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# Dance as Sport: Living Art and Commentary on the Lives of Dancers in French Literature

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Dr. Dawson

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Dance as a Sport: Living Art and Commentary on the Lives of Dancers in French Literature

The curve of the hand, the height of the jump, the deep squat, the speed and agility: all of these phrases may be used to describe an athlete. Spectators watch in amazement as the hand is curved just perfectly for a basketball player to score the layup. Track and field athletes spend hours of rehearsal to clear the height of their hurdles. Football players engage in an intimate squat with one another as they prepare to be cued to then instantly run with all the speed and agility in their body to catch the prized football. One must not be mistaken, though, for these statements above do not merely describe athletes of this sort nor only pieces of art sculpted, painted, or drawn: dancers must curve their hand in precisely the correct way to bring to life the correct shape; dancers must jump higher than even the shortest NBA player must to touch the basket—whether it be a *changement* in ballet or using that same leg strength to do a *back hop* in hip-hop; dancers must squat lower than Peyton Manning to stretch their hip flexors to be able to move with all the more speed and agility—two words which encompass dance in many ways. Art may not always equate with sport, but the sport of dance reveals the beauty of the two combined.

So, then, how exactly is a sport defined? Debate still stems today regarding the definition of what characterizes a sport. Allen Guttmann makes three primary distinctions in his work regarding the definition of sport—separating play, games, and contests (24). Sometimes, dance is thought of only as spontaneous play—visions of dancing in the car to favorite music, dancing

down the aisle in a grocery store, or even dancing at a high school prom. Guttman characterizes spontaneous play as “impulsive, voluntary, and uncoerced” (24). Certainly, some dance can be characterized this way: not all dance is sport dance. However, for the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to delve further into Guttman’s definitions of sport to see how dance truly fits.

Another type of play per Guttman “has rules and regulations to determine which actions are acceptable and which are not” (24). This introduction of rules is how Guttman distinguishes spontaneous play from games. He continues to give examples of games: “leapfrog, chess, ‘playing house,’ and basketball” (24). The final grand scale distinction Guttman makes in the definition of sports is the involvement of competition: “One can win a game of chess or basketball, but it makes no sense to ask who has won at leapfrog or ‘playing house’” (25). Even more specifically, Guttman notes a distinction in contests themselves: “Those that require physical prowess...and those that do not” (25). As the qualifications for sport become even more specific, there are still distinctions that must be clarified. In this instance, how can one define “physical prowess?” Guttman details what many sports heroes have demonstrated: “uncommon strength, speed, agility, dexterity, and endurance” (25). As already stated and to be explored further in this paper, each of these characteristics of “sports heroes” are those dancers radiate.

Finally, in his distinction of play, games, and contests, Guttman is sure to not discard the amount of mental alertness required in sports. Apart from memorization of dance routines that last hours, the mental alertness and stamina required for dancers equates with that of other sports—Guttman gives the example of baseball in his text (25).

Similar to the fast pace of bumping the volleyball over the net as well as the sprints back and forth on the tennis court, techniques of many dances “are performed in maximal amplitudes and often in a very fast rhythm” (Miletic et al. 558). Certainly, though, not all sports require

running quickly or even a ball in its set of props. Sports such as wrestling and Olympic heavy lifting require muscular strength enough to ward off either someone of comparable weight class or snatch double one's body weight over their head. Again, the same rings true for dance. Miletic et al. again notes this similarity in dance as a sport: "Besides high-amplitude movements, the locomotor system of dancers is additionally loaded by frequent lifting of the partner" (558). Although frequently unrecognized as a sport, all of the evidence thus far categorizes it as otherwise. Dance may be thought of as an art as well, but it is also a sport.

Ballet, a French word though of Italian origin in the medieval period, was largely the beginning of dance in the spotlight beyond peasantry and folk dancing. As a genre of dance, ballet itself went through a number of distinct periods of stylistic changes and then branched off into a branch of dance better known as "contemporary" or "modern" dance; dance genres continued to evolve after modern dance followed by jazz dance, musical theatre, and then hip-hop or breakdancing. Each of these genres of dance are still found all over the world today; however, the primary dance genre of the following paper regards ballet.

