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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

WEAVING THROUGH REALITY:
DANCE AS AN ACTIVE EMBLEM OF FANTASY IN PERFORMANCE LITERATURE

SUBMITTED TO
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AND
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents..... | 3 |
| Introduction: Where Dance Exits, Stage Right..... | 4 |
| <i>Giselle</i> as Masochist..... | 12 |
| Eroticizing Dance, Exoticizing <i>Salome</i> | 27 |
| Transforming From Black and White to “The Red Shoes”..... | 43 |
| Conclusion: Modern Dance as the Evolution of Expression..... | 60 |
| Acknowledgments..... | 66 |
| Works Cited..... | 67 |
| Works Consulted..... | 71 |

Introduction:

Where Dance Exits, Stage Right

“The old soldier said: ‘Dear me what pretty dancing shoes!’ and Karen could not help it, she was obliged to dance a few steps; and when she had once begun, her legs continued to dance. It seemed as if the shoes had got power over them.”
Hans Christian Andersen, “The Red Shoes”

There’s a moment in “The Red Shoes” when the reader is aware that Karen’s dancing has taken a life of its own. Dance, no longer an element of a young girl’s fancy, becomes a powerful force of torture, restricting the freedoms of the willful, young girl. In this thesis, Karen and other female characters will show the connection between dance and the freedoms that women desire. Dance is one of the most physical acts of expression, an experience in which the dancer exposes the live body to the audience for consumption. The insertion of dance into the literary form mashes the physical and the literal to convey a common theme. Dance has found itself as a modicum of expression, but restrained expression. The dancer finds itself within boundaries, always the object of another and rarely acting on its own will. A dancer is choreographed for and performs for another; this other takes advantage of their performance and inherent vulnerability by indulging them. In the dance canon, the classical position of ballet is reserved as the historically severe art in which girls are intended to be carbon copies of one another and deprive their body, minds, and creativity through a prescriptive physical exercise. Modern dance attempts to correct this fallacy and extract dance from a caging form to a jubilant release. As Deborah Jowitt of the *Village Voice* notes, in both the 40’s and 50’s and the 80’s and 90’s, “the emphasis [of dance was] less on innovations in movement than on development, expansion, and appropriation” (Jowitt). Women, specifically, were seeking a “new” form that would “engage”

them “for a long time” (Jowitt). Women wished to free dance from its floor-focused origin from ballet through modern movement in which the performance finds new and exciting ways to move through space.

This desire to reflect the internal struggle of dancers is mirrored in the literary sphere. When dance enters the two-dimensional world of the written word, it is begging to be developed into a three dimensional physicality. Narratives incorporating dance ask the question: what would the live bodies do? Female characters such as Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* struggles with common obstacles to freedom as a female and utilizes dance as a means of forming new understanding about her identity. Deriving from a more traditional dance schema, Théophile Gautier gives *Giselle* a masochistic flight through an excursion of fantasy in death from the life of the professional dancer. Hans Christian Andersen’s *Karen* of “The Red Shoes” finds dancing to be a curse that haunts her childhood existence. It is the false freedoms of women that beget fantasy, a fantasy created by their authors to allow the audience and reader to distinguish between the boundaries in the performed and the unperformed.

While *Giselle*, *Salome*, and “The Red Shoes” provide arguably more powerful performances of dance, Nora Helmer’s weak representation of the tarantella in Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* elucidates the relation of dance to Realism. Serving as the exception to the following three chapters, an examination of dance’s function in *A Doll’s House* yields drastically different results due to its nature as a Realist play. Nora performs two dances in *A Doll’s House*; however the audience sees only one of them. The first dance shows the way in which Ibsen restricts dance from realizing its truth telling potential while the second demonstrates the possibility and reality expressed in a dance unseen. Nora’s famous first tarantella dance is commonly analyzed as the symbolism for the deterioration of her married and domestic life. A

2009 stage performance of *A Doll's House* by Gillian Anderson, which moves the Helmers to Edwardian London in Zinnie Harris' adaptation, displays Nora beginning her dance in the taut structure of the tarantella. This structure devolves into what appears to be reckless, joyous spinning, losing the technique of her dance easily. The dance fails as an act of freedom; Nora "needs some more instruction" from Torvald and resumes her dependency on him (Harris). She serves as the typical controlled dancer, choreographed by another, her husband, who renders her naked and vulnerable as the subject of his gaze. Ibsen seems to be deliberately limiting Nora's expression through dance. The notable 1959 television performance of the play casts Julie Harris as a Nora who displays a more violent exuberance in her dance rehearsal. Thrusting her hand against a tambourine and calling out loudly, "faster, faster!" her hair falls from its pins and she becomes the subject of disgrace and shame. Others in the room watching her rehearsal look on with worry. This dance has not helped the poor Nora but driven her into the arms of her husband seeming a helpless child. The tarantella, for Ibsen's purposes within the confines of the stage, or in this case the screen, is insufficient as a mode of expression. This shamed unruly Nora seems in concert with the origins of the tarantella as a dance that "functioned as a means for women to liberate themselves momentarily from the strictures of traditional society with reintegration after appropriate healing and public forgiveness ceremonies" (Lipfert). However, it is the inept execution of the dance that allows Nora's second dance to be idealized and perfected as an improved result.

Nora's second dance in *A Doll's House* exists only in the mind of the audience. The dance lives in stage notes and character dialogue but is never performed onstage. Ibsen provides a space for Nora to express herself where she cannot be the subject of the audience's gaze and where her dance can be idealized to perfection in the mind. It is this second dance that serves as

an entrance into reality for Nora, one of the first instances in which Nora seems to be acting in her own interest by performing purely for herself. After all, Nora's constant refusal to express her feelings about her discontent with her life requires her previous actions to function as a performance, which she must maintain to please others. Within the structure of Realism, the fantasy that dance normally embodies must live in a manner that reflects the everyday for Nora's first dance. As such, Nora's first performed dance exists as a continuation of a performance in which Nora is participating throughout the play. Interacting with others as if content with her life, Nora becomes the ultimate performer, enacting a play within the play *A Doll's House*. This places the second dance as the only instance in which Nora is her real self without the harming input of the audience's eyes.

Examining Nora's life as one continued performance through performative speech, Nora's second dance becomes the expression of the true Nora. In Branislav Jakovljević's "Shattered Back Wall: Performative Utterance of *A Doll's House*," he explores the question of how the "theatre and the performative act upon each other" (Jakovljević). Noting that *A Doll's House* is, in boiled down terms, "a play about writing with consequences, about words that act and generate action," he applies the power of performative speech; Viewing *A Doll's House* through the lens of performative speech, "in which by saying something or in saying something we are doing something," the entirety of the play is confirmed as a performance by Nora (Jakovljević). When Nora explains to Mrs. Linde that at some point her "dancing and dressing up and reciting [will pall on Torvald]" she is in fact performing the acts of dancing and dressing up by its speech and therefore "bringing language[...]back to the body" (Ibsen 17; Jakovljević). By this account, every time dance is mentioned it becomes a performance and therefore a routine part of life; dance embodies the strings that restrain her from freedom and a life she desires

outside the domestic space. The act of performed dancing within the context of the play is just another banal aspect in the constant performance she must conduct in front of her children and, most importantly, her husband.

The freedom which Nora's second dance performance at the ball embodies is exemplified within its existence outside of the performed play. As Jakovljevic notes, "a performative utterance vitally depends on its environment" each having "its own stage, its own situation, which is inseparable from the utterance itself" (Jakovljevic). Nora's second tarantella performance environment consists of the sphere offstage, an area where the "unreality of the theatrical event and the experiential reality of the audience interact, merge, and shape each other"; therefore, the "offstage area is the most concrete continuation of fictional reality" (Jakovljevic). This "fictional reality," is the world of Norway outside the Helmer house in which the play exists that is untouched by Nora's false life (Jakovljevic). Since Nora's tarantella exists in this more realistic outside space untouched by the audience's eyes, it occurs in a "reality broader than the one contained by the visual field of representation that is the theatrical stage" (Jakovljevic). Even though Torvald offers that while watching the "seductive figure of the tarantella [his] blood was on fire," he still feels that "possibly the performance was a trifle too realistic" (Ibsen 67, 64). Torvald relates to the audience the experience they themselves have undergone, a revelation that by removing the dance from their visual world within the play and placing it somewhere much closer to the reality of everyday life, Nora's tarantella becomes the very embodiment of reality and an expression of truth.

Nora's first dance only serves to substantiate this claim as a perpetrator of fantasy. With Nora's truthful performance existing only within reality, the rehearsal of the performance serves as the desires of her performed life. This "promise of performance," a grave simplification and

modification of the traditional tarantella, is the true peak of falsehood offered to the audience (Jakovljevic). The tarantella is not a traditionally solo dance and is performed as a couple or in groups as a “community activity” (Pishner). The costume is customarily “very simple” in contrast to Nora’s overwrought dress intended for the ball (Pishner). As Nora practices in her rehearsal, she is seen to be at fault, dancing too fast, “violently,” “as if her life depended on it” to which Nora responds she “can’t do it any other way” (Ibsen 56, 57). It is clear in the simplest terms that this is a function of the deteriorating relationship between Nora her husband and her domestic lifestyle, but also that this adapted fantasy form of dance does not belong in the context of the staged play. The words that accompany the dance are in fact a plea by the characters for the performance to be changed, altered, or moved to another sphere. If Nora’s second dance were performed in the context of the play, it would pervert the ending, providing the audience with an increasingly normalized and happier seeming Nora who, in what would seem a flash of madness, decides to abandon her accepted life. The perfected tarantella’s rightful place is outside the confines of the stage and in the “dangerous, unpredictable reality” of the “ambiguous offstage world” outside (Jakovljevic). The visualization of dance performs as a barrier to the truth telling salvation of Nora in *A Doll’s House*.

Dance functions as an expression for Nora, but one that can only be enacted in the offstage reality as another step towards Nora’s freedom from her family. As a work of Realism, dance’s function as an element of fantasy constantly finds fault with itself and requires an existence outside the work. As Arthur Symons imagines it in his poem “Nora on the Pavement,” Nora dances out of the Helmer house into her future in search of a more satisfying life. It is this exiting, dancing Nora that “entrances” the night and gains a “power” that realizes “all the joy of living” (Symons). These initial steps, as Jakovljevic notes, are “not pedestrian” and reflect the

communion of Nora's "dance-measures" with "life's capricious rhythm, all her own" (Jakovljevic; Symons). This rejuvenated Nora finds exuberance in expression through dance testing her newfound self. Her dance exists primarily as function of reality not fantasy; it is Realism that places women in the function of everyday life and dance, as a emblem of fantasy, flight, and freedom, deserves no place in that sphere. This necessitates a proper existence for dance as a performance of truthful expression in literary works of fantasy.

In contrast, the following three chapters examine the role of dance as the fantasy element in *Giselle*, *Salome*, and "The Red Shoes," and the manner in which varied adaptations color the underlying narratives and forms of expression. The narratives of these three female dancers, Giselle, Salome, and Karen, coincidentally all brought into being by male authors, necessitate a means of expression which by its very form leaps off the page. Using theoretical and critical analysis to examine how dance as a lens examines the struggle between reality and fantasy and applying these findings to adaptations, underlying narratives of each literary work emerge. *Giselle* creates a meta-narrative around the function of a dancer's professional life, examining the intricacies of performed ballet and its relation to restricted freedom. In *Giselle*, dance as fantasy functions as the bridge which relates the dancer's journey to Giselle's. *Salome* uses dance to explore the fantasy of woman as a seductive creature and the desire to capture and maintain power and control. "The Red Shoes" lets the power of a tripartite semiotic color code of black, white, and red, commonly used by fairy tales, situate the existence of supernatural elements in the narrative. Each woman desires freedom and attempts to reach it through the performance of dance.

