot dancing was its cathartic value in releasing pent-up emotions. Ample evidence has been provided of dangerous, stressful and violent conditions and the urgent need for release. Gumboot dancing is exceptionally demanding physically and is certainly capable of fulfilling this particular function.

In a recent interview, Lucky Diale had this to say: Gumboot dancing is "not merely an entertainment. It has a message to say: it's depression, it's anger, and a lot of things that those people experienced through coming here." He suggested listening to cue words like *Umhlungu* and *Baas*, (names of sequences). The dancers are "taking their aggression onto the boots, beating the umlungu (white person) - they know if they attack them physically they will be arrested, so the only way they can do it is onto their boots .... It's somehow a cry for the people".

But the physicality and prowess of gumboot also expresses another more positive emotion mentioned by many of the younger Lesotho miners: satisfaction in arduous and dangerous work well done, men's work. Gumboot is both a cathartic release of stress and a celebration of manhood.

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405 Larlham, 1985, p xix

406 Manaka, 1979, p 19

Links with the urban milieu and the lifestyle of the compound

Of interest in this investigation are those elements of the dance which have developed or been highlighted in relation to the urban milieu and the compound lifestyle.

The rubber Wellington boots

The most obvious link with modern industrial society is the use of a modern piece of equipment, the rubber Wellington boot, to create a specific elaboration of traditional Nguni step dancing. Step dances use the feet to create a rhythm, and they are found all over South Africa, using different rhythmic and song structures depending on the different languages and musical systems involved. According to Andrew Tracey there are also other dances which use gumboots. We do not know exactly when or where these boots were first issued, nor do we really know which came first, the dance or the boots. The gumboot dance that is associated with the mine compounds and that has been made famous on films and on television has a very special quality. Tracey describes the key element as the rhythms and the way those rhythms are built up. "It's like a conversation in a sense, between the expectations of the audience and the actual rhythms that are performed which sometimes fulfil the expectations of the audience and very often don't, which leads to release in humour etc". The response of the audience is a very important element, as some of the gumboot rhythms go on for quite a long time building up audience expectation and excitement. Maponya says that the audience encourages and inspires the performer to be more innovative and creative.

All three Rhodes students verified the tremendous success of gumboot dancing as a performance experience, both live and on the media. Muller and Topp, writing about the Durban area, note:

> Though still performed in competitions, gumboot dance today has developed more into an art form. In this respect, it is valued purely as one of a variety of items of performance, being performed at events like school sports days, at public fetes and fairs, at university cultural gatherings and various African political meetings.

The musical accompaniment

In addition to the boots, another important piece of western equipment used is the two guitars, or guitar and concertina, which have a vital function in the rhythmic structure. Tracey says that the musical instruments provide the rhythmic eight beat cycle, and the stamping and slapping of the boots occurs in relation to this cycle. The leader of Muller and Topp's team constantly stressed the importance of listening to the rhythmic patterns; the primary aim was uniformity of sound and in the performance context the musicians are very much part of the act. None of my student interviewees used musical accompaniment, and evidently school teams do not always do so. Tracey say that this omits a key element in the rhythmic pattern. Coplan provides some background on how western instruments were introduced into African culture. The Zulus had adopted the drum from the British in the 1870's and the guitar in the 1880's.

> Among the agents of urban social and cultural transmission were the so-called Coloureds, who brought two hundred year old traditions of professional musicianship and the institution of the illegal, private drinking house or shebeen, with them from the Cape. Through Coloured influence and experience of labour or transport-riding for the Afrikaner farmers, western 'trade-store' instruments, including the guitar, concertina, violin, auto-harp and mouth organ, became popular among migrant and farm labourers.[407]

Military and authoritarian features

The crucial elements of this dance, which seem to symbolise the harshness of life on the mines, are those which reveal military or authoritarian control. Most immediately obvious is evidence of military-like regimentation: the line formation, the shouted commands with the leader in control, the basic mark-time beat and even the names of some the sequences. It must be remembered that strict formation is a feature of traditional African dance, particularly among the Zulus, and in any kind of Nguni dance there is usually a leader. However, these elements are also a strong reflection of the environment in which the dance developed into an urban form: every compound was controlled by

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407 Coplan in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 359

police who sought to regulate all aspects of life. Some of these authoritarian features need to be examined in more detail.