Ballet began in the medieval period and began to take flight in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with individual artists and dancing masters. King Louis XIV starred in his own court ballet productions, and he used ballet as a political tool in the 1600s. The three main time periods distinguished by stylistic and otherwise changes of ballet are Romantic Ballet (the mid-1800s), Classical Ballet (1890s), and Contemporary Ballet (all ballet after the Classical period). Many of the well-known and pivotal Contemporary Ballet pieces are from the 1930s-1950s (e.g., *Sacre du printemps*<sup>1</sup>, *Apollo*, even choreography from the film *West Side Story*—even though its choreography and film release came slightly later in 1961). Although each of these ballet genres

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<sup>1</sup> Rite of Spring

are still found today, modern dance connects with the stylistic similarities of Contemporary Ballet and is found around the same time period. After the dramatic and revolutionary changes Contemporary Ballet brought to the dance world (e.g., changes in costumes, set design, choreography, etc.), modern dance's evolution and acceptance eventually came: "Au milieu des années quatre-vingt, la danse contemporaine est devenue un art légitime, médiatisé et financé par les institutions publiques" (Buscatto 195).<sup>2</sup> That is to say, dance as a more contemporary genre was not accepted as a legitimate art until the middle of the 1980s. Additionally, the funding that arose after the acceptance of dance in this way was pivotal in the history of dance—public funding generally means, even today, that something is accepted for what it is and valued for what it brings to society. Even more generally regarding periods of transition for any activity, Verchaly notes the intertwining of societal changes: "L'évolution de la contre-danse...d'évoquer...les transformations de la vie politique, économique, sociale et psychologique, et aussi les incidences qui en résultent dans les divers milieu de la société française" (97).<sup>3</sup> Thus, the societal shifts and shifts in dance are largely united: frequently, dance is not the only thing that evolves—so does political life, social life, etc.

Published as a children's book in 1988, *Catherine Certitude*, written by Nobel Prize winner Patrick Modiano and illustrated by Jean-Jacques Sempé, recalls a piece of the childhood of the now-adult Catherine with her father (Georges), spent primarily in Paris, and the two then transition to New York City. The story begins, however, with Catherine's observation of her own daughter teaching a dance class in New York City. With no explicit date stamp for when the story takes place, the instance at the beginning with Catherine's own daughter is presumably in

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<sup>2</sup> "In the middle of the 1980s, contemporary dance became a legitimate art, broadcasted and financed by public institutions." This translation and all further translations are my own translations of the texts.

<sup>3</sup> "The evolution of folk dance to evoke the transformations of political life, economic life, social and psychological life, and also the incidences that have resulted in variety in the middle of French society."

1988; thus, the remainder of the story is the flashback almost thirty years into the past (Modiano 10). Catherine's unnamed mother herself left Paris to pursue a life of dance in New York City when Catherine was only a small child. As a child, Catherine begins to pursue dance after her father asks, "Ma petite Catherine...ça te plairait d'être une danseuse toi aussi? Comme maman?" (Modiano 42).<sup>4</sup> Georges then enrolls Catherine in a Thursday night dance class for which he stays to observe along with all the other young girls' mothers. Upon the conclusion of the story, Georges informs Catherine that they will be going to America; Catherine is shocked by this revelation of a journey but excited to be reunited with her mother, as their only contact for years has been occasional letters from New York City to Paris. The unification of the illustrations, short length of story, and simple vocabulary in this story may lead one to believe that *Catherine Certitude* is only a meaningless novella for children. However, Modiano and Sempé use distinct family dynamics and gender roles, an unsettling of story location, and clear presence of mystery to draw clear characteristics in the lives of dancers.

As already stated, the flashback encompassing the story of *Catherine Certitude* takes place primarily with Catherine and her father, Georges. Modiano's use of gender roles, both inside and outside the family, is of importance that cannot and does not go unnoticed, particularly when reading the text and illustrations. First, as aforementioned, Catherine's mother (for whom the readers do not have a name) leaves Paris when Catherine is a young girl to pursue dance in New York City. With the publication date of 1988 and knowledge of the story's flashback framework, the story of Catherine's childhood likely takes place sometime around 1950-1970. Psychologists have studied parenting styles and the effects of their decisions in children of even the youngest age—both parental behaviors and attitudes. Witt found that

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<sup>4</sup> "My little Catherine, would it please you to be a dancer also? Like your mother?"