As the chapters develop, a very distinct sphere for dance emerges in literature and, with it, a purpose. It subverts the prevailing belief that "proper literature in academic circles is of

something preserved permanently upon the written page” (Thomas 1). Performance literature, or “literature meant to be primarily experience in performance” as explained by Rosalind Thomas, requires an examination of both the written and performed work (Thomas 1). Claiming these three works as examples of performance literature, the written text emerges as a “stimulant for other activities” (Thomas 3). Thus the adaptations of each of these works must be investigated as to “examine the gap between performance and the written text or other visual representation [...] in order to ask what is gained in performance” (Thomas 3). After such examination, each literary work emerges as a piece of performance literature, where dance is an integral piece of the puzzle.

Giselle as Masochist

The ballet *Giselle* broke ground in creating a narrative purely for the purpose of performance. Taking from previous Romantic ballets' themes of country life, possibly the "greatest champion of the Romantic ballet," Théophile Gautier, a French poet, author, and critic, created *Giselle* with librettist Jules-Henri Vernoy, Marquis de Saint-Georges (MetBallet). Inspired by an excerpt of *De l'Allemagne* by Heinrich Heine, *Giselle* tells of a maiden who becomes one of the Wilis fairies who were brides killed before their wedding nights that guarded the graves of the churchyard at dusk dancing any trespassers to their death. Gautier wrote to Heinrich describing his intent to make the story into a ballet thus in a letter:

My dear Henri Heine,
While leafing through your beautiful book, *De l'Allemagne*, a few weeks ago, I came across a charming passage (one has merely to open the volume at random). It was the passage in which you speak of sprites in white gowns with hems that are perpetually damp, fairies whose little satin feet mark the ceiling of the nuptial chamber, the snow-white Wilis who waltz pitilessly the whole night long, and wondrous apparitions encountered in the Hartz mountains and on the banks of the Ilse, glimpsed in a mist bathed by German moonlight - and I said out loud, "What a pretty ballet one could make of that! [...]" At the end of the week, Adolphe Adam had composed the music, the scenery was nearly completed, and rehearsals went into full swing. (Verdy)

Thus *Giselle* was borne. *Giselle*, "a weak hearted young girl" falls for Prince Albrecht, already betrothed to Bathilde and disguised as the peasant Loys (MetBallet). The young girl dies from apparent shock after realizing his true nature. When Albrecht visits her grave, she must stave off the Wilis who guard it and force men to dance to their death. Saved by the undying love of the resurrected *Giselle*, Albrecht is able to live and *Giselle* rests in peace no longer forced to drift with the Wilis taunting other young men. The original source material directs the audience

immediately to the cruelty of dance, using it to taunt and avenge. *Giselle*, in its ballet form, allows for the dichotomy of both healing and torturous dance. The tale addresses death, love, social hierarchies, and coming of age, all accentuated by the dancing talents of the young title character. By performing *Giselle* as a ballet, the story's themes are augmented in significance and more clearly illuminated with the audience's attention drawn to the larger metaphor about the profession of dance. In Jock Abra's, "The Dancer as Masochist," he questions why dancers involve themselves in a practice that is strenuous on both mind and body. Abra, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Calgary, explores the psychological implications of dance, something that has been much belabored in the dance community. Dancers are commonly associated with a history of psychological abuse and mental hardship; it is no wonder that dancers seem to manifest these attributes in their profession. Enacted within a world of fantasy, the character of Giselle can work through issues that plague dancers worldwide. Addressing the aspects of professional dance such as the severe awareness of time and the struggles of power within dance, Abra comes to the conclusion that dancers must be masochistic in nature. These themes can be closely applied to *Giselle* in its many forms. The ballet *Giselle*, functions as important commentary on dance as both an art form and profession while establishing itself as a piece of literature on the masochism of the dancer.

Violette Verdy, a Balanchine dancer who performed with both New York City Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre, translates the articles of poet and critic Théophile Gautier in his *Les Beutes de L'Opera*, in which Gautier details the libretto of *Giselle*. A close reading of this story enables a deeper understanding of the place dance holds in the narrative. Applying a variety of adaptations of the ballet to the original libretto, including classic American Ballet Theatre productions and the notable and abstract version choreographed by Mats Ek, which sets *Giselle*

in an insane asylum, elucidates the meta narrative of the dancer. Jock Abra's "The Dancer as Masochist" provides the "two psychological facts" that face a dancer: time and control (Abra 34). Reading the ballet as an exploration into the mind of the masochistic dancer, *Giselle* is the embodiment of the dancer's journey.

"The dancer's body provides an object on which others impose, and express, their creative ideas. It serves the same purpose for the choreographer as does canvas for the painter and stone for the sculptor."
Jock Abra

Giselle describes the way in which dancers' control is gained or lost by virtue of their profession. Abra addresses "control by others" as one of two psychological facts of dance that "deserve special scrutiny" (Abra 34). The dancer's existence is constantly "regulated by other people" including "teachers, directors, choreographers" (Abra 34). Dance as an art form that seems so expressive and releasing lends itself to a boxed in structure, one where uniformity is a praised virtue. Dancers in school can be seen as "assured youngsters" who are "virtually indistinguishable in style of dress, hair, make-up - even giggling" (Abra 34). It is also telling that dancers, once they have passed their prime, do not "seem terribly interested [...] in creating something themselves rather than merely being created on" after having subjected themselves to such treatment for extended periods of time (Abra 35). Dancers themselves seem to "virtually forego personal responsibility or independence" (Abra 35). The character of *Giselle* is subject to such types of control through her dependence on those she loves and her place in the hierarchies of the societies of the living and the dead.

Giselle portrays both the loss and assumption of power from her early innocence to her death. *Giselle*, first introduced as an easily impressionable girl, enables the audience to see her

complete lack of control. Giselle is introduced in the first act as a girl who is so “pretty” and “young” and “in love” that an audience would question “how can she believe in death” (Verdy 25). Subject to the power of her mother, who constantly scolds her for dancing, Giselle is commanded to stop dancing for fear that she die from overexertion. In the 2006 Royal Ballet production, most of Giselle’s movements upon first meeting Albrecht are petit allegro, or small quick movements. Performing as a duet and in the brightness of a solo or two, these movements signify her youthful state of mind and naiveté. When performed by Natalia Makarova in a 1977 American Ballet Theater production, the movements of the young Giselle are most striking as her legs seem as if they dart out from underneath her, constantly unable to control themselves. This Giselle is “the epitome of what one hopes is freshness and innocence,” and Giselle holds this position in contrast to Albrecht (Verdy 54). To Albrecht, “Giselle is the embodiment of certain ideals - the freedom he cannot have, the carefree youth denied him, the innocence he cannot hope to possess [...] Giselle is his own discovery” (Verdy 55). Giselle is viewed as the precursor to the responsibilities of adulthood and the fantasy that childhood inherently provides. Most of Giselle’s dance is partnered or danced with the chorus, so the audience senses the dependence of the girl on others due to her youth and “weak [heart]” (MetBallet). A 2010 performance by the Russian Festival Ballet displays many of the movements between Giselle and Albrecht in a marionette doll-like nature as he tips up her chin, lowered with a childly innocence, and moves her arms so that they can properly dance together. In almost all productions, when deciding whether or not she loves Albrecht, Giselle plucks the petals of a flower and counts them in a childish matter. Giselle’s performed love of Albrecht displays all the gullible acts of an easily willed child, and her dramatic reaction to his betrayal causing her death further substantiates this

claim. All performances of the ballet hover over the complete lack of agency of the character Giselle. This trend is easily carried to a more modern retooled production.

In Mats Ek's *Giselle*, the story is reworked to "[substitute] the grotesque for the conventionally beautiful" as Giselle does not die but is relegated to an insane asylum; the once classical ballet is now a contemporary interpretation with many elements of modern dance (Kisselgoff). In doing thus, control is seen explicitly in the opening of the first act. Giselle is tethered to a string and writhes on the ground attached to something that restricts her movements. After thrusting this tether off, Giselle appears to the audience as an outsider in her town both in dress and manner. Remembering moments familiar to earlier classical ballet productions, Giselle prances across the stage with whimsical movements. However it is low and heavy pliés and flexed feet that give this early dance of Giselle a darker weight with a subtext that is carried through the entire production. Ek comments that Giselle's "means of expression are not the point shoes, with which a romantic ballerina strives after weightlessness, but rather her bare feet, which sometimes come down to earth brutally hard" (Mlakar 7). Giselle circles the stage, arms astride as if in flight, recalling the childish nature the classical ballet has cultured. When Giselle and Albrecht interact onstage they seem to play nursery games: Giselle constantly falls at his feet and crawls through his legs, similar to how a child might act with her father. This perverted relationship demonstrates the way in which the classical ballet can be represented in modern terms.

Possibly most telling about how Giselle was controlled by others in her youth is the manner in which her death is treated. After Giselle's death in the 2006 Royal Ballet Production, Giselle and her Mother Berthe, are the only two to remain onstage. Giselle has just died from shock after teasing both audience and villagers that she would commit suicide by Albrecht's

sword. Her mother, in obvious pain, shoos all others away from her child. Giselle is still in the protection of others after death. The mother cradling her daughter is slightly different from the one portrayed in the 1977 American Ballet Theatre production. In this production, it is the same Mother Berthe that pushes all away from her dead daughter; however, before the curtain closes a mad Albrecht, performed by Mikhail Baryshnikov, dances across the stage in remorse as Mother Berthe is pulled from the body of her daughter. In death, Albrecht replaces the motherly protection of the vulnerable Giselle. In the Dance Theater of Harlem's *Creole Giselle*, which portrays Giselle as a young girl in 1841 Louisiana, the one to comfort Giselle when she is feeling weakhearted is most often her Mother Berthe, unlike other productions where Albrecht is the one comforting the sick Giselle. At Giselle's death at the end of Act One, much of the music is given to following Albrecht as he is lead offstage by his companion instead of focusing on the dead girl and her distraught mother. In the Cullberg Ballet production, Giselle is hoisted off to an insane asylum instead of death. Giselle's madness becoming more and more apparent, she attacks Albrecht to which he responds by restraining her by the wrist. Giselle, unable to control her anger at the loss of her loved one, loses control physically. Giselle retaliates by tossing phallic eggs across the stage. This Giselle is trying to regain her physical control by exerting power over others. A more modern Giselle proves to willful, but unsuccessful. Giselle's insanity renders her unable to control herself and therefore the responsibility of her life is given to others. Regardless of the manner of Giselle's exit into the second act, Giselle is still subject to those that control her. It is this childish nature that establishes a lack of agency that she can gain in the second act.

“All interactions, including those of love/sexuality, must

involve struggles for power [...] Each partner needs the Other, but in different ways because the role for each invariably differs.”

Jock Abra, “The Dancer as Masochist”

Giselle being portrayed as such a young child allows the reader to see her willfulness and development in death as an assumption of power. The young Giselle, reincarnated as a Wilis will now try to “unwind the straight fold of the shroud” by joining the other women “pale and cold as moonlight on snow” (Verdy 37). The “tottering” early steps of Giselle from her grave recall the previous Giselle, unabashed and unsure (Verdy 41). Following the experienced and pronounced steps of the Wilis and their Queen, Giselle appears insignificant. The Wilis dance with a wispy gracefulness as they “are nature spirits, and so, “a walk must become a glide [...] as though you were walking on clouds” (Verdy 55). Giselle takes on this transferred quality and takes “possession of the space once again,” this time free of her grave and her burdens (Verdy 41). Without the example of the Wilis, Giselle would not know her place or how to transform. The audience begins to see the distinct difference between the first and second acts, which Verdy regards as the “most important aspect to be developed” in the ballet (Verdy 54). Now, “the peasant girl has become the ideal romantic woman - unattainable, very high en pointe, almost beyond reach” (Verdy 55). In the first act, the women of the village en pointe dance with a lightheartedness that is echoed by the score. As Verdy points out, this new Giselle has to have that sort of “extraordinary understanding that a shadow has acquired [...] all the aspects, all the stages in a woman’s life are now reflected in her relationship with Albrecht: she can be the protective mother and the fiancéé; she can be the mistress, the woman, the wife” (Verdy 55). The languorous dance of the Wilis is conveyed through adagio on point where the entire body is lifted up to assume strength and height.

