

Bedraggled Ballerinas on a Bus Back to Bow: The ‘Fairy Business’

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I

The Kingdom of Transpontus

In May 1976, the New York City Ballet put on *Union Jack*, a production created by the former Ballet Russes choreographer George Balanchine (1904–1983). Its pretext was ‘to honor the British heritage of the United States on the occasion of its Bicentennial’.¹ In reality, two hundred years of American independence from British rule was commemorated by an unexpected, if tongue-in-cheek, tribute to British imperial pageantry and Victorian variety theatre. *Union Jack*, a ballet in three sections, opened with a frenetically fast balletic translation of a Scottish military tattoo: sword dances, swirling reels, and highland flings. This was followed by a costermonger *pas-de-deux*, saucily performed by a Pearly King and Queen to music-hall ditties including ‘The Night the Floor Fell In’ and ‘Our Lodger’s Such a Naice Young Man’. Their two little daughters arrived on stage in a cart drawn by a live donkey. In the third section sailors danced high-spirited hornpipes and jigs to traditional sea shanties. The finale brought together the whole cast of seventy-four dancers, coloured flags in hand, to semaphore ‘God Save the Queen’ to the strains of ‘Rule, Britannia’ while cannon shots resounded and the Union Jack descended behind them. The backdrops for the ballet were Tower Bridge as it might appear in a picture book for children, a cardboard set modelled on Pollock’s Victorian toy theatres, and painted sailing ships atop jaunty seaside waves.

Balanchine’s references for the ‘Britishness’ of his ballet might be traced back fifty years to a similar production, *The Triumph of Neptune*, which he choreographed for the 1926 winter season of Sergei Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet at the Lyceum Theatre in London. It was inspired by traditional pantomime and set in a toy theatre of the Victorian period. Diaghilev himself visited Pollock’s shop at 73 Hoxton Street to select the prints used as a basis for the costume and scenery design.² *The Triumph of Neptune* was ‘replete with “English dance folklore” [...] a street dancer’s polka, a Scottish reel for the Goddess Britannia, a sailor’s jig, fling’, and ‘a hornpipe’.³ There was also a fairy snowflake ballet, a harlequinade, and a grand transformation scene. Such a ballet might seem something of

an anomaly given Diaghilev's more familiar repertoire of experimental works. The wartime and post-Armistice productions of Diaghilev's now European-based company had regularly employed avant-garde painters including Pablo Picasso, Natalia Goncharova, and Mikhail Larionov, to collaborate on ballets that reflected contemporary art movements. The visual modernism of ballets such as *Parade* (1917), *Contes Russes* (1917), and *Les Noces* (1923) delighted Bloomsbury with their attention to 'significant form', and both T. S. Eliot and Roger Fry wrote in praise of their brilliant colour contrasts and suggestive symbolism.⁴ Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Léonide Massine restored the validity and vitality of the male dancer to theatrical ballet, and equally innovative was the choreography of Bronislava Nijinska whose pioneering work challenged the pirouetting 'prettiness' of the ballerina.⁵ When the dance critic Arnold Haskell stated that 'the story of English ballet begins with Pavlova and Diaghileff' he was referring to the invigoration of an art form that had been defined by that twirling prettiness and which had for some decades been confined to the variety halls.⁶ So why in 1926 did Diaghilev produce an 'English' ballet that resorted to the ostensibly moribund and outmoded elaborations of pantomime and music-hall ballet?

In fact Diaghilev was as attuned to trends as ever. It was a craze for mid-century Victoriana among London's so-called Bright Young Things that persuaded him to commission the eccentric peer and composer Lord Berners and his friend Sacheverell Sitwell to create the ballet score and libretto. *The Triumph of Neptune* was a combination of surreal pastiche, camp sentiment, and fierce nostalgia, and it prompted the normally anti-Diaghilev *Daily Express* critic, Hannen Swaffer, to state: 'We saw at the Lyceum last night the beginnings of a British ballet.'⁷ This was not quite what Haskell had meant. Where Haskell was referring to the artistic credibility of English ballet dancing as a nascent phenomenon thanks to Russian intervention, what Swaffer saw in *The Triumph of Neptune* was the rediscovery of an already credible native tradition. The flamboyant dandy-aesthetes of the 1920s embraced a 'High-coloured Victorian England' as wholeheartedly as pre-war Bloomsbury had rejected it, and Diaghilev's company offered ways of making aesthetic connections to that tradition.⁸

From its earliest days Diaghilev's Ballets Russes had extended the boundaries of academic dance with references to ethnic material and folk dance, which on the classical stage had declined into etiolated 'character' stereotypes. Fokine (in common with his cubo-futurist compatriots in Moscow and St Petersburg) believed art sprung from the

masses and must touch the emotions. He astonished pre-war European audiences with revolutionary ballets derived from Magyar and Cossack sources, from Spanish, Greek, Arab, and Turkic indigenous dance, as well as more fanciful ‘oriental’ or ‘primitive’ inspiration. Diaghilev’s commitment to the idea of theatrical ballet as high art allowed his modernist choreographers to raid the ‘tawdry burlesques, ersatz toe dances and vernacular dances’ of folkloric tradition, refining and fusing them into ‘the medium of their own technique’.⁹ Modernism itself might be defined by this transformational method, its texts a remaking or ‘a pastiche or gloss of existing texts’ partaking of an ‘obsessive recycling of themes, genres, and typologies’ ultimately elevating the value of abstract form over its source material.¹⁰ But whereas English modernists in the 1910s had looked outwards, in the 1920s ‘a project of national self discovery was underway’.¹¹ In *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), Charles Ryder’s discomfited recollection of how as a student he had furnished his Oxford rooms illustrates the aesthetic backlash of Evelyn Waugh’s generation against their Bloomsbury elders. In gauche contrast with the elegant Sebastian Flyte’s ‘strange jumble of objects’, an ‘elephant’s foot waste-paper basket’, and ‘a dome of wax fruit’, Charles’s ‘screen, painted by Roger Fry [...] bought inexpensively when the Omega workshops were sold up’, and a ‘poster by McKnight Kauffer’ are rendered, like his books which include Fry’s *Vision and Design*, Clive Bell’s *Art*, and Lytton Strachey’s satirical *Eminent Victorians*, ‘meagre and commonplace’.¹² The post-Armistice neoromantic modernism of the Sitwells, Harold Acton, Waugh, and their Oxford friends, rejected Vorticism’s abstractions as ‘mechanistically competent and insistently bleak’, turning instead to childhood memories of music-hall theatre, of columbines, harlequins, marionettes, and sylphs, and to the tinselled engravings and hand-coloured toy theatre sheets of a disappearing English folk art.¹³

The cultural significance of the Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured had been noted by Robert Louis Stevenson back in 1884. In a nostalgic eulogy for the English toy theatre or ‘juvenile drama’ of his boyhood, he recalls its quality of ‘insular home-bred staginess; not French, domestically British; [...] the footlight glamour, the ready-made, bare-faced, transpontine picturesque [...] a strong flavour of England’.¹⁴ The ‘Englishness’ that enthused the public-school balletomanes of Acton’s set was discovered in the sensational melodramas and spectacular pantomime performed in the theatres of Hoxton, Poplar, and Bow in London’s East End, and on the south side of the Thames bridges in Lambeth and the Elephant and Castle — hence ‘transpontine’, literally over the

bridge.¹⁵ Stevenson's Kingdom of Transpontus, vividly replicated by the engravers and colourists of the Juvenile Drama between 1810 and 1850, is peopled by seafaring tars, dashing highwaymen, the 'black-face' minstrel, the scarlet-clad soldier boy, cockney costers, country maidens, and assorted blackguards, rakes, and cuckolds. This is where hearts are broken or mended, fortunes lost or made, and virtue rewarded, satisfactory resolutions effected by the supernatural interventions of Harlequin's baton or Columbine's wand.