“children internalize parental messages regarding gender at an early age, with awareness of adult sex role differences being found in two-year-old children” (1). One study conducted by Moen et al. studied the effects of maternal employment and daughter gender role beliefs. In their own background literature, they found that “daughters of mothers who are employed outside the home have more untraditional attitudes about women and work” (Moen et al. 282). As explicitly stated in *Catherine Certitude*, not only does Catherine’s mother work outside of the home, but she works in an entirely different country—approximately 3,600 miles away. Therefore, when Georges asks Catherine if she would like to be a dancer like her mother, it seems that it would be the obvious choice for her to desire a similar life to the one her mother chose—at least a choice made with freedom. Also regarding this subject, Moen et al. found that “a continuous work history and a professional job are positively related to having a work role identity, but marriage and a greater number of children are associated with less identification with the role of paid worker” (290). The facts of the story of *Catherine Certitude* are interesting, then, that the relationship between Georges and Catherine’s mother is unclear, and there is only one offspring in this family about which the readers know; the characteristics of the family dynamics in this story more closely resemble the “continuous work history and a professional job” as opposed to “marriage and a greater number of children” (290). Furthermore, in a literature compilation from Witt, she found something similar to Moen et al. that could give insight to the character and actions of Catherine:

Children... whose mothers work outside the home experience the world with a sense that everyone in the family gets to become a member of the outside world, and their sense of self includes the knowledge that they have the ability to make choices which are not hindered by gender (2).

It is interesting, then, that Catherine has followed in the almost exact pathway as her mother: we see Catherine at the beginning of the story observing her own daughter teaching a dance class,

yet Catherine also chose to dance as a young girl and left Paris with her father as a child. The story of Catherine and her family heritage seems to reflect exactly what Moen et al. found in their study with work history, marriage and children, and the battle between the two of a struggle for true identification.

Not only do the mother's actions play a notable yet mysterious role in this story, but so do the actions of the father, Georges. We see Georges primarily in three arenas: he is a business owner with his partner—Monsieur Casterade; he is the primary caretaker of his daughter—Catherine; and he struggles with a romantic relationship void. First, Georges' work is a bit unclear, both to the reader and to Catherine. Even in the first pages of the novel—Catherine's narration as an adult—she says, “Je n'ai jamais su quel est exactement le métier de papa” (10).<sup>5</sup> Georges' work is also one of the very first aspects of Catherine's life mentioned once the flashback begins: “Nous habitons au-dessus d'une sorte de magasin” (13).<sup>6</sup> There is an additional martial aspect of the work and home lives of Georges simply by the fact that he and Catherine live below the shop. This is not unheard of or uncommon for business owners and families to do—even in some places today—however, Modiano could have chosen for them to live in a small cottage exclusive of Georges' work, yet he chose to join the two together in yet another aspect of this intimacy between work and home. Instantly from the beginning, the reader notices the importance of Georges' work in his life: it seems almost as if he is married to his work as opposed to married to a human. Catherine even notes that Monsieur Casterade is rarely away (“Aux rares moments où Monsieur Casterade...était absent,” 14).<sup>7</sup> Slightly later in the story, Catherine tells the reader that Monsieur Casterade only started working with Georges after

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<sup>5</sup> “I never knew exactly what kind of work papa did.”

<sup>6</sup> “We live below a sort of shop.”

<sup>7</sup> “In the rare moments when Mr. Casterade...was absent.”



Catherine's mother left: "C'est après le départ de maman que Monsieur Casterade a commencé de travailler avec papa" (15).<sup>8</sup> Seemingly, after Catherine's mother left Paris to pursue and wed her career—dance—Georges appeared to pursue and wed his career. Conversely, it is interesting that Catherine knows her mother's employment clearly, but it is difficult to understand what Georges does in his work despite his proximity and presence in the family. Modiano uses this juxtaposition yet similarity between Catherine's parents to reveal a commentary on the lives of dancers: one may frown upon Catherine's mother's decision to leave Paris to pursue dance in New York City; however, Georges did, in fact, the same thing only without moving cities.