Giselle not only faces the hierarchy and control of her life evidenced by Albrecht's higher status, but also the hierarchy that occurs after death. Placing Giselle in a new world, she must adapt to the social strata it provides. In the after life, Giselle assumes a power she was incapable of by virtue of her ghostly nature, but is still subject to the Queen of the Wilis, Myrta. These Wilis retain power by the fear they create for, when faced with a victim, the "waltzers of the next world are crueler" than any one may encounter in the first (Verdy 44). In this world of the afterlife, the captured men are forced to dance, accompanying the Wilis' mesmerizing canto until they are too tired and can be pushed into the lake to drown, for "of what possible use is a tired dancer? Except to be tossed into the lake" (Verdy 45). The Wilis reverse the power struggle between the controlling man and the submissive woman. These dancers still require an other, if only to place them in submission instead. Dance itself becomes a weapon, a force by which to taunt and find vengeance against the men whose graves would "never bear the epitaph: he loved the dance too much; it is that which killed him" (Verdy 38). The use of dance as a tool to inflict pain allows Giselle a power and control she did not possess in her life. She is now above the royal Albrecht as an elevated, supernatural being.

When the victim of the Wilis becomes Albrecht, even Giselle's renewed strength as a supernatural being seems to be unable to save him. Giselle, having reversed the interaction of herself and Albrecht as controlled and uncontrolled, is still subject to the the commands of the Queen. The Queen of the Wilis represents the need of the dancer to be an object of instruction; thus, the Queen's command to "let him dance and let him die" is obeyed by Giselle as much as she may try to fight it (Verdy 48). Her love for dance and necessity to move in such a manner proves a weakness. Giselle "flies...bounds...whirls" similar to her youthful state among the living, except that this "mad dance" causes Albrecht to pale in desperation as his mortal body

cannot accompany such a fervor of movement (Verdy 50, 51). When the Wilis hope to claim Albrecht as one of their victims, she cries out in her anger, calling her compatriots “wicked ones” (Verdy 48). The Wilis, by nature of their situation under the rule of the Queen of the Wilis, hear the pleas of the newly strengthened Giselle who compels them not to “put him to death. Let him live to enjoy the soft light of heaven “ (Verdy 48). When the Wilis deny her entreaty and force her to dance “the most chaste and the most voluptuous of dances, to look at [Albrecht] with your most tender glances, to smile [Giselle’s] most charming of deathly smiles,” Giselle summons her new, developed courage to rebel (Verdy 49). Dance is viewed as both an element of torture and joy. Her desire to dance after death almost leads to her love’s demise. Giselle did not regret leaving life “behind at fifteen--it is dancing and love” (Verdy 33). Even though her source of joy becomes a torment, the inability of the dancer to separate themselves from the act of dancing demonstrates the unbreakable psychological that a professional dancer develops.

The classic interpretation of this second act differs very little from performance to performance. The original choreography of Jean Corelli and Jules Perrot fills most of the spaces in which it is performed. The wispy glide of Wilis is carried through the bourré, a small movement en pointe that has the effect of feet moving with the speed of a hummingbird’s wings, of each Wili across the stage. In the Mats Ek production, Giselle dances with a commitment and a force that is completely unabashed. This Giselle, portrayed by Ana Laguna, creates points of contact with Albrecht the imply control by grabbing clothing and limbs. The classical production defers much of this intense contact implying that modernity breeds a feminist interpretation. Mats Ek’s explicit ending displays a worn Giselle, exhausted by her mental state naked lying in the real world. Placing the fantasy Giselle in the stark world clearly delineates the placement of dance in reality. Giselle has gained the power she was unable to attain as a child,

however it has no place in actuality. *Giselle* proves that the art of dancing has a power of its own, to restore youthfulness, to drive one to madness, to death, but it is in harnessing that power that dancing is successful. Nevertheless, the dancer may find power onstage but is unable to transfer this newfound control to life.

**“As Time is the most fragile fabric of which our life is made, so is the moment it takes the dancer to move. This moment is an ecstatic state of being; it is telescoped timelessness. Because of the urgency, the power of immediacy is stronger in dance than in any other art form.”
Walter Sorrell**

The second psychological fact that Abra addresses is Time. Walter Sorrell, an acclaimed dance writer notes that “time is the most fragile fabric of which our life is made” and the “power of immediacy is stronger in the dance than in any other art form” (Abra 34). The character Giselle, introduced as a young woman of fifteen, is clearly emblematic of fleeting time. Her early death further signifies the fate of the dancer, the necessity to have the perfect body that will not fail the choreography. Most importantly, “ballet is for the young,” and *Giselle* displays that once youth is lost you can only cling to the former semblances of life where “a dying swan provides the best known image for this most ephemeral art because [...] its transientness contributes to its unique, tragic beauty” (Abra 34). Many dancers encounter time through “denial,” as is portrayed in contemporary films about dance such as the much lauded *Turning Point* (Abra 35). The necessity of dance to be performed by young, virile bodies, such as that of the peasant girl Giselle, provides for a mousetrap. Abra notes that in such an art,

...to delay deterioration in a mere eyeblink, the automatic becomes the difficult and then the impossible. Before long, dancers must pick up the

pieces of their lives and seek other pastures, a necessity that can be as shattering as for the aging athlete. (Abra 34)

Giselle's narrative clings to this second psychological fact by displaying the importance of youth and death to the dancer through props and the induction of the supernatural.

In this story, Giselle is first described as an innocent through both the story's description and her movements. The "nimble and joyous" Giselle "darts forth" from her cottage house into the morning air, painting the picture of fresh youth (Verdy 14). The maiden, "sensing the presence of her love," the Count Albrecht, is "at the risk of brushing dew off a few flowers" is going to "dance a little" (Verdy 15). In this early introduction to the character, her largest consequence is that of disrupting flowers, establishing the metaphor flowers will hold for time. Giselle's singular fault is conveyed to the reader as being "mad about the dance" (Verdy 16). Described as dreaming only of "dances under green arbors, of endless waltzes, and of waltzers who never weary" dance encompasses for Giselle a youthful freedom and ideal that will starkly contrast a foreshadowed future of "waltzers who never weary" (Verdy 16). Loys, the name the royal Albrecht has assumed to lower his courtly stature, is the "perfect partner" for Giselle as he "never misses the beat, [...] never gets dizzy," and is "always ready to dance on," the ideal quality for a virile dancer (Verdy 16, 17). In the Russian Festival Ballet performance, Giselle, first presented as a young, impressionable girl uses a flower and a change from petit allégro, swift, small movements, to adagio, slow movement, throughout the ballet to signify her development and age. Giselle onstage has a lightness with balottés, a rocking movement that involves a kick-like thrust of legs from under your body, across the floor with leaps and bounds. These balottés have a movement that resembles the second measuring weight in a grandfather clock, keeping time with the music. In *Creole Giselle*, the use of clapping in time to the music

draws the audience's attention to the change in tempo in the score. The abrupt changes from allégro to adagio in the presence of Giselle's male counterpart, Loys, signify the weight he holds on her and that their relationship causes time to become a heavy burden on the dancer.

Additionally, the villagers in *Creole Giselle* applaud Giselle's dancing themselves, something very uncommon in a ballet of such repute. This clapping provides a contrast against the music, which has slowed to show the rapt audience's attention to Giselle's youth. The percussion of clapping and a movement purposely used to resemble the counting of time, remind viewers not only of a life cut short, but of the shortness of the career of a dancer.

For a professional ballet dancer, time not only indicates youth, but the age in which childbirth and mothering can occur. In the Mats Ek adaptation, the customary flowers are foregone for a red stuffed pillow-like toy. This toy is symbolically used as a child which Giselle mock births and Albrecht cradles. The fact that their love is unrealized is similar to the lives of dancers controlled by birthing practices. The women of the village are seen rolling out large, seemingly phallic, wooden eggs with which they dance and sit atop. Professional ballet dancers are very aware of the time as companies may "decide such supposedly private matters as marriage and pregnancy" since a pregnancy or marriage results in an inability, if only temporary, to perform (Abra 34). However the metaphor of a flower once plucked is not neglected in Ek's adaptation, as a blue flower is the token of appreciation from Bathilde, Albrecht's betrothed. The flower representing womanhood, seems a gift of pity from a woman who the audience assumes will give birth to the child of Albrecht. The symbolic and physical manifestations of time translate to the audience both the virtues of youth and promise of age.

In the Russian Festival Ballet Production, after Giselle has died and returns to the stage as a ghost, both the flower and physical movements have changed their significance. Now, most of

Giselle's movements are that of an adagio. The slow, decided movements seem more deliberate, as if the luxury of time assures Giselle's movements. This more powerful, renewed Giselle has multiple flowers dropped on her grave by the dotting Albrecht and dances many a time with flowers in her hand. When Albrecht appears in the forest to mourn Giselle at her grave, it is the ghostly Giselle who approaches him, plucking flowers, and throwing them "with her kisses to her love" (Verdy 47). Giselle returns to Albrecht the flowers of youth, rescinding the invitation to be his youthful companion and accepting her position as a Wilis. The garland of flowers crowning the heads of the Wilis indicate both the loss of their innocence sign of the innocence as children and their eternal place as barren women. Giselle's previous use of flowers as frolic and emotional distraught of the young now reveal a future lost by an inability to age.

A striking manifestation of time illustrates the hours which the Wilis can walk the earth. The stage, once bright and colored with the pastures of the country in daylight, become darkened with the scenery of a grayed graveyard at twilight. The Wilis, only capable of walking the earth in the nightly hours, inhabit this space with properly as ghostly figures that fade into the second act's scenery. Giselle and Albrecht, reunited at her grave, are able to enjoy each other's presence until a "far-off bell begins to strike the hour" and a "feeble bar of light takes shape" (Verdy 51). The morning light is the bell on a timer for the departed Giselle. Restricted only to the night hours, she must devote this sole time of freedom to save her lover. For a dancer who is controlled by everyone around her, her last remaining freedom is the choice to use her time to benefit another. Giselle returns to her grave after her time has run out, leaving Albrecht alive and safe in the morning dew as she sinks in the ground where "flowers enfold her" (Verdy 52). The beauty of Giselle's innocence is preserved, but the ordeal she has overcome has allowed her to rest in peace no longer a victim, prey to the Wilis or their Queen. Giselle, through death, has

escaped the control that a professional dancer cannot. Giselle is only able to escape the power other's hold over her by ending control and time forever and eliminating them as variables in the equation.

“Of course we are all masochists.”
Merle Park

Literature containing dance and theater seems to easily delve into the subjects of sexuality and gender but generally neglects a response to grief, illness, or death. *Giselle* explores the duality of dance to augment one's own happiness while simultaneously causing pain. The young Giselle finds dancing in the first act to be one of the most joyful passions. The narrative describes villagers joining in dance to celebrate the harvest, and Giselle, so taken by the occasion is pronounced the “Queen of the Vintage” (Verdy 23). Even the narrator exemplifies the same joy commenting, “What a splendid occasion for dancing. Everyone joins in, and above all Giselle whose little feet cannot keep still” (Verdy 23). When faced with mortality and scolding by her mother about dancing to death, the “incurable dancer” muses that “to dance on after death” is not a terror for she'd rather not “lie stiff and still between six planks and two small boards” (Verdy 25). Giselle is oddly perceptive; her actions after her death demonstrate that dancing can prove to be a source of help. The ticking time bomb that causes her death is drastically apparent against the joy she receives from dancing. The way that the prima ballerina who plays Giselle crosses the stage shows a dancer who wishes to ignore the wearing of time. The woman is fighting against the stereotypes she is measured against. Forgoing motherhood and child bearing years for her art in the pursuit of unending youth, the professional dancer is the

first act's *Giselle*. Unfortunately, for the dancer, the second act is looming and without the removal of, or the complete end of, both time and control, the dancer will never be free.