The Triumph of Neptune presented a medley of twelve *divertissements* in true pantomime fashion, where character, costume, and choreography take precedence over narrative logic. The slight tale upon which the ballet is hung concerns a magic telescope set up on London Bridge through which it is possible to see Fairyland. A sailor, Tom Tug, and a Journalist decide they must make the fantastic journey. As they take their leave by omnibus, a Dandy embarks upon the seduction of the sailor's wife. In Fleet Street, 'The Evening Telescope' and 'The Evening Microscope' vie for news of the expedition. Eventually the sailor takes fairy form and marries Neptune's daughter.¹⁶ The less-than-coherent narrative, observed the *Queen's* critic, 'gives the ballet its true All-British flavour', concluding, like Swaffer, that 'it is heartening to realize that the Diaghilev productions now contain an item so English as *The Triumph of Neptune*'.¹⁷ Balanchine himself danced Snowball, a traditional black-face role, with strutting and mincing steps derived from the cakewalk, an American vernacular dance with its antecedents in slavery, and from contemporary ragtime moves as well. As mentioned earlier, the inclusion of vernacular dance, in extending the boundaries of what might be accommodated in classical ballet, defined the modernism of Diaghilev's productions. Meanwhile the admixture of pastiche, parody, and homage that characterizes *The Triumph of Neptune* draws our attention both to the workings of modernism in its quest for rejuvenation and to the hierarchical cultural distinctions by which it is informed. Sitwell's quirky and allusive ballet was eclipsed by the larger successes of works such as *Les Biches* (1924), *Le Train Bleu* (1924), and others considered more representative both of the period and of Diaghilev's contribution to the status of modern ballet as high art. Along with it disappeared a sense of continuity with the indigenous performative tradition to which it was indebted, the music-hall ballet.

Marinetti's Futurist paean to Variety Theatre, published in English as 'The Meaning of the Music Hall' in the *Daily Mail* in 1913, indicates the crucial role of music

hall in the formation of modernist sensibilities.¹⁸ Sergei Eisenstein explained the formal influence of pantomime and music hall on expressionist cinema:

First and foremost we must give credit to the basic principles of the circus and music hall — for which I had a passionate love since childhood. Under the influence of the French comedians, and of Chaplin [...] and the first news of the fox-trot and jazz, this early love thrived. The music-hall element was obviously needed at the time for the emergence of a ‘montage’ form of thought. Harlequin’s parti-coloured costume grew and spread, first over the structure of the program, and finally into the method of the whole production.¹⁹

Aspects of music hall’s material content, slapstick, and cross-talk in the plays of Samuel Beckett, to give just one example, have been widely discussed but only recently have scholars begun to give serious consideration to English ballet, which until the arrival of Diaghilev in June 1911, was a principal attraction of the music-hall stage to which it was indeed confined.²⁰ A century of critical neglect can be attributed to precisely the conditions which propelled Diaghilev’s impresarial strategy. Refusing to countenance anything less than the elite audiences his company attracted on the Continent, Diaghilev determined that his company would perform only at opera houses or on the ‘legitimate’ stage.²¹ London’s ‘invasion’ by Russian dancers had in fact begun some years before in 1908, and the forerunners of Diaghilev’s cultural offensive had been forced to perform in music halls. Lydia Kyasht, to the horror of Tsar Alexander the Second, took up an appointment as principal ballerina at the Empire, Tamara Karsavina and Olga Preobrazhenska danced at the Coliseum and the Hippodrome, while Anna Pavlova performed regularly at the Palace Theatre of Varieties.²² Russia’s Imperial court ballerinas were dismayed to find themselves billed alongside ventriloquists, jugglers, Bioscope Picture reels, and animal acts. Having seen her dance in St Petersburg and Paris, Bronislava Nijinska found it ‘infinitely sad’, despite her respect for these performers, to see ‘the incomparable’ Anna Pavlova ‘following acts by magicians, clowns and acrobats’. ‘Why’, she wondered, ‘was Pavlova here?’²³ The reduced status of the ballet dancer in England and her tumble from grace on the respectable stage is key to the way we might explore the lost links between music-hall ballet and what, owing to Diaghilev’s phenomenal achievement, has been considered to be the ‘birth’ of English ballet in the early twentieth century.

II

Bedraggled Ballerinas

Victorian ballet was a popular entertainment encompassing a wide sense of theatrical dance. Pieces billed as ballet might include ‘step-dancing, horn-pipes, and other popular dance forms’ and sometimes incorporate song.²⁴ Between 1860 and 1910 the principal locations for staging the ballet were London’s two great West End music halls, the Alhambra and the Empire in Leicester Square, followed by the Metropolitan in Paddington, the Canterbury and the South London Palace in Lambeth, and rivalled by the Britannia in Hoxton and National Standard in Shoreditch — all up-to-date commercial theatres with vast seating capacities.²⁵ Despite the brief flourishing of Romantic Ballet early in the nineteenth century, dance was a devalued art on the stage of the respectable theatre, having lost ground to the taste for opera.²⁶ This was largely to do with evangelical sensibilities that viewed the relationship between the female body and public display as connoting rather more than artistry. Indeed judicial intervention was occasionally brought to bear. In 1874, prosecution of the Alhambra’s ‘Carnavalesque Ballet’, introduced into the last act of Offenbach’s Fairy Spectacle *Le Roi Carotte*, was averted only when ‘Mdlle Sara [née Sarah Wright, nicknamed ‘Wiry Sal’]’ sent out a doctor’s certificate from Camden Town stating that she had ‘sustained a violent strain’ so could no longer perform.²⁷ *The Era*’s critic commented that

It may be earnestly hoped that the patient of Mr Mason will henceforth find it desirable to forego that violent form of exercise on the public stage, which not only strains the limbs, but shocks the sense of decency. It will be seen by our latest advices from America that the police have closed the Metropolitan Theatre, New York, on account of the ‘Can-Can’ enormities there exhibited, and that *La Timbale d’Argent* is forthwith to be withdrawn from the Lyceum. There is no art, no skill, no training required to execute these gross gymnastic evolutions, and something more than unblushing audacity we may fairly ask from those who profess to be dancers of the ‘Carnavalesque Quadrille’.²⁸

Sustained within the context of a rather more innocuous popular entertainment, however, ballet provided employment for ‘thousands of women’ as huge *corps de ballet* were an element of the period’s emphasis on spectacle.²⁹ Members of the *corps de ballet*, or ballet girls, came mostly from lower-class or theatrical families. Ballet girls were ‘semi-skilled workers with limited opportunities for professional advancement’.³⁰ Even when

apprenticed to the theatre from a young age they were not required to learn much in the way of academic technique or *pointe* work. Principal ballerinas were mostly Italian or French. Not until 1906 in *Coppelia* at the Empire did the *corps de ballet* get some *pointe* work, and not until 1913 would there be an English prima ballerina, Phyllis Bedells.³¹



Fig. 1: From *The Day's Doings*, 8 October 1870: 'The Last New Can-Can: Mademoiselle Colonna and her Parisian Troupe at the Royal Alhambra Palace'.