A second side of Georges the readers see is his life with Catherine. Certainly, as a child, Catherine has no option but to follow her father around and observe everything he does: she is learning and growing and remains under the protection of Georges. However, Catherine describes a vivid and fun ritual between her and her father: "Quand il se rasait, nous respections un rituel tous les deux: il me poursuivait avec son blaireau à travers tout l'appartement, en essayant de me barbouiller le visage. Après quoi nous devons soigneusement essuyer nos lunettes dont les verres étaient maculés de savon à barbe" (36-37).<sup>9</sup> Contrary to the story to this point—a seemingly serious, authoritarian relationship between Georges and Catherine—now the readers see the fun and joy the two have together and that not everything is about work. Similarly, in dance, not everything deals with an authoritarian way of life: as with all sports, there is enjoyment and fun even in the midst of difficult technique training, hours-long performances, and recovery.

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<sup>8</sup> "It was after the departure of momma that Monsieur Casterade began to work with papa."

<sup>9</sup> "When he shaves, we respect a ritual between us: he pursues me with his shaving brush throughout all the apartment, trying to shave my face. After that, we must carefully clean our glasses so that they are not blurred with shaving cream."

Furthermore, it is Georges who first brings up enrolling Catherine in a dance class—as previously mentioned. This event in the story is noteworthy as it connects Georges’ life at work with his life with Catherine. At the beginning of this section of text, a large shipment arrives to Georges’ and Monsieur Casterade’s shop—full of “des statuette de danseuses classiques” (41).<sup>10</sup> Catherine makes an interesting remark about the shipments of statues, though: “Chaque soir, nous nous amusons, papa et moi, à recoller leurs [les statuette] morceaux et à les aligner au fur et à mesure sur les étagères” (42).<sup>11</sup> That is to say that some of the statues break while in the shipping process to the shop, and the uniformity and stiffness of these dancer statues is almost made into a farce as Georges and Catherine seemingly wallow in the “pain” of these broken statues, gluing them back together in whatever arrangement pleases them and then line them up on the shelf. It is, in fact, unclear what shelf they refer to here: do they glue the pieces back together in order to sell the statues as damaged, or do they keep the pieces and re-glued masterpieces for themselves in their home? In their reformation of these shattered dancers, it is immediately after this scenario that Georges asks Catherine if she would like to be a dancer: “Ma petite Catherine, m’a dit papa, ça te plairait d’être une danseuse toi aussi? Comme maman ?” (42).<sup>12</sup> In this one question alone, a multitude of thoughts could be going through Catherine’s head: there is the emotional attachment to her mother and learned value from her pursuit of dance as a career (Moen et al.); there is this feeling of brokenness associated with dance from both the emotional experience of her mother’s absence and this physical, statuesque experience of broken dancers trying to be glued back together; and Georges is the one asking Catherine if she would like to pursue dance—perhaps a longing to please her father could have arisen in

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<sup>10</sup> “Small statues of classical dancers”

<sup>11</sup> “Each evening, we amuse ourselves, papa and me, by gluing back together their [the statues’] pieces and aligning them as we go on the shelf.”

<sup>12</sup> “My little Catherine, would it please you to be a dancer also? Like your mother?”

Catherine's soul in trying to think of her response. Because Georges is the one to bring up enrollment in a dance class, it could be that his question stems from a sort of wishful vicarious life through Catherine now that her mother is gone to also pursue dance. Perhaps Georges wants Catherine to experience life both similarly to and different from how her mother has experienced it. Modiano's use of the father figure to invite Catherine into the dance world makes a comment on the lives of dancers even today: the influence of others—the statues, her mother's vacancy in her life, her father's question—can have immense influence on a dancer's life; however, there is no sense of forcefulness for Catherine to be a dancer. It is her choice. As with any professional athlete, training must start somewhere, and although there may be extrinsic motivations further in the process, the intrinsic outweighs them.