Through the psychological facts of time and control, it is evident how *Giselle* exemplifies the plight of the dancer. A profession in which the body is strained to its limits, its story reveals the same qualities. Ballet requires mind, body, and soul to experience torture day after day. John Gruen, the author of *The Private World of Ballet* comments that ballet dancing "is the most unnatural thing in the world [...] basically every dancer hates it. It's just that nobody wants to admit it...I force my body until it hurts" (Abra 35). Dancers willingly place themselves in a profession in which they know they must compete for control and race against time. It is no wonder that Abra raises the question "what sort of person would choose such a seemingly unrewarding pastime" (Abra 36). However illogical the profession of dance may be, audience members may experience its strife from the safe distance of their orchestra seats, gazing at the glorious *Giselle*.

Eroticizing Dance, Exoticizing *Salome*

Oscar Wilde's *Salome* depicts a female with which society is all too familiar. Some may mistake her for the femme fatale or a deadly seductress. Even though she possesses the attributes of these characters, it is important to look beyond the superficiality of her story, and that of the Western fantasized woman, and examine the greater implications of her prowess and her persuasive dance of the seven veils. Disrobed of power as a result of her youth, Salome finds solace in her budding sexuality. As an object of fantasy, and more specifically the fantasy of men, Salome serves a purpose as the sole object of *Salome*. Oscar Wilde presents the sexuality of Salome in order to allow it to be used as a tool and feminist construct in the dance of the seven veils. This dance creates a power and form of speech of which Salome has been deprived, which is exemplified in her movement in visual adaptations.

Salome introduces audiences to the exoticized woman, and, through her dance, the power such a woman has over those who gaze upon her. Describing the plight of a oddly oriented family, the highly controversial retelling of biblical death of John the Baptist, hereto referred as *Salome*'s Iokanaan, highlights the bildungsroman-like arc of its title character. The young Salome, depicted as a virginal, chaste princess utilizes her own sexuality and newly discovered womanhood through the dance of the seven veils to beguile King Herod and receive the head of Iokanaan. While the play provides readers with implications of Wilde's salacious narrative through its historical significance, it also draws attention to the feminist argument Salome's character makes. Salome, killed after receiving her prize of Iokanaan's severed head seems like a spoiled child who has received a timely end. However, audiences must question, what is it in this dance that is so powerful and what qualities of woman enable such power to arise. Most

importantly, adaptations of *Salome* and the dance of the seven veils have been highly sexualized and are usually performed to the point of almost total nudity. The exposure of actress or dancer would imply that the subject be completely objectified by the gaze. It is this exposure of the young girl that calls into question how audiences view dance and its power.

Noticeably, Oscar Wilde's dance of the seven veils expresses a European sentiment towards a type of orientalism and eroticism. This "thorny issue of orientalism" is revealed through the "images projected by Westerners" in such performances as those of the *Salome's* dance (Shay and Sellers-Young 14). The exoticizing of Salome's dance provides powerful insight into how society views Middle Eastern dance. Most striking, perhaps, are the implications of seductive dance and the immense control it allows the young, otherwise powerless, Salome to have. Research and explanation by Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young in "Belly Dance: Orientalism - Exoticism - Self-Exoticism" elucidates the relation between Salome's dance of the seven veils and Middle Eastern eroticism. Shay, a scholar in dance history and theory specializing in ethnicity and politics and identities that emerge in choreography, and Sellers-Young, a professor in the Theatre and Dance Department at University of California, Davis, use their combined experience as dancers, historians, and cultural theorists to explain the effect of eroticism, exoticism, and orientalism on the genre of belly dance or its more proper label, solo improvised dance. Hollywood adaptations of the dance of the seven veils as well as productions of the play and opera *Salome* make it painstakingly clear to audiences how sexuality as power is perceived. To an audience that may fear the female as a powerful being, the performance of Salome may render some speechless. Combining the research of Shay and Sellers-Young and the manifestations of the dance of seven veils through

film adaptations, *Salome* explores the power of solo dance through the utilization of the eroticized dance of the female.

“There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.”

Audre Lorde

Salome’s performance can most closely resemble “solo improvised dance” of the Middle East (Shay and Sellers-Young 14). Dance scholars seem to relegate this genre through “misinterpretation and neglect” to an area of distaste and shame (Shay and Sellers-Young 14). The sexuality exhibited by its performers causes alarm in its association with striptease by both public audiences and scholars (Shay and Sellers-Young 14). Alarming, the dance of the seven veils of *Salome* easily falls into this category of misunderstanding. Solo improvised dance varies throughout many regions of the Middle East, where some forms may be characterized by sensual movements of the lips and eyes, to specific dipping of the pelvis or hip sways (Shay and Sellers-Young 15). Although solo improvised dance implies an art form in which a single performer is displayed, its origins lie in group performances where dancers may perform “roles in often naughty playlets” (Shay and Sellers-Young 15). Notably, solo improvisation is seen primarily as a “principal expressive form of dance” and is currently a classicized and recognized form of self expression (Shay and Sellers-Young 15). Solo improvisation, in contrast to *Giselle’s* ballet, unfortunately struggles for canonization as a respected genre of dance by being used merely as a form of entertainment in current popular culture (Shay and Sellers-Young 15). The confusion with striptease and the aptly named erotic dance profession prevents solo improvisation from being viewed as pure expression and an “honored art form” (Shay and Sellers-Young 15). A

study of Canadian Egyptians reveals that this type of dance has a “legitimate place in [Canadian Egyptian] culture, but not a serious place,” and there is no “compelling evidence to suggest that historical attitudes were different” (Shay and Sellers-Young 16, 15). It is relatively clear that this is a common sentiment worldwide. Possibly, the lack of seriousness associated with solo improvised dance has to do with its comparison to the classical dance genres.

Solo improvised dance lacks the academia most other recognized and appreciated art forms acquire. Ballet contains encyclopedic explanations of its origin and great performers became household names when the art was in vogue, e.g. the fame of Mikhail Baryshnikov in the 1970s. There are dictionaries composed of terms and techniques that can be applied to modern dance, jazz, and ballet. However, no such documented academic endeavors exists for solo improvised dance currently; solo improvised dance and its more common title, belly dance, lies in the “realm of popular culture,” although there have been many attempts to the contrary (Shay and Sellers-Young 16). Some may even recognize belly dance as a popular art form of early burlesque. Endeavors to canonize the art form may misleadingly exist in the coining of the term belly dance. “Belly dance,” originated by Sol Bloom for dancers in the 1893 World’s Fair “for the [purpose] of titillating his audiences” conjures up images of promiscuity and the exposed body (Shay and Sellers-Young 16). This is further substantiated by the “strong disrepute” that accompanies belly dance in the Middle East (Shay and Sellers-Young 16). This distaste for the art form in this region derives from “Islamic mores that dictate that women must not appear uncovered in front of males who do not stand in proper kinship relation to them” (Shay and Sellers-Young 16). This view produced banishment of performances of such “sinful” dance before the fall of the Taliban regime in 2002 and establishes the sentiment that “female public dancers who appear in male (public) space” reinforce notions that “professional dancers are

prostitutes,” a commentary not solely associated with this form of dance (Shay and Sellers-Young 16). Attacks are often made on dancers practicing belly dance in Middle Eastern countries and video stores refuse to carry certain films or recordings of such dances because of threats (Shay and Sellers-Young 15, 16). Another term, “choreophobia,” was produced in order to illustrate the negativity associated with belly dance and solo improvised dance (Shay and Sellers-Young 17). It is no wonder then, that an art form that causes such negative reactions would be so feared and powerful as the tool of the young princess Salome.

Feminism has created a gateway for solo improvised dance as an instrument of power. The second phase of feminism allowed for the questioning of the female body as negative (Shay and Sellers-Young 16). A feminist social critic Susan Bordo explains that if society continues to think of the body as negative and “if the woman is the body, then women are that negativity”; This approaches all negative aspects of society for women such as removal from knowledge, religion, violence, sexual desire, or “even death” (Shay and Sellers-Young 16). Bordo may not be speaking directly to dance as expression, but it is evident that her statement has severely positive implications for solo improvised dance and its culture.

The “belly dance movement” was given wings in the 1970s as a result of sexual liberation and the feminist movement (Shay and Sellers-Young 17). Belly dance became a “powerful means of transcendence” as women “[redefined] belly dance as a symbol of personal and sexual liberation” (Shay and Sellers-Young 17). It is this sexual liberation that has recreated the relationship between the erotic and dance as feminism. Feminists, such as Audre Lorde recognize the potential of the erotic as something “deeply female” and empowering (Lorde 53). Lorde defines erotic as “an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which [women] are now reclaiming in [their] language,

[their] history, [their] dancing, [their] loving, [their] work, [their] lives” (Lorde 55). Sellers-Young describes her own relation to belly dance and its erotic power thus,

Recently, in thinking about the function of belly dance in my life, I realized the dance was multifunctional. In its placement of breath, pelvic orientation, and learning the relationship between body parts, it integrated my mind/body and therefore connected me to my erotic (using Audre Lorde’s definition) nature. This, of course, increased my sense of personal power. However, it was in its vocabulary a means to learn and then display (thus proving my knowledge) the cultural codes of femininity in a heterosexual society. It was also a site to dramatize, through dance, the media images of women and thus bring them within the realm of play...the community experience of witness that takes place via a stage performance...seems to increase the potential empowerment of the participants. Thus, the dance has a healing power. (Shay and Sellers-Young 18)

Sellers-Young describes the “multifunctional” power belly dance as both a “healing” and an active mode of change. By amplifying her own personal power through dance, Sellers-Young is able to embody and empower a community of dancers and women alike through their acceptance and embrace of their own eroticism. It is this exploration of eroticism, and the magnifying capacity of exoticism, outside the realm of pure male fantasy that elevates the dance of the seven veils to a place of authority and influence.

“She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. One might fancy she was dancing.”
Oscar Wilde, *Salome*

Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* presents audiences with the sexuality of women that has plagued the minds of scholars and feminists as both a sign of power and weakness. Sexuality’s representation in the media and literature has shaded its meaning through the varied lenses. The performance of sexuality through the dance of the seven veils is mostly viewed as negatively

seductive. However, if a viewer embraces the dance as a female expressing her own knowledge of the erotic, the dance becomes a source of empowerment and positivity. Wilde's own imprisonment due to "gross indecency" prevented him from presenting the work and the dance in the manner he wished it to be seen. Only through adaptations of the story is the meaning and intent able to be gleaned from the spectacle that is the dance of the seven veils. However, in order to appreciate the visual performance, the literary work must first be examined and closely dissected to understand the structure of power in Salome's world and the purpose of her dancing plea.

In order to understand how Salome creates power through her sexuality, other forms of power in the text of *Salome* must be examined. The establishment of the story in a royal family presents power in its most basic form, the imposed power of authority. Through the royal family of stepfather Herod, and his wife and Salome's mother, Herodias, control is most prominently displayed in the capture and imprisonment of a religious figure, Iokanaan, or John the Baptist. His imprisonment embeds in the mind of the audience the imposed superiority of Herod over religious figures and prophets. Simultaneously audiences see the power of religion¹, which has prompted Herod to imprison Iokanaan, due to his presumed prophetic power and has rendered the King Herod fearful lest he release this divine being. Herodias exemplifies a female power that is purely negative as she is a feared example of female sexuality, used to commit evils, murders, and sins to retain her power. Salome, by birthright, retains some power as princess.

¹ It is important to note that solo improvised dance has origins rooted in religious worship. As Wendy Buonaventura, a scholar of Middle Eastern dance, notes: "Originally [the dance] had a precise meaning in terms of ritual for it expressed the mysteries of life and death as people understood them. Like all early dance it was originally connected with religious worship, at a time when religion was an integral part of everyday life and had relevance to every aspect of human existence. But as primitive cultures grew more sophisticated and civilization suppressed the faiths of a former age, so too were the ritual connected with these bygone religions suppressed" (Shay and Sellers-Young 13).