Hired for their looks and placed in rows accordingly, design and display was the role of the *corps*, spectacular effects being appraised rather than the dancing itself. The ballet girl might be trained at the simplest level of gesture, while elaborate headdresses and props often inhibited her movements. Costumes were encrusted with sequins and spangles, gilt-foil, tinsel, Dutch metal, and crystal drops, whatever would refract light and sparkle. Dance critic J. E. Crawford Flitch commented that 'frequently the *corps de ballet* have no room for any more elaborate step than an artless hop and a right-about-turn, a kind of convalescent pirouette'.³² George Bernard Shaw described the Alhambra and Empire *corps de ballet* as 'consisting of rows of commonplace dancers, individually uninteresting (from the artistic point of view) but useful for the production of lines and masses of colour in rhythmic motion'.³³ Massed and depersonalized, the main function of these kaleidoscopic battalions of girls was to be decorative, to provide glitter and spectacle. The

principals and the *corps* had nothing to do with each other, the inflexible hierarchical divide of the ballet paralleled those in society generally, and while the principal ballerina was exotic and distant, the girl of the *corps de ballet* was British, ordinary, and sexually attainable.

The tension between the aestheticized identity of the ballet girl as she appeared on stage across the glare of the footlights and her accessible self shivering in the street outside was a crucial component of her undeniable erotic appeal. ‘An Earthly Paradise’ (signed J. M. B.) was published in the *Sketch* after a production of *Faust* at the Empire Palace of Varieties (1895). The poem revels in the prosaic reality of the offstage existence of the *corps de ballet* who in the final scene’s aerial ballet appeared as angels:

No more the angels deck the sky —
These angels hail from Peckham Rye
From Bow or Kentish Town.³⁴

Some years after, Crawford Flitch would describe the *corps de ballet* as ‘rank after rank and file after file of honest breadwinners from Camberwell and Peckham Rye’.³⁵ Between J. M. B.’s allusion to William Blake’s vision of angels in Peckham Rye and Crawford Flitch’s flat pronouncement of Peckham Rye as a suburban address, the ballet girl’s humble domicile had kept pace with the outward push of London’s ribboning cheap housing. Girls commuted ‘up west’ from the new model tenements of Bethnal Green, Poplar, Mile End, and Bow. Earlier in the century, Albert Smith, popular humourist and author of *The Natural History of the Ballet Girl* (1847) located her habitat in the outer suburbs of the day — ‘Possibly she may live at Islington or Kennington’ — or ‘in the unknown regions of Lambeth’.³⁶ Smith composed a series of ‘Natural Histories’ on a botanical model: *The Gent* (1847), *The Ballet Girl* (1847), ‘*Stuck-Up*’ *People* (1847), *The Idler Upon Town* (1848), and *The Flirt* (1848). His rather affectionate account of the ballet girl was at once indulgent and chiding of the young ‘gent’ about town, appealing to his prurient desire to exchange ‘theatrical romance for common-place reality’ and promising to ‘try if we cannot make the one as interesting as the other [...] by reversing the ordinary effect of glamour [...]. We intend to touch but lightly upon pink-tights and gauze-petticoats. Spangles will only be hinted at’.³⁷ The book’s purported revelations prompted a cross response in the *Theatrical Times*:

Who can wonder at the ‘Gentish’ youths giving their whole thoughts to the ‘pets of the ballet,’ [...] and endeavouring, as they do by every means to find

out all about them, worrying and annoying Editors of Theatrical publications with questions as to their ages, and other minutiae respecting them.

It is not the general rule that when a young woman goes on the stage in a short flowing gauze sylphide dress, she goes at once, *nolens volens* [willy nilly] as the Cantwells and Mawworms of society would have us believe *au diable*; no, cases where such does happen are the exceptions. But when Mr Albert Smith starts by declaring this [...] instead of bearing out his laudable and rightful belief he entirely proves the contrary [...]. There are many things that it does not concern, or is not at all necessary everybody should know. The private history of the ballet girl is one of these. What does it matter to the playgoing portion, or the public in general [...] whether they rehearse of a morning in their common walking dresses or whether they are painted and decorated of an evening [...] *still more, what does it betide anyone save themselves and their intimate relations, their residing over the Surrey side of the water, and having to cross and recross the bridge of Waterloo in their journeys to and fro the theatre.*³⁸

Despite his protestations, the attention given by ‘A Voice from the Side-Wing’ to her constant commute reinstates the social equivocacy of the ballet girl with the streetwalker. The ballet girl’s late-night journeys to the West End palaces of varieties between Piccadilly and the Strand, or to those on ‘the Surrey side’ of the bridge in Lambeth, mapped out a sexualized geography of London reinforced by the associations of these locations with moral impropriety. Waterloo Bridge had been memorialized in Thomas Hood’s famous poem ‘The Bridge of Sighs’ (1844) as the most likely place for a repentant prostitute to leap to a watery grave. When pickings on the Surrey side were slim, the women of ‘Whoreterloo’ would shift to the music halls and pubs ‘up West’. The journalist James Greenwood described the late night returns of an

amazing number of wretched girls and women who come hurrying from the Strand side of the bridge, and with an aspect as exactly opposite to ‘gay’ as black is to white, making haste, through the rain which had saturated their flimsy skirts and covered the pavement with a thick paste of mud, cruelly cold to ill shod feet.³⁹

The ambulant ballet girl is also ‘very tired’ when she ‘quit[s] the theatre’, possibly having had

no refreshment [...]. It may be wet, too, and her thin shoes are not very well calculated to meet the treacherous paths and crossings of the suburbs. For in common with most members of the theatrical profession, she lives far from the scene of her labours.⁴⁰

By the 1880s a striking amount of testimony expressed uncertainties regarding the moral perils of the ballet world. *The Pantomime Waifs* (1884) claimed to draw back the

veil from the ‘gilded falsity’ of the young ballet girl’s life.⁴¹ Anticipating Mrs Ormiston Chant’s concentration on the *deshabillé* of the dancer, Ellen Barlee, an evangelical philanthropist, presumes an irrefutable association of the dancer’s career with intemperance and vice:

the excitement, the unreality, the sensationalism, the costumes of their occupation, distance all feminine sobriety and practical domesticity [...]. *Deny it who can* the calling of a ballet girl is in itself a recognised lure to the depraved of the other sex.⁴²

Miss Barlee invokes the magic of the pantomime transformation scene in order to emphasize the transformation from glittering fairy back to melodramatic waif: ‘Turn off however, the gas, slip off the tinselled raiment’ and follow the bedraggled fallen fairy through ‘pitiless rain and biting cold back to her lonely fireless London garret’.⁴³ While her book did actually strengthen the campaign to legislate the labour of the stage fairy, it can only have added to her erotic appeal. The following year, Rev. Stewart Headlam, supporter of Oscar Wilde and major ballet fan, took a delegate from the Alhambra ballet — which included Martha Wooldridge, ‘a little Cockney slip of a danseuse’, as she was described — to visit the Bishop of London in an effort to convince him that ballerinas were *not* all doubling up as prostitutes.⁴⁴

The fascination of the ballet girl for late-Victorian theatregoers sprang from the perceived incongruity of her fantasy stage persona and her offstage reality, the titillating ‘paradox of a real, and probably available woman playing an incorporeal nymph’.⁴⁵ The neighbourhoods traversed by the ballet girl between the theatres of the West End and London’s less salubrious areas ‘down East’ played no small part in this ambiguous allure. For Arthur Symons who, in 1898, brought his Symbolist aesthetic to the critique of the music hall, it was the girl of the *corps de ballet* who suggested the symbol which might best function to ‘disengage the ultimate essence’ of urban life.⁴⁶