The fact that the dance is performed in straight lines, or two or more lines one behind the other, and that the dancers are performing rhythmically and in unison with precision and speed, gives a military feel to the performance. As we have said, dancing in lines is an Nguni feature, and postgraduate student Lulu Khumalo emphasised the importance of the line structure in the dance. She identified as significant pace, crescendo, change of direction, a quick sharp sense of what you are doing, and responding to audience excitement, but 'everything is always in a line'. The circle is used as a processional entrance and exit and to and from the performance area.

The order of the sequences is never pre-arranged. It is the task of the team leader to call out which sequence is to be performed, and this call-and-response pattern also gives an authoritarian feel to the dance. However, Andrew Tracey says the leader should not be regarded as a rigorously authoritarian figure, or an "almighty commander. He is usually responsible for seeing that everyone dances correctly, and is conspicuously in the middle where he can be seen and heard." Peter Larlham comments further:

> A warm, friendly rapport exists between the leader and his group, but strict codes of behaviour are adhered to. Absolute precision is demanded of the team in the execution of the dance. In competitions a single error will forfeit the team's chance of winning, for the spectators and rival teams are highly critical in their appraisals.[408]

Margaret Larlham sums up the relationship between leader and team members:

> The group is defined in opposition to a leader. The group qualities of obedience and respect interlock with the leader's authority and responsibility. The dance structure itself is defined in this way; "waiting" alternates with "doing", restraint with release; periods of storing or summoning energy in the "marking time" period complement the highly-charged release of energy in the routines.[409]

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[408] Larlham, 1985, p 50

[409] Larlham, 1986, p 115

After conducting a workshop on gumboot dancing in March 1990, Maishe Maponya defined the role of the leader as someone who knows how to take his team through their paces stage by stage to learn the sequences. Phrases like 'feel the weight of the wellies', 'listen to the beat of the wellies,' 'enjoy it - lets see your spirits coming out as you do it - then it becomes a beauty' guided the workshop participants through the rhythms, the group dynamics and the experience, and illustrated the importance of the leader's role in the learning process.

Another authoritarian element was the manner in which the dance competitions were organised on the mines, which David Coplan describes as being "according to rules more appropriate to a European school or military parade ground than to the aesthetic of rural African dance rivalry." The white judges based their decisions on criteria like:

> 1. the rendering of the music
> 2. the general appearance of the dancers
> 3. the precision of the movement of the dancers
> 4. the regularity of the dancing line.
>
> That these European aesthetic criteria bore no relation to traditional African ones did not trouble those awarding the prizes, nor did it lessen the prestige of the winners among their fellow competitors.[410]

It is interesting to compare these criteria with those described by Peggy Harper in the *African Dance* entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1976:

> African dances are earth centred. Dancers repeatedly return to the earth as they give themselves to the rhythmic pulses of their dance, interpreting the percussive patterns of the music through their postures, gestures and steps. They externalise rhythmic patterns in the surrounding space by moving through, rather than to, fixed positions on a dance floor. Thus, the criteria for assessing skill are based on rhythmic rather than spacial precision. ..... A dancer is assessed primarily on his ability to follow the percussive musical rhythm, 'to play the drums with his feet' or with whatever part of the body articulates the rhythm. Each dance style is immediately identified by its characteristic rhythmic pattern.[411]

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410 Coplan, 1985, p 73

411 Harper in *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* 15th Edition 1974, *African Dance* p 156

In mine dancing, it is clear that status was also a factor. There was considerable personal prestige associated with the dancers, particularly the team leaders who often held preferred positions on the mines. Coplan comments on competition organisation in Durban hostels:

> Commercial employers coopted workers' dance competitions, providing uniforms, colours, banners, transport and time off for rehearsal - all to heighten the loyalty and morale of the workforce. This system of company teams and white judges and performance standards continues today, and has powerfully influenced the aesthetic of Zulu men's dancing now for more than half a century.[412]

It is evident that these competitions served to increase innovation, accuracy and technical facility in the dance, transforming it from an informal to a highly structured and complex urban expressive form.[413]