While Georges appears to be married to his work and father to Catherine, it seems as though he is not really lacking anything in terms of relationships although he is physically without a spouse for most of the story. The reader is informed that Georges chooses the dance class that Catherine will attend—seemingly an action without second thought as he is in charge of the family and its affairs: “Papa en avait choisi un [cours de danse]” (43).<sup>13</sup> Catherine's teacher is called Madame Galina Dismaïlova. At Catherine's final dance class, both Catherine and the reader discover that Georges knew Madame Dismaïlova previously: “Catherine, c'est drôle...J'ai connu dans le temps ton professeur, Madame Dismaïlova” (77).<sup>14</sup> Instantly upon reading this long-hidden piece of information, there appears to be a new air to Georges: he who was previously this serious yet loving caregiver now seems to have ignited a sort of scandal in enrolling Catherine in this particular dance class with this specific instructor, especially with the secretive nature of his actions. Georges recalls his original meeting of both Catherine's mother

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<sup>13</sup> “Papa chose a dance class.”

<sup>14</sup> “Catherine, it's funny...I knew your professor, Madame Dismaïlova, in the old days.”

and Madame Dismaïlova: both at a Casino at the same time, both dancers. “Un soir, on m’a demandé de remplacer l’un des porteurs... Les porteurs, ma petite Catherine, sont ceux qui doivent porter les danseuses de la revue... Et la danseuse que je devais porter, c’était ta maman” (78).<sup>15</sup> After this relatively lengthy description of meeting Catherine’s mother for the first time, all the information Georges gives about meeting Madame Dismaïlova is, “C’est au Casino de Paris que j’ai connu aussi ton professeur, Madame Dismaïlova... Elle faisait partie de la revue” (78).<sup>16</sup> Immediately unclear what exactly happened, there is this sense of mystery as one wonders about further details of their first meeting. Furthermore, Madame Dismaïlova proves more mysterious when we find out that her name has been changed in the years since Georges first met her: “elle ne s’appelait pas Galina Dismaïlova à cette époque-là, mais tout simplement Odette Marchal” (78).<sup>17</sup> This sense of mystery applies not only to Madame Dismaïlova’s life, Georges’ life, or even Catherine’s life; this mystery is present in lives of all dancers. Similar to acting, dancers must take on a role outside of themselves in a production while still, of course, remaining their own person underneath the costumes, choreography, and character they portray. Although not always, there is sometimes a scandalous air about dancers as they position their leg a certain way or make eye contact with one chosen member of the audience. Furthermore, even though dancers do not always appear scandalous externally, they have a mysterious component to themselves similar to the intertwining of mystery apparent with Georges, Catherine, Catherine’s mother, and Madame Dismaïlova.

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<sup>15</sup> “One evening, someone asked me to replace one of the carriers... The carriers, my little Catherine, are those who must carry the dancers to the review... And the dancer that I had to carry, it was your mother.”

<sup>16</sup> “It was at the Casino of Paris that I also met your teacher, Madame Dismaïlova... she took part in the review.”

<sup>17</sup> “She wasn’t called Galina Dismaïlova in the older days but simply Odette Marchal.”

In addition to the family dynamics and gender roles Modiano makes use of as a part of commentary on the lives of dancers, there is also an uneasiness that the story takes place in both Paris and New York City. Frequently, a single location is clear and consistent in a story, or there may be a clear transition from one location to the next. However, in *Catherine Certitude*, a battle seems to take place between the two cities, two countries, and two sides of the family. Georges and Catherine's mother first meet and eventually marry while she is dancing with a troupe in Paris (15). However, Catherine's mother is American. At one point into her marriage to Georges, "elle avait le mal du pays" (15).<sup>18</sup> Following this homesickness, "elle avait décidé de retourner en Amérique" (15).<sup>19</sup> Additionally, it is in Paris that Georges meets Madame Dismaïlova—a source of mystery and scandal that the reader discovers late in the story. At this point, Paris appears only as a place of scandal and heartache. Presumably, however, Paris is where Catherine was born and still resides for the flashback encompassing most of the story. On the other hand, at the end of the story as Georges and Catherine are traveling to reunite with Catherine's mother (as Georges promised when she first left Paris), he says, "il ne faut pas oublier la France" (92).<sup>20</sup> Therefore, there is a certain history that Georges wants Catherine to remember about Paris even though Modiano conveys that much of the difficulty of life came from being in Paris.