III

‘A cry of ecstasy in Paris would find an answer in London’⁴⁷

Modernism in London emerged as a response to a metropolitan modernity that had Paris as its counter image. ‘In Leicester Square’, Symons wrote, ‘you are never in the really normal London: it is an escape, a sort of shamefaced and sordid and yet irresistible

reminder of Paris.’⁴⁸ Soho’s Leicester Square had been home to the notorious Café du Globe where *tableaux vivants* and *poses plastiques* were staged. The French influence, from ‘internal filth’ to ‘outward show’, as one Swell’s Guide, *Peeping Tom* (1859), promised, was ‘everywhere on view’.⁴⁹ By the 1890s this influence was nowhere more evident than at the Globe’s successor, the Empire Theatre of Varieties, where the nightly spectacle of the ballet was mirrored by the shadowy reflection of the ‘very much painted’ women who strolled the five-shilling promenade.⁵⁰ ‘Soho is Bohemia’, Symons claimed, ‘not in the literal sense for Bohemia exists only in Paris’, but he meant that the Empire was its embassy.⁵¹ Symons was a regular Channel hopper, familiar with the *café-concerts*, cabarets and bars of Montmartre and Montparnasse, the *Chat Noir* and the *Moulin Rouge*, where poets, painters, and their models mixed with a vivid *demi-monde* peopled by pimps and their girls, the flamboyant Parisian *Apaches*. ‘Arthur Symons’, observed W. B. Yeats of his friend,

has made the music-halls of London and Paris his peculiar study, and set forth their gaieties and tragedies in even, deftest verse [...]. He has studied them for purposes of literature and remained himself, if I understand him quite rightly, quite apart from their glitter and din.⁵²

It is difficult to understand how Symons could be thought to have remained ‘apart’ from the music halls’ ‘glitter and din’ unless the stream of London ballet girls he pursued and immortalized in poems, reviews, letters, and essays were fantasized liaisons. Whatever the case, through his music-hall studies of one kind or another, Symons introduced into a literature of London the Baudelairean aesthetic that venerated the maddening artifice of the female dancer as well as the idea of art and poetry inhabiting and illuminating the life of the street.⁵³ It was Symons who proposed that writing about the metropolis would be ‘the very test of poetry which professes to be modern’.⁵⁴ In defence of the general outcry raised against his ‘dirty-minded’ music-hall poems, Symons composed an article on literary decadence for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (1893) which, although it served to provide his detractors with an even clearer target, would be reworked as *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), an acknowledged influence on the writing of Joyce and Eliot and their high-modernist response to the representation of urban life.⁵⁵ Symons explained French Symbolism as ‘an attempt to spiritualise literature’, ‘to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realised by consciousness’.⁵⁶ He

brought this formal aesthetic to his critique of the raucous variety of London's music halls and their delightful 'consecration of the frivolous'.⁵⁷

And now look at the dance [...]. Here are all these young bodies, made more alluring by an artificial heightening of whites and reds on the face, displaying, employing all their natural beauty, themselves, full of the sense of joy of motion, or affecting that enjoyment, offered to our eyes like a bouquet of flowers, a bouquet of living flowers which have all the glitter of artificial ones. As they dance, so human, so remote, so desirable, so evasive [...] they seem to sum up in themselves the appeal of everything in the world that is passing, and coloured, and to be enjoyed.⁵⁸

Symons's familiarity with the dance revues of Montmartre meant that he had a well-developed appreciation not just of the ballet but of popular dance forms including novelties such as the 'serpentine dancing' of Loïe Fuller, gypsy dances, and those of the Parisian working and criminal classes that had moved from the street to the stage, the cancan, the tango, and the apache dance. These dances, for Symons, were the ultimate symbol of human life in the city: 'simultaneously intimate and formal, to the point of potential alienation', they 'spoke against the sterility of modern life yet [...] also celebrated its transitoriness'.⁵⁹ The image of the dancer 'with her gesture, all pure symbol', explained Symons, 'evokes, from her mere beautiful motion, idea, sensation, all that one need ever to know of event'.⁶⁰ In his recognition of the dancer's relation to this complex of ideas, Symons was, as Frank Kermode has established, 'at the centre of his period and herald of its successor'.⁶¹ Kermode acknowledges Symons's role as a conduit of ideas, not just across the Channel but across the century's divide. It was Symons's 'transformation of the bohemian art of living into a form of symbolic production' that would play an especially strong part in the history of modernism's underestimated complicity with dance and the dancer.⁶²

IV

The Fairy Business

There is one beautiful sight in the East End and only one, and it is the children dancing in the street when the organ-grinder goes his round. It is fascinating to watch them, the new-born, the next generation, swaying and stepping, with pretty little mimicries and graceful inventions all their own, with muscles that move swiftly and easily, and bodies that leap airily, weaving rhythms never taught in dancing school.⁶³

Symons's poem, 'Nora on the Pavement' (1893), merges the memory of 'A footlight fancy, petulant and bewildered' in a vision that restages the ballet girl 'on the midnight pavement'.⁶⁴ In Laurence Binyon's 'The Little Dancers' (1896), 'Two children, all alone and no one by' hear the barrel organ and 'Holding out their tattered frocks [...] dance sedately: face to face they gaze, | Their eyes shining with perfect pleasure'.⁶⁵ Ernest Rhys did the same in his poem about a street-dancing girl, 'A Winter Night's Bacchante' (1894):

The little tumult of the hour is past,
The quick beseeching of the music, still,
That made the moments reel,
While night gave way, and faster and more fast
Pressed tirelessly her circling feet upon romance's heel.

The spell was hers, hers fiddle, piping flute,
Whose rapturous magic sped the giddy throng,
While swift she glanced along,
A pale Bacchante, passionate of foot,
Whose swaying limbs and laughing eyes turned all our hearts to song.

She charmed the night till care was stolen away,
And left us happy, for an hour of heaven,
Our sins of earth forgiven,
As still we watched white arms, white garments, sway,
And radiantly she swept along, by winds of music driven.⁶⁶

The critic John Lucas has noted a disengaged *flâneur*-ism in these works, observing that the fin-de-siècle perception of 'the *demi-mondaine* world of music hall and street performers, of prostitutes and dancers' was a 'kind of home-grown Orientalism'.⁶⁷ Sensibilities that blurred distinctions between the pantomime orientalisms of London's variety theatres and an orientalist theatricalization of the streets outside were instrumental in forging a rhetorical space for London's working-class communities as spectacle. As early as Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821), low-life localities had been portrayed in terms of the theatrical potential of the East End:

Lascars, blacks, jack-tars, coal-heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, &c. were all *jigging* together [...] and the scene changed as often as the pantomime, from the continual introduction of characters.⁶⁸

James Greenwood's 'excursions into queer sides of nightlife' took him to the lowest dives in Ratcliffe Highway and were collected in *The Wilds of London* (1874). Observing the

colourful throng in the dockside dance halls of the East End, he imagined he was ‘behind the scenes at a theatre during the pantomime season’.⁶⁹

Dancers worked together to create self-referential performances of this sociogeographical gap. Theatrical presentations of vernacular forms derived from street dances and working-class ‘types’ that incorporated the steps of urban street dance and folk tradition became hugely successful. Like the Parisian apache dance, these ‘coster’ performances would sustain nation-defining notions of ‘Englishness’ that would become central to the late-Victorian stage and they would ensure the continued vitality of theatrical dance.