Employers were instrumental in providing finances for costume which, like military uniforms, expressed uniformity and group identity and solidarity. The choice of uniform may be subject to the degree of urbanisation of the team members, or the strength of rural links, as well as changing urban fashions. Muller and Topp's team wore white trousers and turquoise T shirts, whereas the girls in the young elitist team belonging to Ohlange High School wore brightly coloured shiny disco outfits and the boys wore overalls. Khumalo's team wore jeans and T shirts and Sithole's team wore overalls with mine helmets. The team researched by Margaret Larlham were dressed in khaki 'amapondo' trousers ie 'doctored' to include decorative strips of coloured materials, with red T shirts.[414] The Gold Reef City Team wore similar trousers with vests and mining helmets in bright primary colours. Maponya says that overalls are most typical because they are hardwearing; trousers usually become worn out at the seat and knees and the necessary patching eventually became a colourful and decorative feature. And Andrew Tracey says he has seen teams wearing American cowboy-style fringed outfits. Obviously what is important here is the uniformity to establish group identity. Diale says that even when not wearing 'traditional gear' there is a need for a dance group to be unique and

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[412] Coplan, 1985, p 65

[413] Muller & Topp, 1985

[414] Larlham, 1986, p 107

to look alike. He feels that the tattered clothes and patches are a rebellious form suggesting trash collectors, prison uniforms, poverty and a strong association with the working classes. As well as different kinds of hats and scarves, most of the groups mentioned also wore percussive props on their gumboots: bells, bottle tops and small stones or pieces of metal in empty shoe polish tins called *amakhehleze,* and worn as a substitute for traditional ankle rattles. Interestingly, Diale notes that a wooden floor is not an ideal dancing surface because the sound of the boots is inclined to overwhelm the more subtle variations of the percussion. He describes gumboot dancing as "an African form of Spanish dancing" with guitar accompaniment and a strong beat. And certainly, like *flamenco* or tap dancing, it is a dance form in which "sounds accompanying exertion in dance are an integral part of the dance itself".[415]

That symbolic display of authority, the European military band, was very popular at the time, and may have been of some influence. Such bands certainly would have been in tune with the highly stratified society of the Zulus, for example, with its strong military orientation. Coplan gives examples of military bands in Johannesburg which influenced evolving urban dance forms:

> British and local military brass and fife and drum bands, such as the Wanderers Military Band, played outdoor concerts of light classical and march music at the Wanderers ground and other parks as early as 1890.[416]
>
> Perhaps the most culturally influential mission was the Salvation Army, which used brass bands, tambourines and singing brigades in both mine compound and city streets.[417]

It is impossible to say with any certainty how strong these influences were, but they were definitely part of the general music environment and may well have contributed to the stylistic development of gumboot dancing and its general military feel.

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415 Royce, 1977, p 98

416 Coplan, 1985, p 50

417 Coplan in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, p 368

Perhaps the most important link with the environment is provided by the names of some of the sequences. One of Muller and Topp's informants, school principal Mr Sangweni, says that the names of the sequences are "not merely labels. They are depicting something that pertains to the life of the people". Muller and Topp mention certain names of sequences which are relevant here.

Two names are associated with police in an urban milieu: *AmaBlackjack* refers directly to the compound police, and *AmaPhoyisa* refers to the regular city police. The influence of competitions and manager-worker relationships are present in *Salutho, Caps* and *Attention*, which are found regularly among gumboot repertoires, and which seem to be imitating the police or greeting competition judges. The sequence entitled *Good Morning, Baas* is an obvious reference to the master/servant relationship. Rhodes student, Sithole, included in her team's repertoire a sequence entitled *Salute like a Policeman*. These name clearly derive from the urban relationships and lifestyle that have become part of the gumboot dance tradition.

Muller and Topp quote T.V. Ranger, in *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa*, who interprets such regimentation as 'adjustment to absolute power' or 'identifying with the aggressor'. He gives as other examples, Jewish prisoners in German concentration camps, who imitated the SS style of uniform and standing to attention etc., and also the Beni tribe in East Africa, who imitated military uniforms and drill and expressed exaggerated loyalty to the British Crown. Muller and Topp suggest that one could draw similar parallels with the mine workers and their experience of the police:

> Police contact with the miners was frequent since every compound was controlled by policemen. Continual clashes occurred (over issues like drinking, dagga smoking and possession of pass books) as police sought to regulate all aspects of African social life. This "identification with the aggressor" is expressed in gumboot teams in the forms of a "phoyisa" who cleared the way of the men as they danced through the streets, en route to performance events.

Muller and Topp give the constant commands by the team leader as another example of 'adjustment to absolute power' in a system where black workers are continually given instructions by white supervisors, police etc. I think this is a valid assumption, providing one keeps in mind that

leaders have a role to play in traditional Nguni dancing, so there is also a strong link here to the roots and origins of the dance.