Conversely, as Catherine describes the present-day living situation of her and her family—even briefly mentioning her first memories of coming to New York—everything feels as though it is at peace in New York City. "Ici à New York, j'ai fait partie d'une troupe de ballet pendant quelques années. Ensuite, j'ai dirigé avec ma mère un cours de danse. Puis elle a pris sa retraite et j'ai continué sans elle. C'est maintenant avec ma fille que je travaille... Lui [Georges]

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<sup>18</sup> "She became homesick."

<sup>19</sup> "She decided to return to America."

<sup>20</sup> "We must not forget France."

et maman sont installés maintenant dans un petit appartement de Greenwich Village” (10).<sup>21</sup>

There is no explicit mention of happiness with life in New York City; however, there seems to be an immense peace for the entire family in New York City that did not exist in Paris. There are peaceful transitions—Catherine spending a few years taking a dance class; Catherine then teaching a class with her mother; finally, Catherine taking over for her mother as she retired. Even in describing an aspect of the relationship between Georges and Catherine’s mother now, all comes across as peaceful and content: they are reunited and living together, just as Georges promised would happen. What is to come of this distinct difference between the two cities in which the story takes place? Georges states that it is necessary to not forget France (92), but happiness appears to be found more so in New York City. In the lives of dancers, there may be a constant pull and tug between a number of facets of life—home life, work life, etc.—but in the end, one must not forget from where they come but still strive to succeed and enjoy life in the present.

Finally, in all of this, there is an ongoing sense of mystery. Although already briefly mentioned in each section of this paper, there are further motifs throughout the story of Catherine that contribute to this overarching sense of mystery present. Historically, if one wears glasses, they serve the purpose to gain clarity. However, throughout *Catherine Certitude*, Modiano conveys a goal to debunk this traditional thought that glasses help one to see more clearly; in fact, he projects this idea that glasses hinder how one sees the world around them. From the very beginning when Catherine narrates in present-day, she notices a young girl in her daughter’s dance class that removes her glasses before class, and Catherine recalls her own days as a young

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<sup>21</sup> “Here in New York, I took part in a ballet dance troupe for some years. Next, I directed a dance course with my mother. After that, she retired, and I continued without her. I now work with my daughter... Georges and my mama now live in a small apartment in Greenwich Village.”

dancer and the requirement to remove her glasses before dancing: “Une petite fille...porte des lunettes. Elle les a posées sur une chaise, avant de commencer le cours, comme je le faisais au même âge chez Madame Dismaïlova. On ne danse pas avec des lunettes” (9).<sup>22</sup> Certainly, one may not give a second thought this idea of removing glasses to dance: they may fling off and be damaged, particularly with a more advanced dance group. However, with young children who would likely not be performing strenuous enough choreography to cause glasses to fly off, what would the problem be with dancing while wearing glasses?

Additionally, an aforementioned scenario between Georges and Catherine involving shaving cream also makes clear note of the presence of glasses. However, in this described ritual, Catherine notes that they must clean off glasses so that they are not stained—alluding to and confirming the widely accepted fact that glasses help to gain clarity. Even more so than gaining literal clarity, Georges and Catherine appear to connect best in this sort of situation—with glasses removed and then cleaning them. At this point, Modiano seems to give contradictory statements regarding glasses’ purpose in this story. When Catherine begins her dance class with Madame Dismaïlova, on the other hand, Catherine notes an advantage she has regarding wearing glasses:

Au début, j’enviais mes camarades qui ne portaient pas de lunettes. Tout était simple pour elles. Mais, à la réflexion, je me suis dit que j’avais un avantage : vivre dans deux mondes différents, selon que je portais ou non mes lunettes (43).<sup>23</sup>

This idea of living in two different worlds can be understood by anyone who needs corrected vision: it is easier to see in one world (typically while wearing lenses), and it is more difficult to

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<sup>22</sup> “A small girl...wears glasses. She puts them on a chair before beginning the class, as I did at the same age in class with Madame Dismaïlova. One does not dance with glasses.”