A career in the ballet was more often than not a family concern. ‘Perhaps her father is a supernumerary’, Smith observes in *The Ballet Girl*, ‘or she is confided to the care of an older sister Coryphée’.⁷⁰ In *Hard Times* (1854), Sleary’s Circus is comprised of ‘two or three handsome young women [...] with their two or three husbands, and their two or three mothers, and their eight or nine little children who did the fairy business when required’.⁷¹ Many of Edwardian London’s best loved Gaiety Girls and musical comedy stars came from theatrical families and began as stage fairies employed in East End music-hall ballets. Ada Reeve, who grew up to become a famous Gaiety Girl, was born into a minor theatrical family. Her father was an actor and her mother a ballet dancer. She made her first appearance in the pantomime at the Mile End Pavilion in Whitechapel at the age of four.⁷² Marie Lloyd’s father was a waiter at the City Road’s Grecian Theatre, formerly the Eagle Tavern. As a child she danced barefoot in the saloon theatres of Shoreditch with her three sisters whom she organized into a troupe called the Fairy Bells. The Empire production of *Cinderella* in 1906, for example, lists four Collier sisters on the programme, Beatrice, Elsie, Lily, and Millicent, and three Craske sisters of whom Margaret would be hand-picked by Diaghilev for the Ballets Russes (renamed Margareta Krasova). Lottie Collins, who would become famous for her song and dance ‘Ta-ra-ra-Boom-der-ay!’, was born in the East End in 1865 and started out in music hall at the age of eleven in a skipping-rope dance act with her younger sisters, Eliza and Mary Ann, called *The Three Sisters Collins*.⁷³



Fig. 2: Sheet music cover for 'Ta-ra-ra-Boom-der-ay!'

Lottie Collins was touring in the United States when she first heard the song 'Ta-ra-ra-Boom-der-ay!'. Reportedly of Black origin and first sung in a St. Louis whorehouse, Crawford Fritch traces it to an Algerian *danse du ventre* or belly dance and to what he describes as 'the barbaric orgies of Central Africa'.⁷⁴ Collins first sang the song at performances of the Gaiety Theatre's burlesque *Cinder Ellen Up-too-late* in December 1891. Afterwards she performed it at the Tivoli Music Hall and it became her signature piece. She would sing the first verse demurely and then launch into the chorus and an uninhibited skirt dance with high can-can kicks on the word 'BOOM' that exposed her scarlet stockings and garters. Collins's interpretation of the song drew from a dance craze of the time, the Skirt Dance, and it was this dance that was to prove transitional in staging the powerful attraction upper-class men exhibited towards lower-class female sexuality. As a later commentator would observe, Lottie Collins turned 'Ta-ra-ra-Boom-der-ay!' into a Dionysian revel of the emancipated girl.

An anonymous contemporary dance critic writing in the *New York Times* explained the Skirt Dance as 'a felicitous union' of the ballet and of the clog or step dance, popular on the music halls, derived from working-class and folk roots and from London's

costermonger tradition.⁷⁵ Henry Mayhew describes coster dances as ‘vigorous, laborious capering’, clog hornpipes, jigs, and polkas, performed at twopenny hops in beer shops or in the street to the music of a concertina or fiddle or barrel organ.⁷⁶ The *New York Times* critic welcomed the Skirt Dance for its class hybridity:

One may call it the happy offspring of a *mariage de covenance* between a rather worn-out aristocratic stock and a vigorous plebeian, whereby the former has been set, very literally upon its legs again and the latter has acquired much grace and refinement.⁷⁷

The Skirt Dance was created by Frederick D’Auban. He too was a child performer in the 1850s, appearing with his sister Marie as Madame D’Auban’s ‘celebrated infant dancers’ and he continued to appear as part of the D’Auban family song and dance act throughout his childhood.⁷⁸ D’Auban would go on to become ballet master at the Alhambra, the Gaiety, and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. With his sister he created a saucy act called ‘Aint She Very Shy’ which combined the elegance of classical dance steps with step dancing: it caught on, especially through the performance of Kate Vaughan, one of his earliest pupils.⁷⁹ She too began as a London child performer. The revolutionary element of Kate Vaughan’s performance was that she brought street clothes to the stage. She performed in mid-calf length loose skirts and lace petticoats, a startling departure from the customary gauze skirt and pink tights of the ballet chorine. George Bernard Shaw found the Skirt Dance infuriating: ‘Who has not seen a musical comedy or farce interrupted for five minutes,’ he inveighed, ‘whilst a young woman without muscle or practice enough to stand safely on one foot [...] clumsily waves the inevitable petticoats at the public’.⁸⁰ Yet this was exactly what the prescient *New York Times* critic found so refreshing:

The aim of the modern ballerina is to compass strange feats of muscular endurance and acrobatic distortion. To stand for minutes together on the tip of one toe, and to gyrate the other leg in a circle at right angles to the body may be magnifique, but it is not dancing. The effect is painful. The academic dance has, in short, for some time been a decadent art, and needed renovation by a return to nature, just as a worn out family is rejuvenated by an infusion of peasant blood.⁸¹

V

‘Down from the ballet - up from the clog’

It was Lottie Collins who eroticized Kate Vaughan’s relatively genteel Skirt Dance with the wilder steps and energetic high kicks of the vernacular dances of working-class culture. And it quickly found its way back to the streets. In Bow, where Collins had performed skipping dances as a girl with her sister, the Opies recorded that ‘Ta-ra-ra-Boom-der-ay!’ was a favourite song for girls as they skipped well into the twentieth century.⁸² Montagu Williams, author of *Round London: Down East and Up West* (1894) describes the girls of the East End who ‘come out very strong on a Saturday night’:

to have half a dozen of these girls marching down the Bow Road singing at the top of their voices the chorus of ‘Ta-ra-ra-Boom-de-ay,’ or ‘Knocked ’em in the Old Kent Road’ — these are at the present moment their favourites — is a little irritating to quiet-loving citizens.⁸³

The threat to the ‘quiet-loving citizens’ of Bow was felt on a wider level, perceived as the encroachment of working-class licence on public morality:

The year in which ‘Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay’ overran the streets of our towns may well give pause to the observer of English habits. It was such an affront to English respectability as had never yet been administered, not only because it flaunted an image of a high-kicking dancer on a music hall stage, but because the very sound of the tune was jeering, as well as ludicrous. The sudden absurd jolt of its high note became a grin at the gait and carriage of a respectable man [...]. It had no individual interest whatever; it was the voice of the crowd asserting itself.⁸⁴

Crawford Flicht complained that the ‘prettiness of the Skirt Dance as it was danced by Kate Vaughan had perished in the contortions that were introduced from the Moulin Rouge’.⁸⁵ In fact the can-can had been danced in London’s music halls by British ballet girls since the 1860s, long before the Moulin Rouge opened its doors in 1889. The Alhambra briefly lost its licence in 1874 because of the ‘unblushing audacity’ of the ‘Parisian’ high kickers Mlle Colonna and Mlle Sara (Wiry Sal), who were actually both London ballet-trained girls, Amelia Newham and Sarah Wright. Sarah was the daughter of a waiter at the Canterbury music hall in Lambeth, and Amelia of theatrical parents.⁸⁶

The French can-can, that ‘mad, unbridled dance of the drunken “petroleuses” of the French Revolution’, was a potent signifier of working-class assertion as well as unbridled female sexuality.⁸⁷ By the 1890s music hall was becoming big business and the

risqué acts and *double entendres* of the traditional turns were now deemed too vulgar for a growing middle-class audience. London County Council's Theatre and Music Halls Committee devised an agenda with the social purity brigades to 'vigilantly watch our entertainments and vigorously repress whatever is clearly contrary to good morals'.⁸⁸ Mrs Ormiston Chant's controversial contribution to the regulation of public decency was her campaign to rid music halls of impropriety, vice, and alcohol, by lobbying the Theatre and Music Hall's Committee to refuse licences. Her attitude towards the dancers at the Empire reflected the customary lack of distinction between female performers and prostitutes, and her campaign served to reinforce the social stigma that still adhered to the dancer's profession.