Satire

Satire can play a significant role in the relief of stress. Andrew Tracey says that the satirical element is stronger in some other mine dance forms which include song, but that aspects of the compound lifestyle are laughed at satirically in gumboot dancing:

> They satirise the structures that they know on the mines, which can be very easily laughed at. If you make clever use of the rhythms you can be even more satirical, because the white person watching this dance isn't aware of the effect; the aesthetic effect of a certain rhythm can build a picture of a person and his character.

The two Rhodes students who led gumboot teams of girls at school both said that the presence of women in a man's dance constituted a satirical element in itself. Part of the success of Sithole's performances was the comic burlesque elements introduced, which depicted the hard-living, hard-drinking lifestyle of the mine veterans, whose behaviour often shocked their kin at home. This satire was instantly recognisable to the spectators, particularly as the girls wore mine helmets and overalls and sang work songs, and the enthusiastic response helped Sithole and her team to win first prize in a national competition.

Although satire is certainly present in gumboot dancing it seems to be a secondary element. The dancers' main focus of attention would be on getting the complex rhythms right, which demands tremendous concentration in performance.

American influence

Another possible urban influence was the cinema, and particularly the impact of America on emergent African urban performance culture. Coplan, in *In Township Tonight!*, describes this influence as considerable and important, and he discusses the misconceptions that have arisen because

of them. In his introduction he notes that a certain lack of interest in African urban art forms "may be explained by the widespread perceptions that they are not authentically African but rather the diluted, bastardised, commercial stepchildren of Western cultural colonisation." Coplan has a far more positive view of American influence:

> Much of the Western popular music so influential in Africa has grown luxuriantly in the Americas from African roots. Among urban black South Africans, the sustained appeal of black American performance styles derives also from the comparable experience of the two peoples under white domination. Hence it follows that modern urban forms are African because Africans have chosen to play them.[418]

Is there any evidence of this influence in gumboot dancing? Andrew Tracey finds no traces except perhaps in the cowboy style costumes sometimes worn. Margaret Larlham describes the form as one which "projects showmanship with stylish American overtones."[419] Muller and Topp ascribe the speed and complexity of the footwork, compared with the slow tempo in much traditional dancing, to the possible influence of American films. They provide photostats of film stills which illustrate the close resemblance between boot slapping techniques in gumboot dancing, in the jitterbug dance of the 1940's, and the tap routines of Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. These stills, which are taken from films like *Follow the Fleet* and *The Gay Divorcee*, suggest that movements from tap routines may be have been copied exactly in some of the gumboot dance sequences. We cannot be certain about this, but Muller and Topp do provide evidence that films were shown in the compounds and locations in the 1920's and 1930's which featured Astaire and Kelly. Tim Couzens, in his chapter describing the long history of the transatlantic connection and black Johannesburg, confirms that church, sport and carefully censored films were part of Sunday recreation on the mine compounds.[420] Interestingly, Andrew Tracey has noticed a considerable increase in the speed of gumboot dancing since he first knew it. This could be ascribed to the gradual influence of local and overseas films and television, but could also be a reflection of the increasing tempo of modern urban lifestyle.

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418 Coplan, 1985, p 3

419 Larlham, 1986, p 117

420 Couzens in Marks & Rathbone, 1985, pp 321 - 322

What is certain, in the specific context of gumboot dancing, is that the all-black, all-male, white-controlled compound milieu provided a uniquely South African environment, which may be considered instrumental in determining the evolution of this dance form, from its distinctive rural and traditional roots into the popular and exhilarating urban art form we know today.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this preliminary investigation has been to consider the African urban art form known as gumboot dancing in its historical socio-economic and cultural context in South Africa.

This study has revealed the violent nature of the African experience of South Africa's industrial revolution. A long history of compulsion forced black involvement in the white-controlled cash-based economy centred on the mining industry. Migrant workers from all over South Africa, bereft of their tribal support systems and denied full participation in the new industrial society, were in search of a new urban cultural identity. In the controlled, coercive and often dangerous environment of the mine compounds, competition dancing was encouraged by management as a leisure activity. Based on rural traditions, and influenced both by the vibrant life of black Johannesburg and the authoritarian features of compound life, gumboot dancing developed as an urban dance form. It was one of several mine dances that played a role in helping migrant workers to orientate themselves in the impersonal modern industrial world, to release tension and to develop new relationships and forms of recreation. It expresses the shared values and experiences of a heterogenous black urban society. Margaret Larlham comments: "...urban dance styles are a record of adaptive and resourceful behaviour in times of change. They may be seen as the self-assertive answer to the pressures of the urban environment".[421]