<sup>23</sup> “At the beginning, I envied my comrades who did not wear glasses. Everything was simple for them. But, after reflecting on it, I told myself that I have an advantage: to live in two different worlds, based on if I wear or do not wear my glasses.”

see in another (typically without lenses). However, Catherine's comment has a tone that alludes that she sees more clearly without her glasses on. In fact, she says so explicitly: "Et le monde de la danse n'était pas la vie réelle, mais un monde où l'on sautait et où l'on faisait des entrechats au lieu de marcher simplement. Oui, un monde de rêve comme celui, flou et tendre, que je voyais sans mes lunettes" (43).<sup>24</sup> In a more literal sense, dancing without glasses may certainly be a world that is blurry and soft, but this would seem to have a more negative connotation—wishing instead to wear glasses to see clearly. However, Catherine says she prefers to dance without glasses on because she sees not a fuzzy world without shape but a dream world. The mystery of a dancer's life comes not only from the steps, leaps, or jumps she or he powers through; rather the mystery of a dancer's life comes from what is seen to the dancer themselves—this dream world Catherine speaks of, for example. Perhaps Madame Dismailova chooses to require her students to remove their glasses because she better understands this fuzzy and soft dream world. Although sight in dance can be helpful, there is arguably an aspect of dance that does not require sight whatsoever—the feeling of one's body making the right shape or stretching in the right way to improve a leap. For these things, sight is certainly not required.

Furthermore, Catherine recalls a Thursday evening dance class at which she forgot her glasses (as Madame Dismailova required her each class to remove them and set them aside). For the first and only time the reader sees, Catherine dances alone ("J'ai décidé de danser toute seule," 47).<sup>25</sup> This dream world she describes earlier in the story seems to come to life in her imagination here. She recalls her solo dancing: "Il m'a suffi d'un peu d'imagination pour

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<sup>24</sup> "And the world of dance isn't real life, but a world where one leaps and where one leaps in place of simply walking. Yes, a dream world like this, blurry and soft, is what I see without my glasses."

<sup>25</sup> "I decided to dance all alone."



entendre dans le silence la musique du piano et la voix de Madame Dismaïlova” (49-50).<sup>26</sup> All the while she is dancing to imaginary music and the voice of her teacher, Catherine is dancing without her glasses, giving the reader a more vivid example of this dream world she enters without her glasses on. Although the reader can see Catherine’s imagination come to life here, the mysteriousness of her dream world still remains. Certainly, Modiano uses specific diction to bring to life the scenario of Catherine dancing alone, but there is nothing further described regarding what may be going on in Catherine’s mind during this scene. As a result of this, Modiano’s commentary on dancers’ mystery continues: it may not ever be possible to understand each dancer’s own dream world; however, this mystery of dancers contributes to the character of the sport overall.

The unification of the illustrations, short length of story, and simple vocabulary in this story may lead one to believe that *Catherine Certitude* is only a meaningless novella for children. However, Modiano and Sempé use distinct family dynamics and gender roles, an unsettling of story location, and clear presence of mystery to draw distinctions in the lives of dancers. Catherine’s actions of, at least somewhat, following in her mother’s footsteps as well as the unclear role of Georges—in his work, in the Certitude family, and in the story—reflect the sense of mystery and uncertainty dancers may face yet overcome to succeed in their sport. Additionally, the battle between—and perhaps eventual reconciliation of—New York City and Paris as a story location helps to make clear the same struggle dancers face both in their own time spent in a particular city as well as the pull and tug between many areas of their life (i.e., family, job as a professional athlete, personal preferences of time spent, etc.). Finally, as all prescriptions are different for different pairs of eyes, there is no one mold to fit as a dancer nor

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<sup>26</sup> “It was satisfactory to have a bit of imagination to hear the music of the piano and the voice of Madame Dismaïlova in the silence.”

even as a sport (as Allen Guttman's text reflects at the beginning of this paper). This prevalent sense of mystery throughout the story involving mysterious relationships (Georges and the women in his life), mysterious characters (Madame Dismailova and Catherine's unnamed mother), and a mysterious life circle (of Catherine and her family lineage, both her parents before and her daughter after her) give life to truthful struggles and triumphs of dancers even today. Certainly, dance can be thought of in a multitude of ways, primarily both as art and sport. As previously stated, art may not always equate with sport, but the sport of dance reveals the beauty of the two combined in its bodily performed manner and the manner in which one's life is the life of a dancer.

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