It was now that commodified configurations of the cockney entertainer began to emerge. The 'mashers', 'swells', and so-called 'coster carollers' of the 1860s, 70s, and 80s, had been proletarian comics of the 'rorty' or 'slangster' type, beloved of their local audiences.⁸⁹ Their acts revolved around drink, domestic violence, pugilism, and flash clothes. They featured thieves' cant, backslang, and patter, along with step dance and performances of physical dexterity and horseplay.⁹⁰ Henry Mayhew had treated costers as members of the dangerous classes, their street-based life positioning them between settled and wandering tribes of Irish extraction with no more than a 'predatory respect for property' and a 'sturdy hostility to Christianity and marriage'.⁹¹ Their distinctive clothing marked them out. Mayhew described the customary dress of the coster: bell-bottomed trousers with buttoned vents, mufflers, peaked caps, pearl buttons, short hair with a donkey fringe, ornamented boots, and elaborate belt buckles. What Gareth Stedman Jones has explained as the ideological containment of the East End 'pearly coster' emerged with the domesticated or conservative-subordinate position taken by Albert Chevalier.⁹² Unlike his predecessors Chevalier was middle class, and his act derived from art, not life. Chevalier based his routine on anthropological observation rather than experience: 'The man is a survival of the picturesque and possesses many traits of the Romany and Spanish gypsy', he explained to the *New York Times* when he brought his act to the States in 1896. 'The trousers are Mexican and the big buttons are Spanish. The girls wear an apron with all changes of costume, a big fringe on their foreheads, and earrings that are usually family heirlooms.'⁹³ The male 'cockney' entertainer became subsumed into a 'contained' class position. His character coalesced as one of 'sturdy optimism, in his unwavering determination not only to make the best of things as they are, but to make them seem

actually better than they are by adapting his mood to the exigencies of the occasion'.⁹⁴ Apolitical and staunchly patriotic, his potentially disturbing social difference was domesticated, enshrined 'within a larger framework of national and imperial unity'.⁹⁵

Meanwhile it was in dance and theatrical displays of female sexuality that an autonomous working-class vitality persisted. Bessie Bellwood (1856–1896), born Catherine Mahoney of Irish parents, was a rabbit-skinner from Lambeth. Dressed in a flashy 'wine-colored frock, with many frills on the skirt, and a rorty hat topped with a red and white feather', she made a huge hit on the halls with 'What Cheer Ria' (1885), a song and dance act about Maria, a raucous coster girl.⁹⁶ A later incarnation of 'Ria' has her get quickly bored with a spell in the Salvation Army:

Sister 'Ria, Sister 'Ria of the Army soon began to tire
So she sold her tambourine
Now she's nightly to be seen
Dancing in the ballet at the Empire.⁹⁷

The exuberance of the working girl in her brief idyll of (relatively) carefree adolescence exercised a strong cultural pull in the face of the raft of philanthropic bodies and reformatory legislations which threatened to eradicate traditions of working-class leisure. Montagu Williams described the importance of costume and dance to the girls in Bow:

They have fashions of their own; they delight in a quantity of colour; and they can no more live without their large hats and huge feathers than 'Arry can live without his bell-bottom trousers. They all sport high-heeled boots, and consider a fringe an absolute essential. [...] They can sing a good song, or dance a break-down with any one.⁹⁸

Somerset Maugham captured the type in *Liza of Lambeth* (1897). Wearing 'an enormous fringe, puffed-out and curled and frizzed, covering her whole forehead from side to side, and coming down to meet her eyebrows', Liza Kemp is 'dressed in brilliant violet, with great lappets of velvet' and 'an enormous black hat covered with feathers'.⁹⁹ Seeing what 'a sensation she was creating; she arched her back and lifted her head, and walked down the street, swaying her body from side to side, and swaggering along as though the whole place belonged to her'.¹⁰⁰ Liza begins to dance to the music of the organ grinder. 'It's too bloomin' slow,' she said again; 'it gives me the sick. Let's 'ave somethin' a bit more lively than this 'ere waltz. You stand over there, Sally, an' we'll show 'em 'ow ter skirt dance.'¹⁰¹ Liza's cockney swagger and natural animal grace enable her to perform the difficult steps and motions of the dance, the high kicks, splits, and 'magnificent' cartwheels 'better' than the 'trained ballet' of which Liza is well aware.¹⁰² 'Talk of the

ballet at the Canterbury and South London. You just wite till you see the ballet at Vere Street, Lambeth — we'll knock 'em!' ¹⁰³ In May Sinclair's best-selling novel *The Divine Fire* (1904), set in 1892, a young Decadent poet is infatuated with Poppy Grace, who, costumed in 'a purple velveteen skirt, a purple velveteen jacket with a large lace collar, and a still larger purple velveteen hat with white ostrich feathers that swayed madly', performs a coster dance on the stage of the Jubilee Variety Theatre:

Poppy's feet beat out the measure that is dance on East End pavements to the music of the concertina. In the very abandonment of burlesque Poppy remained an artist, and her dance preserved the gravity of the original ballet, designed for performance on a flagstone. ¹⁰⁴

By the end of the century stylistic appropriations of indigenous dances of the streets, whether the impromptu barrel organ waltzes, cellar-flap tap, clog, and coster dancing of the East End, the sexual abandonment of the South American barrio tango and flamenco, the peasant carnival of the Breton Kermesse, or the Black American breakdown and cakewalk, were expressive of a mood that would coalesce in the furore that was the Ballets Russes when it arrived and changed everything. Many spoke of Lottie Collins's performance in terms that anticipated the reception of the Ballets Russes: 'Bang goes the drum and the quiet, simple-looking nervous figure is changed into a bacchanalian fury.' ¹⁰⁵ Another critic described Collins's dance as

a Pavlova's 'Bacchanale' of the [music] halls, ante-dating the Russians by a generation. One remembers even now the electric thrill which shot through the audience, as a species of frenzy seemed to possess the slight figure on the stage, and the tempestuous petticoats swished, and the scarlet-clad limbs flashed high in the air. ¹⁰⁶

And while the Russian ballet was dazzling fashionable audiences with displays of foreign licence, other writers saw 'true Bacchanales' being performed in the East End streets: 'You may listen to Glazounoff's *L'Automne Bacchanale* at the Palace Theatre danced by Pavlova, but I should not look in Shaftesbury Avenue or Piccadilly for its true spirit. Rather I should go to Kingsland Road, Tunnel Gardens, Jamaica Road.' ¹⁰⁷ In 1906 the *Era* reported that 'a troupe of female street dancers from Walworth earned a trial at a small neighbourhood hall from where they were booked to the Camberwell Palace'. ¹⁰⁸