However, it is not by this given royalty that she is able to command the attention and will of the court. The audience sees the budding sexuality of Salome revealed when she learns that she cannot rely on the power bestowed upon her by relation to the King. When Salome desires to see Iokanaan, her royal commands of “bring forth this prophet” are received with resolute no’s (Wilde Scene I line 189). Salome does not receive an audience with the prophet until she uses her feminine wiles on the dotting Narraboth saying the next day she “will let fall for [him...] a little green flower” and will look at him “through the muslin veils” (Wilde 1.215). The mention of “veils” and “little green flower” are essential, for not only do they display the imposed sexuality of the sixteen-year-old Salome, but foreshadow the implications of the veil and pay tribute to the idea of hidden sexuality embedded in Wilde’s green flowers (Wilde 1.215). This transition of Salome into sexualized woman indicates to the audience a change in her character. This change is also recognized by the beguiled Narraboth who brings Salome the desired prophet, Iokanaan. It is implanted in the audience’s mind that, considering her success with Narraboth, Salome possesses at such a young age the understanding, possibly through her mother’s example, of how men are affected by her sexuality.

Wilde fully develops Salome’s transition from child to woman through descriptions of her character by other members of the court. The first lines of the play exemplify the focus of the narrative. The audience notices Salome’s age, for the response to adoration of the princess by Narraboth is that she is a “little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver[...]who has little white doves for feet. One might fancy she was dancing” (Wilde 1.5-8). The diminutives used to describe the princess establish her position as a child, not yet a budding woman in the minds of the audience. Additionally, the mention of veil and dancing allude both

to the time and Middle Eastern, orientalist setting; to a contemporary or fin-de-siecle audience, these statements would imply foreshadowing of the use of the dance form and the veil. Salome directly addresses her virginal qualities, which are corroborated by allusions of white doves. Salome compares herself to the moon stating her reverence of the glowing orb onstage describing it as “cold and chaste” with “the beauty of a virgin” (Wilde l.142, 143). She is continually described through dove imagery, having “little white doves for feet,” being “the dove of all doves,” and whose “little feet” when dancing Herod proclaims “will be like white doves” (Wilde l.7, l.357, l.799). Relating Salome to a bird representing religious messages and peace draped in a virginal color allows Salome to embody the beauty of untarnished youth, something that the eroticizing of her dance will immediately alter and pervert. However, her beauty is colored as more darkly sexual from Herod who is “always looking at her” much to the chagrin of his wife, who implies that he looks “too much at her” (Wilde l.407, l. 451). The incestuous nature of Herod’s lust after his stepdaughter gives Salome’s beauty a more womanly sheen, yet of no influence of her own. The sinfulness of such a relationship makes Salome seem older and more of a voluptuous seductress, that of a typical Lolita, than a child would be. It is this Lolita that Salome is forced to become. Salome’s discovery of her sexuality is relayed to the audience as the development of a young adolescent.

The audience experiences Salome’s own manifestation of her sexuality as she grows into this new sense of power. Salome’s longing for Iokanaan is tainted with highly sexual vocabulary, stating that she is “amorous for [his] body” and asks him to “suffer [her] to touch [his] body” (Wilde l. 304, 313). This lustful language may alert the audience that they are seeing a change from the innocent, chaste princess into a maturing woman. Herod helps her transition

to womanhood by requesting that Salome “dance for [him]” (Wilde l. 682). From here we see that Salome finds power over the King in her denial of him as he begs her to complete this pleasure for him. The implied sexual nature of such a performance allows the audience to see Salome in a matured light and also notice that she has assumed power in her refusal to dance, even though Herod “[commands Salome] to dance” (Wilde l. 687). When Herod offers Salome “whatsoever thou shalt ask of [him],” Salome indicates her change of mind, “rising” as indicated in the stage directions to assume a new power over the King (Wilde l.740). Salome regains a new power by choosing to dance for the King, her choice is what allows her to hold control over the Tetrarch, but it is her movement that maintains this influence.

The dance of the seven veils consolidates Salome’s matured power through her sexuality. The dance is described in the stage directions of the play in the singular “Salome dances the dance of the seven veils” (Wilde 85). However, in order to understand the interpretations of the dance, the concepts of the dance of the seven veils and veiling must be examined. The contemporary dance of the seven veils is a burlesque spectacle of, usually, Middle Eastern dance. The dance of the seven veils seems to be a Wildean concept, as prior to the publishing of *Salome*, the aptly named dance of the seven veils cannot be traced to any other record in previous culture. It is believed that Oscar Wilde derived the concept of the dance of the seven veils from the Myth of the Goddess Ishtar, who on passing into the underworld must remove an article of clothing or jewelry before passing through each of the seven gates in hell (Shira). It is interesting then, that the dance is usually performed as highly sexual for in some translations of the bible from which the story of Salome derives the Hebrew word used to describe the dance is more often translated as a childish dance or game (Shira). Additionally, veils are usually worn as a religious symbol of

reverence to God and prayer. As in important in most biblical tale, audiences must pay attention to religious signifiers in Wilde's play such as Iokanaan ordering Salome to "cover [herself] with a veil," indicating his instructions that she become more pious (Wilde 1.291-2). Similarly, Herod, prior to asking Salome to dance for him, mentions that "the veil of the sanctuary has disappeared" to which Herodias replies that it was Herod that stole it, connecting the concept of the veil in *Salome* with a twisted lack of respect for religious practices (Wilde 1.678-680). Additionally, the dance is presented as highly feminine. It is an "orientalist position that [solo improvised dance] is an exclusively female dance," such as the one Salome is to perform (Shay and Sellers-Young 22). The audience must be increasingly aware that the attention drawn to Salome's sexuality and gender must be echoed by the implications of a dance centered primarily on women's bodies. When belly dance, or its variant forms, are performed by male dancers it is normally in the manifestation of parody, where the dancer imitates gestures and movements considered to be feminine (Shay and Sellers-Young 21). Wilde's dance is drawing the reader's attention to the realization of the erotic in the young Salome and her own explicit presentation of herself as that of the female gender; this gender self-assignment recalls scholars' recognition that "movement in dance, like all other culturally learned and constructed behavior, is culturally gendered" (Shay and Sellers-Young 22). Thus, with the invocation of gender, sexuality, and the struggle for control, the stage is set for the dance to commence; but without any additional stage directions as to the visual nature of the dance, the adaptations of the story are able to give a clearer picture of Salome's triumph of sexual prowess and power.

“The individual...dancer...who performs in a public area is placing him or herself in the position of representing the Other. This

establishes a potential power relationship that is not necessarily pernicious but is often...disrespectful and banal.”
Shay and Sellers-Young, “Belly Dance: Orientalism - Exoticism - Self-Exoticism”

Taking into account that each adaptation encompasses a different perspective and interpretation of the dance, it is revealing that all portray a very powerful adolescent coming into her own. An examination of two versions of the Strauss opera *Salome*, which is the direct German translation of the Wilde play set to an operatic score, shows two approaches to the dance that establish Salome as a woman of immense power. Color plays an important role in the 1997 version of the opera, titled *Richard Strauss: Salome* directed by Luc Bundy which reveals Salome in a black sheath like top that is bejeweled but still exposes her breasts through a mesh material to the audience. The black of Salome’s clothing stands out against the darker, deep colors such as iridescent greens and cranberries of the royal King and Queen. This Salome, performed by Catherine Malfitano dances with a variety of veils conveying layers of meaning. The first veil she is given is white and covers her face, allowing the audience to see her virginal qualities as the silencing of Salome by other conventional forms of communication. It is this mix of virginity and sexuality that composes the “principal ingredient of the popular western image of the Middle East [as] spirituality and sex” (Shay and Sellers-Young 23-24). Covering her sinful self with the veil of purity and piety, she allows herself to be looked at but not let the audience see where she is looking, retaining power of the gaze with the audience and the actors on stage. In this adaptation the stage is used as a barrier to the eyes of the audience to convey the idea of cowering and revealing, a now-you-see-it-now-you-don’t approach common in burlesque theater. Malfitano uses the veil to tease Herod, rolling herself in its fabric with the

intent to eventually unravel and reveal herself as a gift to the Tetrach, or letting the King use the veil to envelop embrace her. In most other adaptations, there is no other physical contact between Salome and the King. Salome displays explicitly sexual behavior rubbing herself with her veil having a seemingly erotic experience as Herod watches nearby, panting. It is this “orientalist view of the timeless sensual coupled with the timeless feminine” that explores the fantasized tropes for the “exoticizing of oriental dance” that is evident in Salome’s movement (Shay and Sellers-Young 24). The end of the dance convenes with the triumphant pace of the score: Salome’s mimicked staccato movements like that of a snake attack, or a swiftly rising moon, with a taut strength in her outstretched curved arm. The powerful strokes of this dance establish the power play between Herod, Herodias, and Salome.

A 1992 version of the same opera, *Salome*, directed by Derek Bailey features the soprano Maria Ewing whose dance features the more common, and possibly more vulnerable, nude climax. Salome’s veils traverse the rainbow from a white veil again silencing her through red, the color of the blood red moon onstage². The white veil resurrects images of purity and she twists these by using the veil as a phallic symbol, gyrating over it whilst it is pulled tight by two servants. While this is overtly sexual, Salome’s position on top of the phallus allows her to still be in control in sexual endeavors, showing that she has harnessed her power as a woman. This “pleasurable self-reassurance” that Salome garners reminds the audience that they are participating in the “seemingly harmless side of exploitation, cloaked as it is in playfulness and delirium” (Shay and Sellers-Young 19). Allowing for the King to feel a false sense of control, Salome shifts between levels rolling at his feet, standing on the ledge above him then returning

² The use of black, white, and red as a color code is natural to the world of fantasy as is explained in the next chapter discussing “The Red Shoes.”

to the floor. Salome uses the veil to build herself a throne, sitting on one end and turning until she has built up a nest of crushed piety and renewed power. She continues with explicitly sexual gestures, rubbing her breasts, mouth agape, throwing and arching her back, all the while discarding colorful garments from her being. She still addresses her desired Iokanaan, lowering herself over the grates of his confinement, simulating a sexual encounter, allowing herself to lose her virginity to all those participating in her gaze, excluding Iokanaan who refuses to look at her. She rubs her thighs vigorously exemplifying her lust for Iokanaan, and removes her last garment standing naked in moonlight onstage, revealing herself in the act that allows her desire in the only way she feels she can. By creating a highly sexualized performance, Ewing gives in to the male fantasy of belly dancing and allows the audience to hold a similar position to that of Herod. Salome, seen primarily as a sexual object uses this power to in turn objectify Herod, rendering him a servant to her feminine strengths. This sexual and nude finale solidifies the strength and eloquence of solo improvised dance.

An adaptation *Salome* in 2004, starred and directed by Steven Berkoff, displays the dance in a much more internally powerful way. Salome is dressed all in white, contrasting a cast of black and white garments, with a heavy emphasis on black. The production is a highly theatrical rendition replete with sing song voices and a dance like movement from all characters. The dance however is performed with metaphorical, mimed veils which are sensually removed from Salome's body until she stands symbolically naked at the front of the stage. The lack of physical veils enables the audience and Herod to imagine the dance as explicitly or implicitly as they would like. The somber piano music that accompanies her dance implies a more personal performance, for, unlike other adaptations, this dance does not seem solely for the pleasure of

Herod. Instead, it invokes the idea of Salome's own personally journey of adolescence, and therefore a more triumphant assumption of control in her womanhood. It is in this direct adaptation of the play that the audience is confronted with solo improvised dance's location at the "intersection of dance vocabulary, media images, the feminist and sexual liberation movements, cultural appropriations, and the community of origin" (Shay and Sellers-Young 25). Salome dance of imagination and fantasy is clothed in the red light of the moon, however as soon as the dance finishes, she is returned to the bright yellow light of the stage and the comical court and overly theatrical cast of the play. The stark contrast between the two modes allows the audience to see her sexuality as not a commodity but an inherent strength.