For all these reasons, gumboot dancing is important as a medium of research. As Rhodes graduate Lulu Khumalo puts it:

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[421] Larlham, 1986, p 116

> It is a multicultural experience, an urban dance based on rural traditions. The fact that it is a creative dance done by black people makes it important.[422]

In spite of its Nguni roots, the influence of the media, and particularly TV 2 and 3, seems to have given gumboot dancing an intercultural identity as representative of urban black South Africa. As a member of Muller and Topp's team said, anyone can 'play gumboots' irrespective of ethnic identity. The dance is now consciously known by people countrywide and has tremendous audience appeal among all South Africans. Ian Steadman, referring to the gumboot dance in Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, notes the enthusiastic response that greeted its performance:

> No form of text notation can adequately describe the sheer theatrical dynamism of a gum-boot dance. The present writer has witnessed spontaneous and lengthy applause for this dance sequence at a number of different performances of the play both in South Africa and in England.[423]

In her article on *Dance in a changing society*, Peggy Harper notes that the "dances that lend themselves to entertainment in the theatrical sense are those with an athletic technique which can be immediately appreciated by audiences unfamiliar with the dance."[424]

Andrew Tracey describes gumboot dancing as having become a 'national culture thing', a part of black urban performance culture. It is accessible to all South Africans because it does not normally use song, so there is no language problem, and the rhythmic structures can be learnt by everybody. Tracey describes it as comparable, or even better, than other stepping and slapping dances from Russia, Austria and Argentina. Of course, one must remember that it is not a social dance that can be quickly learnt; as a theatre dance form it requires, in addition to fitness, boundless energy and skill, a great many hours of teamwork to learn and perfect the rhythms.

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422 In June/July 1989, Rhodes student Lulu Khumalo went on a scholarship from USIA to the American Dance Festival, where she took classes with the *Chuck Davis African American Dance Ensemble*. They had in their repertory a gumboot dance taught to them in the sixties by the cast of Alan Paton's *Sponono*. It was the only black South African dance they knew.

423 Steadman, 1985, p 398

424 Harper in *African Arts*, 1967, p 76

Gumboot dancing is indeed what Hugh Tracey described as "an authentic example of that cosmic reality which makes men dance together for the joy of dancing and the proof of living".[425] It is a pity that so littlē research has been done on such a magnificent dance form. It needs to be investigated nationwide, with concentrated work being done on the Witwatersrand and in Natal. Maishe Maponya states that an important question must be asked in relation to the rising popularity of certain African urban dance forms: Do they truly reflect communities that have defined themselves, or are they merely linked to money, television fame and international stardom? And if so, how relevant is this in the end? Gumboot dancing is not just tourist entertainment; it has a meaning and a context within the urban African experience. And an understanding of that context, of the totality into which the dance fits, adds another dimension and an enormous richness to one's appreciation of the performance experience.

> The dance reflects powerful social forces that demand some explanation.[426]

In the introductory issue of the South African *Dance Journal* (March 1990) Fredrick Hagemann states: "Movement, like language, is culturally specific; it embodies the values and world perceptions of those who create the movement."[427]

Gumboot dancing is a new form that grew out of rural traditions, and has been transformed by suffering and stress into an exhilarating and triumphant celebration, of manhood, of survival, and of a rich emergent African urban culture.

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425 Tracey, 1952, p 2

426 Spencer, 1985, p 206

427 Hagemann in *The Dance Journal*, 1990, p 6

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Andrew Tracey.	Director of the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in Grahamstown.
Lulu Khumalo.	Zulu speaking drama honours graduate and Junior Lecturer in the Drama Department, Rhodes University; leader of a gumboot team at school.
Louisa Mokwena.	Tswana speaking drama graduate.
Siphiwe Sithole.	Swazi speaking drama graduate; leader of gumboot teams at school and University.

Dance Umbrella, University of Witwatersrand, 1990

Lucky Diale.	Contemporary dancer with P.A.C.T and chairperson of the Dance Alliance.
Pepper Lekabe.	Leader of the gumboot dance team, Gold Reef City.
Maishe Maponya.	Poet, playwright, dancer, choreographer and lecturer at the School of Dramatic Art, University of the Witwatersrand.

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