I want to conclude with the testimony of Hilda Munnings, an East London girl from Wanstead Flats who persuaded Pavlova to teach her and went on to become the celebrated Lydia Sokolova (1896–1974), principal character dancer with Diaghilev's

Ballet Russes (and for whom the part of the goddess Britannia in *The Triumph of Neptune* was specially created). Here she describes her earliest inspiration and provides us not only with a tantalizing glimpse of East End coster tradition but confirms the centrality of East End dance culture to the way that English ballet would develop from Diaghilev onwards:

It was outside public houses, mostly on Saturdays when the factories were closed, that I had seen girls dancing to a barrel organ. They danced in fours or sixes, opposite each other, performing high kicks, *ronds de jambe* and splits — in fact the can-can. They also danced the cake-walk. These girls were just as good dancers of their type as the performers I saw later in the cafes in Spain, and they bore a striking resemblance to them. They were attractive creatures, mostly dark like Gypsies, with kiss-curls stuck on their cheeks and foreheads and little combs in their hair. Unlike the Spaniards, however, they wore no jewellery, only gold earrings and hats with feathers. Their skirts and their blouses with puffed sleeves were of every conceivable colour, but they always had a preference for purple; over their shoulders there was always a little shawl. The skirts with three or four flounces at the bottom, were worn over several frilled petticoats, and when these were lifted they revealed black stockings and button boots.

In Holy Week they didn't dance: they skipped. It was the custom to lower large beer barrels from the drays into the cellars under public houses by lengths of thick cable; and during this week men used to hold these cables across the street to form gigantic skipping ropes [...] The coster girls used to leap higher and higher over the rope sometimes executing a wonderful side kick, beating the legs together. I longed to dance like those girls.¹⁰⁹

¹ The George Balanchine Trust, *Union Jack* <<http://balanchine.com/union-jack/>> [accessed 16 November 2011].

² *The Sitwells and the Arts of the 1920s and the 1930s*, ed. by Joanna Skipwith (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1994), p. 108.

³ Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 137.

⁴ Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 317. See also 'M. Larionow and the Russian Ballet', in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. by Christopher Reed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 281.

⁵ Earlier in the nineteenth century male dancers were considered to be grotesquely obstructive of the audience's erotic pleasure in the female dancer as indicated by the title of a satirical lithograph by Charles Edouard de Beaumont (1860): 'The unpleasant thing about a danseuse is that she sometimes brings along a male dancer.' See Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacles, Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 9. Later on, the *Era* spoke for what was acceptably British in ballet staging: 'For that horrid,

painted epicene thing, the male ballet dancer, we entertain nothing but disgust.’ See Ivor Guest, *Ballet in Leicester Square: The Alhambra and the Empire, 1860–1915* (London: Dance Books, 1992), p. 90.

⁶ Arnold Lionel Haskell, *Ballet Since 1939* (London: Longmans Green, 1948), p. 8.

⁷ Quoted in Skipwith, *The Sitwells*, p. 108.

⁸ Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Hamilton, 1984), p. 119. For a useful discussion of this trend, see Simon Joyce, *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), pp. 66–67.

⁹ *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*, ed. by Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 56.

¹⁰ Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 142.

¹¹ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010), p. 10. Harris’s excellent book documents what she terms Romantic Modernism across the arts at this time, although she does not include dance here.

¹² Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 36, 40.

¹³ Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete*, p. 130.

¹⁴ Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured’, in *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction: An Anthology of Literary and Critical Essays*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 76–77.

¹⁵ Acton notes that despite their determined Victorianism, his friends had a point of contact with Jean Cocteau in that they ‘preferred certain circuses or music-hall turns — what I called the illegitimate stage — to the ‘legitimate stage’, *Memoirs of an Aesthete*, p. 155.

¹⁶ *The Triumph of Neptune* <http://www.balanchine.org/balanchine/display_result.jsp?num=64> [accessed 17 November 2011].

¹⁷ *Queen*, 15 December 1926; repr. in Nesta Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed by Critics in England and the United States, 1911–1929* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1975), p. 343.

¹⁸ Reprinted in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence S. Rainey (London: Blackwell, 2005), p. 34.

¹⁹ Daniel Gerould, ‘Eisenstein’s *Wiseman*’, *Drama Review*, 18.1 (1974), 71–76.

²⁰ I am indebted to Amy Koritz, Alexandra Carter, and Jane Pritchard for their work on this ‘lost’ period of English ballet.

²¹ The first Ballets Russes appearances in London were at the Covent Garden Opera House, 21 June 1911, and 26 June 1911 as part of George V’s Coronation Gala. They performed before ‘an audience that included ambassadors and ministers, African kings, Indian chiefs, maharajahs and mandarins, and the cream of British society’ and the *Illustrated London News* was so impressed that it ‘called for the creation of a permanent dance company at Covent Garden’. See Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Modern Age* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000), p. 26.

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- ²² Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, p. 17. The Tsar disapproved of the music hall as a setting for Imperial trained dancers. See also Lydia Kyasht, *Romantic Recollections* (London: Dance Books, 2010).
- ²³ Bronislava Nijinska, *Early Memoirs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 381.
- ²⁴ Amy Koritz, 'Moving Violations: Dance in the London Music Hall, 1890–1910', *Theatre Journal*, 42.4 (1990), 419–31 (p. 420).
- ²⁵ Jane Pritchard, 'Dancing Disraeli: An Overview of the Inclusion of Political and Topical References in the Music Hall Ballets at the Metropolitan and South London Music Halls 1870–1884', paper presented at The Cultural History of Pantomime Conference, Universities of Birmingham and Lancaster, July 2011.
- ²⁶ Alexandra Carter, *Dance and Dancers in the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall Ballet* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 1.
- ²⁷ *Era*, 20 September 1874, p. 11.
- ²⁸ *Era*, 20 September 1874, p. 11.
- ²⁹ *Women's Work*, ed. by Agnes Bulley and Margaret Whitley (London: Methuen, 1894), pp. 34–35.
- ³⁰ Koritz, 'Moving Violations', p. 427.
- ³¹ Carter, *Dance and Dancers in the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall Ballet*, p. 53.
- ³² J. E. Crawford Flitch, *Modern Dancing and Dancers* (London: Richards, 1912), p. 174. See also Percy Fitzgerald, *The World Behind The Scenes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881), p. 42.
- ³³ George Bernard Shaw, *Music in London, 1890–94: The Collected Music Criticism of Bernard Shaw* (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 255.
- ³⁴ J. M. B., *Sketch*, 1 January 1896, p. 52. Carter speculates this was possibly J. M. Barrie.
- ³⁵ Crawford Flitch, *Modern Dancing and Dancers*, p. 65.
- ³⁶ Albert Smith, *The Natural History of the Ballet Girl* (London: Bogue, 1847), p. 18.
- ³⁷ Smith, *Natural History of the Ballet Girl*, pp. 36–37.
- ³⁸ *Theatrical Times*, 26 June 1847, pp. 195–96 (emphasis added).
- ³⁹ James Greenwood, *Low-life Deeps: An Account of the Strange Fish to be Found There* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), p. 59.
- ⁴⁰ Smith, *The Natural History of the Ballet Girl*, p. 36.
- ⁴¹ E. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs; or, A Plea for Our City Children* (London: Partridge, 1884), p. xvi.
- ⁴² Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, p. xvi (emphasis in original). See Lucy Bland, *Banishing The Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (London: Penguin, 1995). For an account of Chant's moral purity campaign concerning 'the want of clothing in the ballet' see Laura Chant, *Woman's Signal*, 1 November, 1894.
- ⁴³ Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, p. 55.
- ⁴⁴ John Orens, *Stewart Headlam's Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses and the Music Hall*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 69. After Headlam's wife left him for another woman, Wooldridge became his housekeeper of many years' duration.