The 1953 film *Salome* starring Rita Hayworth, is important because it clearly illustrates Hollywood's brand of orientalism. The orientalism pictured is the place of "dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements" combined with "Hollywood-inspired visions of sheiks and sultry beauties [dancing] in scanty garments never seen or worn in the Middle East" (Shay and Sellers-Young 18, 19). Clinging more closely to the biblical narrative, the dance focuses on the performance-like nature of the dance. Hayworth, smiling the whole time and never dropping her eyes from the King's face performs as if this is a dance done every day, instead of on the special occasion of request. However it holds similar themes to previously mentioned adaptations. Salome first is revealed from behind a pillar, a use of props reminiscent of the 1997 Strauss adaptation. Hayworth's Salome also allows the King to feel a semblance of control as she dances seductively at his feet. The transition of veils from a dark silencing blue over her head to a nude underdress, implies nudity without having to display it explicitly, a virtue of the production for a larger, general audience. Additionally, Salome's crown, which is removed

at the start of her dance symbolizes that she has gained her power, but in order for her dance to be effective, must defer to the royal power of the king. This adaption most accurately describes the abuse of exoticism in the dance of the seven veils. The overdone Hollywood set loses the emotion that is part of the “discovery” that emanates from solo improvised dance (Shay and Sellers-Young 19). In this example of exoticism, eroticism is used to clearly illustrated a “representation through which identities are frivolously allocated” (Shay and Sellers-Young 19).

The textual reference to the dance indicates that it has accomplished its purpose. Even though Iokanaan will not submit to her sexual advances, Salome uses her sexual power to imprison him for her own pleasure. Herod’s response after the spectacle is one of complete satisfied joy exclaiming “Wonderful! Wonderful! [...] I will give thee whatsoever thy soul desireth” (Wilde 1.831-5). Thus so pleased, he accommodates Salome’s wishes for Iokanaan’s head as per his previous oath, however it is not without reservations. Herod comes to understand Salome’s power stating that he “may have loved [her] too much” and that he has “looked at [her] overmuch,” concluding that “one should not look at anything,” regarding the power of the gaze and Salome’s sexuality as he now sees it (Wilde 1.872-3, 1.894, 1.895). Thus, the audience witnesses the completion of Salome’s task and the gaining of her desire from a means other than her previously known forms of communication and persuasion.

“[Exoticism] is also a will to power over the unknown, an act of indiscriminately combining fragments, crumbs of knowledge and fantasy in disrespectful, sweeping gestures justified by harmless banality.”

Marta Savigliano

By playing with the Western concept of exoticism, Salome is transformed into a sexual being that toes the line between orientalist farce and assumed feminist power. Adaptations show that Salome is conscious of her effect on men in her dance for she plays between the dichotomy of clothed and unclothed, revealed and hidden, virginal and sinfully lustful to appease and control her victims. It is this self-awareness that the true expression of belly dance and solo improvised dance wishes to achieve. The tarnishing of the art form through overproduced Hollywood adaptations point in the direction of fear of foreign influence and cultural demise. But the correctly funneled energy of feminine eroticism is what fuels Salome's performance as a championing heroine. Her assumption of her own sexuality and assignment as female establishes Salome as a child who has gained knowledge far beyond her years. It is this strong establishment that helps to detract from the negative and stereotypical "widespread icon of exotic dance as a representation of the Middle Eastern woman" (Shay and Sellers-Young 17). Solo improvised dance, when performed as statement of feminist ideals, self-control, self-actualization, and womanhood has the potential to be a classical and canonized genre of dance. It is this link between the literary work *Salome* and the cultural significance of her dance that truly makes Oscar Wilde's play a symbol of power.

Transforming From Black and White to “The Red Shoes”

Livy: You’re a magician, Boris! You have produced all this in three weeks and from nothing!

Boris: My dear Livy, not even the best magician in the world can produce a rabbit out of a hat if there is not already a rabbit in the hat.

Powell and Pressburger’s *The Red Shoes*

As Boris Lermontov is aware, transformation in the world of performance cannot occur without initial motivation and potential. Boris Lermontov, the head of the Ballet Lermontov of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s 1948 film *The Red Shoes* epitomizes the character of the controlling ballet director: decisive, strict, and with an unwavering vision. Assisted by Moira Shearer’s acclaimed performance as the vulnerable counterpart, the coquettish chorus girl he plucks from obscurity to become a prima ballerina, *The Red Shoes* becomes a story of transformation. Deriving from Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale for children, “The Red Shoes,” the adapted film is one of many interpretations of the original fantasy tale also including a Korean Horror film and a Kate Bush short film and eponymous album. “The Red Shoes” relates the story of young orphan Karen whose red shoes won’t let her stop dancing. It is not surprising that the story focuses on the color red, drawing attention to the dancing feet of the young child. The color red, acts as a stimulant, and doing so in these adaptations draws the audience’s attention to the objects on which the color is cast (Gaskill 725). More striking however, is the way that the red color illuminates the objects that are cast in drab shade by comparison. As Francisco Vaz de Silva illuminates, humans determine in fairy tales a particular chromatic trio of colors, specifically black, white, and red. This representation of color in the human mind allows the reader to subconsciously highlight red items, coded as sinful, desirous, and fantasy, against the more realistically grounded and stable objects colored black and white.

Using color as a semiotic code, dance performs as the instigator of transformation against the symbolic play between reality and fantasy.

Francisco Vaz de Silva describes the chromatic trio of red, white, and black as a key to understanding the fairy tale. His research originates within the work of Brent Berlin and Paul Kay who found that “despite the proven ability of humans to discriminate thousands of color percepts,” only eleven basic categories exist, from which “the eleven or fewer basic color terms of any given languages are always drawn” (Vaz de Silva). Understanding this, de Silva explores the story of Snow White to discover whether “fairy tales use colors, as they use functions, in a patterned way,” noting the finding of Vladimir Propp that “thirty-one functions are all that the human imagination needs to produce the myriad extant variations in fairy tales” (Vaz de Silva). These languages “encode basic color categories” where any “given category supposes all previous ones” (Vaz de Silva). In the most basic terms, if a given language contains two color terms, these refer to black and white. However, if a language includes a third term in addition to black and white, “it contains [...] a word for red” (Vaz de Silva). This discovery is substantiated by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins who suggests not only is there a universal color scheme but that “colors are in practice semiotic codes” (Vaz de Silva). Semiotics, which is the “theory and description of sign systems,” allow for the interpretation of expanded binary systems, such as that of black and white, and the “consequences of [these structures] throughout a culture” (Irvine). While it may not be surprising that most associate red with blood or love, the introduction of a language of color that permeates the imagination draws the attention to some observations which can be made about fairy tales; specifically, using the prominence of red against the starkly contrasting black and white, creates a division of fantasy and reality.

Fantasy and reality are manifested through dance in the form of perfection. Ballet dancers strive to achieve the perfect body as they participate in an art form that “pitilessly rejects all those who do not meet its precise physical specifications” (Abra 33); artists always wish to be the most innovative; women stereotypically desire to have the perfect life, partner, and family. It is these desires for perfection that drive the women of “The Red Shoes” mad. Their desires function as the key to the semiotic code of black, white and red by cutting the black and white world of reality with red. Dance functions as the mode of transformation, taking the woman from reality to fantasy. Through the following three adaptations, dance remains the integral ingredient whether it is the transformation of Kate Bush to the woman behind the mirror, Sun-jae becoming the murderess ballerina in the 2005 Korean horror film *The Red Shoes*, or Moira Shearer’s paper dance in the 1948 feature film *The Red Shoes*. The title red shoes and their desire to dance draws a line between fantasy and reality which, in order to cross, transformation is necessary.

**“If I could learn to give like a rubberband
I’d be back on my feet”
Kate Bush, “Rubberband Girl”**

The tale of “The Red Shoes” by Hans Christian Andersen utilizes bold red against a subdued reality of black and white to establish Karen’s propensity for fantasy. The core narrative traces the journey of a young, orphaned girl Karen whose desire for beauty leads her to a pair of red shoes that never rest from dancing. In the outset of the fairy tale, the chromatic trio is immediately introduced. In summer she went barefoot and in winter she had to wear large wooden shoes which made “her little instep [grow] quite red” (Andersen). Using the pagan imagery of winter as white, summer as black paired with the resulting red of pain and consequence, attention is drawn away from the bleak existence of the orphan to the fantasy that

will appear on her feet. This chromatic trio is developed into more concrete codes throughout the fairy tale. Black commonly symbolizes observance and piety. Black is often associated with death, coinciding with the opening funeral in the narrative as Karen follows “behind the humble coffin” in a pair of shoes made of “some old pieces of red cloth” (Andersen). These “clumsy,” red shoes “were not suitable for mourning” but as Karen was presented with no other option she put her previously barefoot feet into them to join the procession (Andersen). White, as a singular semiotic code relates to audiences as an embodiment of purity, clarity, and the divine. On the eve of Karen’s confirmation, she stands in a room amongst “pretty shoes and white slippers” (Andersen). The separation of “pretty shoes” from “white slippers” indicates that beautiful things may appear appealing, but proper choices are coded in pure white of her confirmation (Andersen). Andersen has relegated beauty, a desire of Karen’s, to the world of the improper and fantasy. The pure and heavenly representation of white is emphasized by the appearance of an “angel of God in white robes” (Andersen). This angel who appears to Karen twice, first serves as a contrast to her life of red shoes and the second time as a welcoming and reassuring figure after the red shoes are removed. The red emblems are clearly disapproved of by those of the world of black and white.

The introduction of red into Karen’s reality brings with it the world of fantasy. Before existing in only black and white, Karen was orphaned, faced with hardship and poverty, and only knew school and church. Her banal existence is severely affected by the emergence of the red shoes. The first glimmer of excitement in Karen’s world is a princess who is dressed in fine, white clothes with “neither a train nor a golden crown” but marked only by “beautiful red morocco shoes” (Andersen). Karen is immediately envious of the girl who reflects a fairy tale life, royalty, beauty, and fine things. Karen herself is even aware that these red shoes do not

belong in reality and the story proclaims “there is really nothing in the world that can be compared to red shoes” (Andersen). Karen, fueled by the desire for such an otherworldly possession, has red shoes made for her confirmation. She herself injects fantasy into reality by intermingling the red shoes with the white purity and black piety of confirmation. The color emerges as sin with the entire congregation’s eyes drawn to Karen’s feet seeming “as if even the ancient figures on the monuments, in their stiff collars and long black robes” were giving disapproving stares (Andersen). Red has become a concrete signifier of fantasy and begins to change previously black and white coded objects.

As Karen becomes more tied to her shoes, the remnants of the world of binary black and white become more subdued. One Sunday at church for communion, Karen decides against wearing proper shoes and wears instead her favored red ones (Andersen). When kneeling before the altar, fully on her path into fantasy, Karen “[thinking] only of the red shoes,” forgets to sing the psalm and say the Lord’s Prayer (Andersen). The intermingling of items color-coded as reality and fantasy, display the tensions existing in the same world, demonstrating that one must overcome the other for prominence. Similarly, in front of the church door, Karen meets an “old crippled soldier” whose beard is “more red than white” (Andersen). It is this old soldier that recognizes Karen’s shoes as “dancing” shoes (Andersen). The old soldier serves as the indicator of transformation; his beard indicates the clouding of a previously pure world with the impending fantasy of the red shoes, and by naming the red shoes “dancing shoes” recognizes the necessity for dancing to enter fantasy (Andersen). At the soldier’s request, Karen is “obliged to dance a few steps” after which her “legs continued to dance” under the power of the red shoes (Andersen). The shoes have effectively divided the two worlds and once the dancing has begun, the supernatural effects of fantasy take form.

This established color trio clearly demonstrates the division of reality and fantasy in Hans Christian Andersen's "The Red Shoes" and dance's position as a transforming agent. Dance's physicality implies a transformation from reality to fantasy that can be seen by the human eye. Naturally, adaptations of the fairy tale attempt to reconcile this need of the story. In three visual adaptations of "The Red Shoes" dancers and dancing serve as the catalyst for change and realization and evoke remnants of the semiotic color trio established in the original story. Examining each in turn reveals the way in which different mediums reconcile this original intent to distinguish the two worlds and the path from one to the other.

**“And this curve, is your smile
And this cross, is your heart
And this line, is your path”
Kate Bush, “The Red Shoes”**

Similar to Kate Bush's song "The Red Shoes," life's purpose is dictated to Victoria Page in a manner that forces her to choose death over love or art. Victoria Page, portrayed by the professional ballerina Moira Shearer, with her signature flaming red hair and red shoes becomes the canvas on which the battle between the ideal and reality is painted. The 1948 film *The Red Shoes* uses a professional dance company to illustrate the struggles of Hans Christian Andersen's Karen between fantasy and reality. The acclaimed film created a ballet titled *The Red Shoes* to serve as a central work to the film. Aside from the plot of the film, this central dance serves as a reinterpretation of the original fairy tale. Incorporating many aspects of film and staged ballet, the ballet *The Red Shoes* demonstrates the art world's interpretation of the merging of fantasy and reality through dance.

The film *The Red Shoes* cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of its creation. Prior to *The Red Shoes*, there were many films that included dance numbers (Christie). However, no film had truly attempted to intertwine music and dance into its story seamlessly in a “dreamlike spectacle” (Christie). As Ian Christie, a Professor of Film Studies at the University of Kent whose studies focus on the work of Directors Powell and Pressburger, notes the release of *The Red Shoes* “marked a triumph of artistic collaboration and has since become a benchmark of modernity” (Christie). Similar to the distinction drawn between the existence of performance in *A Doll’s House* and the previous chapter’s subjects, this film stood out against productions of its time when “realism was the fetish of so many filmmakers and critics throughout the world” (Christie). As such, it was originally considered a “disaster by its backers” specifically targeting the central thirty minute ballet which Powell and Pressburger “considered their finest achievement” (Christie). It is the vision of these directors who emerged from the constraints of realism to produce a work that allowed dance to take the viewer effortlessly into fantasy.

The intricacies of a staged ballet performed for film created the world in which the ballet needed to flourish as a surreal piece of art. Staging the central ballet for the purpose of the film was a difficulty necessary to tackle. However, the struggle proved to demonstrate key contrasts within its narrative. The earlier portions of the ballet use normal conventions of the stage, chorus, spotlight, and set art. However, after Shearer has put on the red shoes, these elements begin to fade away. As is indicated in the film commentary by Ian Christie, the absence of spotlight once Shearer has entered a fantasy world with the shoes creates an “abstract piece of surrealism” where “as the ballet’s starting point fades from memory, so the conventions of the stage all disappear” (Film Commentary *The Red Shoes*). Shearer leaves the town behind, traveling through the clouds as gloomy lighting fills the stage and darkens the portrayal of reality

with its concrete images. Thus begins the so called paper dance in which Moira Shearer dances with an anthropomorphic discarded newspaper.

The idea of the discarded newspaper was not new to the film by the time of its introduction in the ballet *The Red Shoes*. It is reminiscent of a discarded piece of paper earlier on a terrace in the larger narrative of the film (Film Commentary *The Red Shoes*). This relation to the fully embodied fantasy aspects of the ballet to the real world of the film's plot already demonstrates dance's power to take the viewer from one to the other. However, the use of newspaper in art was not new either. This was reminiscent of popular cubist art of time where artists incorporated actual newspaper clippings into finished art (Film Commentary *The Red Shoes*). This introduction of cubist art derives from the modeling of the Ballet Lermontov and Boris Lermontov after the famed Ballet Russe and Sergei Diaghilev, respectively (Christie). It was not uncommon for Diaghilev to introduce "popular art into ballet," just as *The Red Shoes* does for popular film (Film Commentary *The Red Shoes*). As such, the newspaper³ serves as a symbol of "transience and chance," notes Director of Photography Jack Cardiff (Film Commentary *The Red Shoes*). The newspaper as a physical and symbolic mark of fantasy allows the semiotic code of black, white, and red to demonstrate dance's transformative powers.

The paper dance in the ballet *The Red Shoes* demonstrates the transformative power of dance as it plays against a literal background of black, white and red. Moira Shearer enters the frame of film wearing a frothy white gown, a change from her earlier youthful dress reminiscent of the early costume of the young Giselle. Complemented only by the bold color of her red hair

³ This object brings to light similarities of another Technicolor film of the time, *The Wizard of Oz*, which not only employs anthropomorphic characters but a similar semiotic code. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the scarecrow, lion, and tin man all serve the purpose of illustrating issues of Dorothy's real life while existing in a fantasy world. Additionally, it is the gifted ruby slippers that take Dorothy to and from the fantasy world of Oz and serve as the first image, as well as colored object, after entering. The stark representation of the ruby red slippers against the black and white stockings of the Wicked Witch of the East serves as divider between Dorothy's reality and fantasy.

and red shoes, the gloomy, dark set background fades in prominence. Immediately, after the floating dancer touches the ground, the film cuts to a shot of a floating, yellowed newspaper against a black town. The town's only other color consists of the setting sun, which shines an eerie gleam on the newspaper creating shadows as it floats toward Shearer. As Shearer enters this frame from stage right, the three colors of the tripartite code exist with one another onstage allowed by the fervent dancing of Shearer's red feet. Shearer pauses in front of the newspaper in a stance that resembles a preparation, and, at this moment, as if being called into being, the newspaper rises up in the crude formation of a person. The newspaper beginning to circle and dance with Shearer indicates not only the transformation of its object status but also of its existence in reality to fantasy to complement the direction of the narrative and ballet. The newspaper, spinning faster, becomes another human dancer who is styled as a newspaper. Shearer's white gown now embodies the yellowed black and white of the newspaper and she becomes the intermediary between the black and white world of reality and the red of fantasy. This crucial moment demonstrates precipice of disaster that Shearer teeters on expanding the ballet into the larger argument of the film illustrating the "demands of art" (Christie).

The duet between the dancer and the dancing newspaper illustrates the submission of Shearer to the transformation of fantasy. The two dancers move without contact onstage, their movements opposing. The newspaper man, executes decisive movements with exuberance, jumping high into the air and turning with force. Shearer's character maintains the previous mode of dance which signifies the "dreamscape," with light airy movements similar to a reworked waltz (Film Commentary *The Red Shoes*). When Shearer and the newspaper man first make contact, the two spin as if implying the melding of the two worlds. Their parting leads to the halting of Shearer's dance standing before the newspaper man who is on the ground with the

arm and leg of his body on the side facing Shearer outstretched in pose that would cause most audiences to think of a stopping gesture. Sensing the implication that reality, in the form of the newspaper man, is trying to reclaim Shearer, she cowers as he throws both arms over her head and embraces the dancer. The two spin together faster and faster, Shearer releasing and letting her body be controlled by the man, until she is once again dancing with a sheet of newspaper in a white dress against a dark backdrop. Reality has fought this battle with dance as a tool to cross the boundary between the two realms, but the prevailing power of fantasy overcomes and reality must resume its secondary position as an object.

This portion of the ballet clearly demonstrates the transformative power of dance. The film allows dance to physically transform objects as well as transform their meaning and importance. By utilizing the semiotic color code, audiences are easily able to distinguish the differences between reality and fantasy and relate them to the larger portrayal in the film's plot. The melding of lighting techniques, popular art references, and color psychology indicates a larger scheme of symbolic references which the art world employs. Regardless that this medium differs vastly from the written word, it attaches itself to the same purpose. *The Red Shoes* serves as important interpretation of the fairy tale due to its embodiment solely in dance and the resulting imagery it provides to a larger audience.

**“And I can hear my mother saying
‘Every old sock meets an old shoe’”
Kate Bush, “Moments of Pleasure”**

The Korean horror film *The Red Shoes* presents a chilling depiction of dance as the origination of desire using semiotic color codes to distinguish between idealized wants and reality. Through the common supernatural use of transformation in horror films the women of

this version of the *The Red Shoes* can execute their desirous wills. It is at the conclusion of the film as Sun-jae returns to the scene of the first execution by the supernatural red shoes⁴ that we see her transform. Looking at her daughter, Tae-soo, standing on the train tracks of the station which was once a ballet theatre, the lights of the station flash on and off revealing the duality that exists within her: both a worried mother and a crazed killer. Looking out from underneath her hair, the transformed Sun-jae stares longingly at her daughter who clutches the red shoes; as the lights flash again, the audience sees the original Sun-jae begging for forgiveness and for the life of her daughter from the supernatural spirit that haunts the shoes. However, it is this spirit that reveals that Sun-jae has been transformed for much longer than the moment the audience has been shown she found the red shoes. In this moment the film cuts to every murder that has occurred thus far while the spirit explains it was Sun-jae who “killed them all” (Kim *The Red Shoes*). It is visually explained that Sun-jae is the transformed spirit, reclaiming the shoes that were once hers and murdering everyone in her path. It is the audience who also experiences how they have been fooled by their perception of reality and fantasy through the transformative power of dance to the desires of the red shoes.

The Korean film *The Red Shoes* traces the story of a dancer whose shoes and life were stolen from her. The original dancer Oki, after being killed by lesser dancer Keiko in jealousy, wreaks revenge on the women who have stolen the red shoes. Once Keiko put on the shoes to perform, they took on their own life and killed her. The shoes carry the spirit of Oki so that once a woman finds the shoes and puts them on, as Sun-jae did, anyone that takes them from that woman will be killed. Through transformation in the form of possession, Sun-jae embodied the

⁴ The red shoes in this film are in fact pink in color. However, the distinction is not necessarily an issue as the categorization of the shoes being “red” has more to do with the bloody nature of their history and the implication that they are tainted with the supernatural elements of fantasy and, in this case, horror. The red shoes are also high heels and not pointe shoes.

spirit of the dancer Oki and murders countless people who she felt betrayed her. The differences in the reality and the fantasy of the film can be deciphered by the presence of the semiotic color code.

The majority of the film is shot in tones of black and white with highlights of red. As was indicated by the title credits, which consist of a black screen with white lettering, which, after each sentence, fills with red blood, the semiotic code still exists and prevails through much of the cinematic narrative. Red is the color of Tae-soo's nightgown when she is possessed with desire for the shoes, the color of Sun-jae's lipstick when invigorated so much that her "feet feel like dancing on their own," the color of Sun-jae's purse when she supposedly first finds the red shoes (Kim *The Red Shoes*). It is the moments in which flashes of red are splashed across the screen that a transformation and possession is taking hold of Sun-jae. On the other hand, when Sun-jae is painted as lifeless, pale and worn, wearing only black and white, the audience understands her to be suffering from the after effects of these horrors. The supernatural element casts the shadow of fantasy, but also clouds the events that are actually taking place. Red is a signifier in *The Red Shoes* not purely of supernatural happenings but of false reality.

In Yong-gyun Kim's *The Red Shoes*, dance serves a perfunctory purpose. Dance does not take as active a position as Powell and Pressburger's film or represent the transformation as fully as the original story, but rather performs as a catalyst for transformation. It is the desire to perfect the art of dance that motivates the original murder. It is this similar desire for perfection in the form of a beautiful pair of shoes that drives the women that follow. However, nods to the original story are strong: the women murdered for the taking of the red shoes from another are killed in a manner that dismembers their legs. This is a replication of Karen's final removal of the red shoes from her body with the help of an executioner who cuts her legs off. The original

story easily lends itself to an adaptation of the horror genre as it focuses on a tormenting pair of red shoes. However, the audience is not given the same satisfaction of readers of “The Red Shoes.” at the conclusion of the film, a viewer can only assume by what is presented that Oki’s spirit took the life of Sun-jae. The screen cuts to black after the supposed death of Sun-jae and quickly cuts again to the beautiful ballet dance of Oki who seems at peace. The chilling depiction of Tae-soo dancing in her ballet slippers in front of the mirror following Oki’s dance leads audiences to believe that dance again has acted as the agent of transformation and the young Tae-soo is now the possessed body of Oki.

The film portrays transformation in the most literal sense. What was a symbolic representation of a transition from a world of reality to fantasy has become an experience of the supernatural within reality. The semiotic color code assists in defining the differences between the two worlds for an audience, however misleading it may appear to be at first. By applying a purely literal interpretation of the original “The Red Shoes,” the film results in the creation of a narrative that demonstrates the necessity of transformation to decipher, rather than cross into, the world of reality and fantasy.