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- ⁴⁵ Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 44.
- ⁴⁶ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1899), p. 10.
- ⁴⁷ Gerald Cumberland, *Written in Friendship: A Book of Reminiscences* (London: Richards, 1923), p. 278.
- ⁴⁸ Arthur Symons, *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* (New York: Brentano's, 1919), p. 183.
- ⁴⁹ Cited in Joseph W. Donohue, *Fantasies of Empire: The Empire Theatre of Varieties and the Licensing Controversy of 1894* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), p. 9.
- ⁵⁰ The infamous promenade was a bar and lobby space behind the first tier of gallery seats where for the admission price could be gained a distant view of the stage but, more crucially, assignations might be made. Laura Ormiston Chant, a member of the National Vigilance Association, opposed the renewal of the Empire's licence in 1894 on the grounds of this open prostitution. See Donohue, *Fantasies of Empire*, p. 48.
- ⁵¹ Arthur Symons, *The Café Royal and Other Essays* (London: Beaumont Press, 1924), p. 4.
- ⁵² W. B. Yeats, *Letters to the New Island* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 144.
- ⁵³ Symons's study, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, introduced developments in French verse and writers such as Balzac, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue, and Huysmans to the Anglo-American reading public.
- ⁵⁴ Arthur Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures* (London: Smithers, 1897), p. 188.
- ⁵⁵ Among the reviews that upset Symons was one in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 September 1895, p. 4. Signed 'Pah!', it calls him 'a dirty-minded man' whose 'mind is reflected in the puddle of his bad verses'.
- ⁵⁶ Symons, *Symbolist Movement*, pp. 9, 10.
- ⁵⁷ Symons, *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*, p. 145.
- ⁵⁸ Arthur Symons, 'The World as Ballet' (1898), in *The Collected Works of Arthur Symons*, 9 vols (London: Secker, 1924), IX, 245.
- ⁵⁹ Murray Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 75.
- ⁶⁰ Arthur Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts* (New York: Dutton, 1913), p. 391.
- ⁶¹ Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 84.
- ⁶² Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 18.
- ⁶³ Jack London, 'The People of the Abyss', in *Novels and Social Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1982), pp. 1–184 (p. 158).
- ⁶⁴ 'Nora on the Pavement', in *Poems by Arthur Symons*, 2 vols (New York: Lane, 1911), I, 83–84.
- ⁶⁵ 'The Little Dancers', in *Collected Poems of Laurence Binyon* (London: Macmillan, 1931), p. 3.
- ⁶⁶ Ernest Rhys, 'A Winter-Night's Bacchante', in *A London Rose and Other Rhymes* (London: Matthews, 1894), pp. 7–8.
- ⁶⁷ John Lucas, 'Hopkins and Symons: Two Views of the City', in *Fin de Siècle/Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*, ed. by John Stokes (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 52–68 (pp. 61–67, 66).

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- ⁶⁸ Pierce Egan, *Life in London* (London: Appleton, 1904), p. 227.
- ⁶⁹ James Greenwood, *The Wilds of London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1874), p. 5.
- ⁷⁰ Smith, *The Natural History of the Ballet Girl*, p. 18.
- ⁷¹ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. by Graham Law (London: Broadview Press, 2003), p. 73.
- ⁷² James Douglas, *Adventures in London* (London: Cassel, 1909), p. 144.
- ⁷³ See Peter Gammond, *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- ⁷⁴ Crawford Fritch, *Modern Dancers and Dancing*, p. 96.
- ⁷⁵ 'Origin of Skirt Dancing', *New York Times*, 17 July 1892 <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F20D10F7355515738DDDAE0994DF405B8285F0D3>> [accessed 17 November 2011].
- ⁷⁶ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 21.
- ⁷⁷ 'Origin of Skirt Dancing', *New York Times*, 17 July 1892.
- ⁷⁸ *Era*, 26 May 1850, p. 13.
- ⁷⁹ Crawford Fritch, *Modern Dancers and Dancing*, p. 77. She first performed the dance at the Holborn in 1873 in the Ballet of the Furies.
- ⁸⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable, 1954), p. 11.
- ⁸¹ 'Origin of Skirt Dancing', *New York Times*, 17 July 1892.
- ⁸² Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of School Children* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 107.
- ⁸³ Montagu Williams, *Round London: Down East and Up West* (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 17.
- ⁸⁴ R. H. Gretton, *A Modern History of the English People: 1880–1898* (London: Richards, 1913), p. 305.
- ⁸⁵ Crawford Fritch, *Modern Dancers and Dancing*, p. 86.
- ⁸⁶ Erroll Sherson, *London's Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Ayer, 1925), p. 264.
- ⁸⁷ Sherson, *London's Lost Theatres*, p. 264. According to popular belief at the time the *pétroleuses* were female supporters of the Paris Commune, unruly viragos accused of burning down much of Paris in the final days of the Commune in 1871.
- ⁸⁸ Cited in Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 114.
- ⁸⁹ 'Rorty' is costers' slang meaning 'of the best; excellent; jolly; dashing'. 'I Have a Rorty Gal' (1864) was sung by the coster performer 'Chickaleary' Vance.
- ⁹⁰ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The "Cockney" and the Nation, 1780–1988', in *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. by David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 272–324 (p. 295).
- ⁹¹ Stedman Jones, 'The "Cockney" and the Nation', p. 288.
- ⁹² Stedman Jones, 'The "Cockney" and the Nation', p. 301.
- ⁹³ 'Albert Chevalier Arrives', *New York Times*, 19 March 1896 <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9406EFDF1638E033A2575AC1A9659C94679ED7CF>> [accessed 17 November 2011].
- ⁹⁴ Edwin Pugh, *The City of the World: A Book about London and the Londoner* (London: Nelson, 1912), p. 303.

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- ⁹⁵ Stedman Jones, 'The "Cockney" and the Nation', p. 301.
- ⁹⁶ *Ring up the Curtain*, ed. by Ernest Short and Arthur Compton Rickett (London: Jenkins, 1938), p. 196.
- ⁹⁷ Cited in Carter, *Dance and Dancers*, p. 21.
- ⁹⁸ Montagu Williams, *Round London*, p. 17.
- ⁹⁹ W. Somerset Maugham, *Liza of Lambeth* (London: Heinemann, 1897), p. 8.
- ¹⁰⁰ Maugham, *Liza*, p. 8.
- ¹⁰¹ Maugham, *Liza*, p. 10.
- ¹⁰² Maugham, *Liza*, p. 10.
- ¹⁰³ Maugham, *Liza*, p. 10.
- ¹⁰⁴ May Sinclair, *The Divine Fire* (London: Constable, 1904), p. 59.
- ¹⁰⁵ Drama critic Clement Scott, cited in Crawford Flitch, *Modern Dancers and Dancing*, p. 97.
- ¹⁰⁶ J. B. Booth, *The Days We Knew* (London: Laurie, 1943), p. 46.
- ¹⁰⁷ Thomas Burke, *Nights in Town* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), p. 76.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Era*, 'Variety Gossip', 18 August 1906, p. 20.
- ¹⁰⁹ Lydia Sokolova, *Dancing for Diaghilev* (London: Murray, 1960), pp. 4–5.