**“Oh, she moves like the Diva do
I said I’d love to dance like you.
She said just take off my red shoes
Put them on and your dream’ll come true”
Kate Bush, “The Red Shoes”**

Kate Bush’s short film *The Line, The Cross & The Curve* reiterates the concept that transformation is necessary to cross from reality to fantasy. In Kate Bush’s film, which was created with the music of her concept album *The Red Shoes*, her character of The Dancer is transposed as The Mysterious Woman through the “gift” of her shoes (Bush). The Dancer “[who

would] love to dance like [the Mysterious Woman]” wears the red shoes in the hope that they will have the magical power (Bush). This adaptation differs from the others in acknowledging openly that the shoes hold supernatural powers. Unsurprisingly, the Dancer then enters a fantasy world. However, it is these red shoes that allow passage into the fantasy world by crossing through the mirror of the rehearsal room. The literal transformation, which appears in Yong-gyun Kim’s film, is expanded into the viewer’s ability to see the physical barrier between the two worlds.

The barrier between worlds allows for the semiotic color code to be easily deciphered. The rehearsal room, the setting prior to transformation, contains only elements of black and white, and their coded meanings. The Dancer wears a simple black dress with the availability for movement. The room, after an electrical blackout consists only of the dark room, the darkly dressed Dancer, and lit white candles. The Dancer’s only other company is a black bird which dies in its attempt to escape the room and its confining reality. The desire for escape is satisfied for the Dancer by the entrance into the room of the Mysterious Woman, dressed in an extravagant costume of black and red. The entrance of red into a world of solely black and white implies that the Mysterious Woman belongs to another world which necessitates the drawing of a line, a cross, and a curve. This trio can be attributed to black, white, and red respectively as reality, piety, and desire deviating from the straight line. After these three images are drawn, the Dancer is beckoned into the fantasy world where her transposition as the Mystery Woman becomes realized through the expansion of the color red.

Bush’s adaptation clearly articulates to the viewer the division of fantasy and reality but leaves little to symbolism through a literal transformation. By removing the work of detection from the chromatic trio, its deeper meaning loses importance. The more fantastical and literal

approach however, still conveys the importance of color to the relation between fantasy and reality. Bush's film also places a heavy emphasis on desire, which is strung throughout both versions of *The Red Shoes* but in a subtler manner. By giving desire a human form in which to dwell, Bush empowers desire and instead of simply recognizing its tormenting power, allows the reader to acknowledge that desire can act of its own will. By drawing these literal distinctions, Bush affirms what has been shown thus far: the dance becomes a catalyst for transformation, an agent of change, and a tool for the development of color symbolism to divide the realms of fantasy and reality.

“Overall, women are like roses; but whereas a good mother passes on her blood drops and takes briars as they come, the bad one clings to rosebuds out of season.”
Francisco Vaz de Silva

By combining dance with a semiotic color code, the trend of fairy tales extends to performance literature. Red as signifier is not uncommon to film. *Schindler's List* similarly uses red to highlight the coat of a young child and allows the audience to follow her journey. Similar to aforementioned film adaptations of “The Red Shoes,” *Schindler's List* focuses on the main character in the light of the development surrounding him in Nazi Germany. Culturally, this semiotic color trio surpasses the fairy tale. A study by Victor W. Turner shows that the Ndembu tribe of Zambia “possess primary terms for only white, red, and black” (Vaz de Silva). This pervading coding of basic color terms is not singular to the fairy tale or, for that matter, the western world (Vaz de Silva). This cultural expansion of a color theory implies that Hans Christian Andersen not only wishes to impart simple lessons to children through his fairy tales, but also allows any reader to find ways to distinguish reality from fantasy in their own life.

Even though it may seem as such, dance is not portrayed as evil. Rather, the use of dance as agent for transformation into a world where evil resides leaves room for the improvement of dance and need for a mode of freeing expression. Dance, and more specifically ballet, normally provides for a controlling aspect of expression. Women generally find a feminist perspective through explorations of the varied means of expression. Andersen is merely highlighting the blockages inherent in dance as a mode of transformation. Dance acts as way to perform as another character, to step out of one's own reality and enter that of another while onstage. While this proves to be a manner of self exploration, one must be cautioned, as all the women of "The Red Shoes" are, that desire may take over and each person has the possibility of losing themselves in this transformation.

Conclusion:

Modern Dance as the Evolution of Expression

“Is it not true that all the graces of God are upon woman...that all the marvelous liness of the animal, that the gestures of the flower are in her? So if she has all the gifts, she is the reflection of the world. She is like a garland suspended between reality and the ideal...She can, with all her gestures, represent all ideas. If the gesture is right, the idea is beautiful.”
Isadora Duncan

The women of this thesis have clearly demonstrated that they too are garlands suspended between reality and the ideal. As Isadora Duncan has stated, modern dance serves as a feminist form of expression which has the potential, through physical expression and gesture, to ride along the line between reality and the ideal. Twyla Tharp, presents a point of view that confirms that in order to find a more precise feminist expression, older narratives must be revisited. Tharp, a current modern dance choreographer, creates space for the old and new forms of expression to live in the same world and work off each other's inadequacies. Tharp's work has a “distinctive style” which is recognized for “its blending of more traditional training with idiosyncratic gestures, clear structure, and consistent entertainment” (Brown et al. 193). Tharp, known for researching her inspirations upwards of a year before creating a work, shows concrete ties to both “The Red Shoes” and the mingling of modern dance and ballet in her work “In the Upper Room” (Frankel).

Tharp's “In The Upper Room,” demonstrates the ability of contemporary feminist expression to synthesize previously hindering narratives, such as “The Red Shoes.” First performed in 1986, “In The Upper Room” presents both modern dancers, “stompers” and

ballet dancers, the “bomb squad” who are en pointe in red shoes similar to those of the 1948 film *The Red Shoes* (TwylaTharp.org). Dancers enter the stage in red shoes and dressed in black and white jail-stripe jumpsuits, which are stripped away to reveal more red as the narrative enters more into the realm of fantasy (Frankel). These dancers work “according to their nicknames, stomping and bombing the space with their finesse, energy and force” (TwylaTharp.org). Not only is the clothing adhering to semiotic color trio of reality and fantasy, but here reality is viewed as a barrier to the dance. Shading the black and white of reality with the striped pattern commonly associated with prison garb allows the red underneath to speak as pure freedom as well as fantasy. Unsurprisingly, Tharp’s publicity manager at the time of the production of this dance notes that “Twyla had worked with Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘Little Match Girl’ and ‘The Red Shoes’ in research preparation for choreographing the work” and drew inspiration from the tale (Frankel). Intermingling ballet and modern dance, Tharp creates an embodiment of fantasy that is expanded across both restricting and liberating forms of dance.

Possibly, the need for a new movement art form in modern dance is best articulated by the life of Isadora Duncan. Duncan was a revolutionary. Born in 1877, she fought against the expectations of women in the late nineteenth century refusing to wear corsets or other restricting clothing (Brown et al. 7; *Dancing Program 7*). She did not follow social norms, took lovers, and lived out of wedlock (*Dancing Program 7*). Dance at that time in America wasn’t a respected profession nor was it considered an art form, and “the dancer was considered only slightly more respectable than a prostitute or stripper” (*Dancing Program 7*). The predominant respected dance form abroad, ballet, “wasn’t about pushing boundaries” (*Dancing Program 7*). Famous for her preoccupation

with Greek and Roman references in both dress and manner, Duncan is commonly depicted in a loose toga like dress flouncing across the stage barefoot (*Dancing Program 7*). Prior to Duncan, the “purpose of dance was to reinforce the existing order” not create a space for women’s expression (*Dancing Program 7*). Duncan, performing abroad in conjunction with the famed Imperial Ballet in Russia, drew a strong contrast between the dance of the past and the future of performed expression. The famous prima ballerina, Anna Pavlova⁵ performed a “traditional” ballet prior to Duncan’s appearance on stage; Duncan moved across the stage in loose fitting clothing freed from ballet’s strict technique in the new movements of modern dance (*Dancing Program 7*). Anna Pavlova later stated that the “American dancer came to Russia and brought freedom to all of us” (*Dancing Program 7*). This commentary mirrors the relation of *Giselle* to ballet as a barrier to liberation, that women who subjected themselves to dancing ballet were in effect restricting their own freedom through masochistic movement and functions.

Ruth St. Denis, whose dance resembles that of solo improvised dance, provided women with a form of expression in America that burlesqued stereotypes. In America, the “avant garde was often confused with the exotic” (*Dancing Program 7*). The former showgirl Ruth St. Denis made dance a more recognized popular art form in the United States. Playing into stereotypes, she allowed women to control the image they portrayed and used the predominant want of audiences to objectify to her advantage. Using the “sensuous dance of the East as inspiration for her art,” she created a space for expression similar to that of Salome using a sexualized exoticized dance for power (*Dancing Program 7*). Through Ruth St. Denis, this form of expression became “acceptable in

⁵ Ann Pavlova later was principal dancer for the Ballet Russe, the company off which the Ballet Lermontov of the 1948 film *The Red Shoes* is based.

proper society” and spread widely through America for public consumption. By allowing dance to be more widely used, experienced, and performed by a larger group of women, St. Denis provides expression as a viable means to freedom.

These women represent a feminist perspective which attempts to escape from the strictures of their narrative and take flight through a form of expression. Modern dance revolutionary Mary Wigman echoes this sentiment with regard to dance that women find “[themselves] in a process of change...[abandoning] classical ballet in favor of an expression representing [their] time” (Wigman 33). *Giselle* showed a need for such expression in the mind of the professional dancer. *Salome* displayed the necessity of dance to exert power and control. “The Red Shoes” used dance as a means to express desire and transformation. It makes perfect sense that theories used to explore these wants of expression all dealt with an underlying human psychology. The want exists; it is deciphering and allowing it to be satisfied that is the issue. Not only does dance prove to be a lens for the literary medium, but an additional mode of expression outside the written word.

In exploring dance as a medium of expression, freedom arises as a goal. *Giselle* wishes to free herself from the control of the Wilis, the grip of haunting death, and, in turn, free her beloved Albrecht. *Salome* is offered no mode of expression by her subverted role as sexual object and captive prisoner and desires to escape her captivity as subject to the King. *Karen* is not allowed to explore her desire for beauty both due to her orphaned and impoverished state as well as her religious ties, and the red shoes try to offer her flight. But which of these women are actually freed? Not *Giselle* for she is relegated to the world of the dead and is only able to free others. Not *Salome*, who after

receiving that which she desires she herself is killed and does not reap the benefits of her new position of power. Not Karen, for she is separated from her legs and her shoes and only resolves her issues with her faith through forgiveness in death. The only truly liberated woman is Nora. Nora, unable to be seen in her perfected performance by the audience, is freed. No longer the object of one's gaze, she is able to separate herself from a condemning state of domesticity and uses dance as a truthful and freeing mode of expression.

Similar to the experience of dance in the literary form, dance as a performance of art is an attempt by women to find truthful and liberating expression. As Alfred Habegger notes, "to embody a daydream in dense social notation is to bring that daydream out in to the world, to test it and to make it, with all its aspirations and distortions, a political force (Habegger ix). By allowing dreams, desires, and expression to take form and physicality, women are making a political statement about their wants and needs. The previously described women enact their dreams and desires to create a space for expression. The women of this thesis, restricted by the boundaries of their reality, serve as perfect examples of the need for reformed communication through modern dance.

Dance is a mode of expression that allows various narratives to be explored. Women can act as another character or perform autobiographically. As Tharp notes, dance is a natural form of expression and human movement; humans' "very first habit is to control [their] movement" therefore, dance, or any form of physical movement, is the most natural way to express oneself (*Dancing Program* 7). The placement of dance within the written word congeals the physical and the literal. The very "idea dance could

be a medium of expression was revolutionary in the beginning of the twentieth century,” but current methods of examining literature normalize such modes of expression and use them in a variety of artistic forms (*Dancing Program 7*). The authors of the previously discussed four works have rendered their female protagonists to the world of dance in order to offer the reader view of a narrative in which the most natural form of expression is properly expressed. Dance becomes speech and therefore speaks the words these women are unable to articulate themselves.

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