

The dancer in and out of character

Tiepolo, Canova, Degas

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Two paintings, by Giandomenico Tiepolo and Edgar Degas, mark points in a story line about the tension between human figures and the artworks that try to contain them, a story about the heightening and relaxation of that tension over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Any depiction of human figures subordinates, to some degree, the depicted bodies to the “body” of the artwork—its composition. It will be argued here that this tension between body and composition is redoubled—reproduced as subject matter, as it were—when the picture depicts dance and dancers. For a dance, even before it is represented in a picture, very often already involves a rivalry between individual stylized moving bodies and coordinated assemblages of those bodies. In the contest between dancing body and overall staged tableau, the dice are loaded, as it were, because the dancer, even if playing a role, is still a real person with a real center of gravity who may well resist being reduced to an element of a pattern. The transformation of body into artwork is always incomplete. The dancer never quite disappears into his role, as a painter’s model does.

Dance thus proposes a counteraesthetic to the art of painting, or at least acts as a drag on some powerful concepts of painting that stress composition or planar patterning above everything: a challenge staved off by the two very sovereign paintings to be discussed, the one knowing, the other doubting. Between the two pictures, as if in a fable, appears a sculptor who set down his chisel, for a time, and took up painting, an art form he little understood, in hopes of courting the muse of dance: this was Antonio Canova. The dancer, he hoped, held the key to a recentering of art on the mobile, self-possessed body—no, more than that: a reduction or leading-back of art to a simple placement, a placing-there, of bodies. The sculptor’s experiments around 1800 expose the plot that embraces the two paintings.

La parade, the theme of this issue of *Res*, recalibrates art history away from artworks and toward the stylized figure, who may shuttle between works and real, nonartistic configurations. *La parade* names a sighting of the preartistic figure as it crosses over from city life onto circus or stage, and back again, and generally in its apparitions beyond or between scenes of representation. The present essay describes this trespassing as a “taking across,” or metalepsis: a shift from one level of organization, or “world,” to another, but a shift that is incomplete, imperfect. An actor, for example, might leave the stage but stay in character, extending the role into real life. Such incomplete displacements can be marked in painting by remnants of the old setting that are carried across, clinging to the figure.

Dance is by nature a metaleptic site because movement in and out of the role is happening constantly. First, the character in a ballet can play the role of a dancer—this happens whenever someone on stage who walks suddenly begins to dance, offering a performance to the other characters. This happens often in ballet. Second, and more subtly, the actor-dancer always remains partly just a human being who can dance, a dancer whose performance would be valid and effective even if not embedded within a narrative theatrical context. The dancer in a ballet d’action or narrative ballet occupies a fictional role but, compared to a speaking actor in a drama, only incompletely. The ballet dancer imitates, but the high degree of stylization interferes with the imitation. Form dominates content. In addition to imitating a prince or a hunter, the ballet dancer is also just imitating a dancer, someone who dances. He dances for us and so is not so very different from a person whom we might encounter on a dance floor or even on the street, in life. The real body of the dancer is closer to the surface of the actor-dancer than is the case with acting. The dancer on stage trails the real world along behind him. And in complementary fashion, the nonacting dancer in a festive setting, including social or nonprofessional dancers like you or me, is not only dancing but also playing a quasi-role: not a fictional role, exactly, but an altered, stylized personhood exempt from many everyday conventions of behavior. The social

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dancer trails the theater along behind her. Thus does the motif of dance in painting and in sculpture rouse metaleptic stirrings that are suppressed by the art of painting.

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The painting by Giandomenico Tiepolo depicts an outdoor gathering, a sunlit entertainment, at a villa on the mainland (fig. 1).¹ In the background rise the blue Alpine foothills. The picture, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, measures 75.6 by 120 centimeters and is suited for a private living space. Tiepolo depicts a society that cultivates festive confusion about roles. He depicts a dance apparently embedded within a festive continuum but threatening to escape it. The company is clustered around a pair of trees outside the noble residence. At center a couple faces off in a dance. This is the marker of the *parade*: figures emerge from a group.

Women arrive from the left, where a carriage is visible. The women are about to plunge into the confusing right half of the scene. There is no sign who the host might be and no indication whether the festivity is happening mainly outdoors or whether what we are seeing is a kind of overflow. Guests with masks, guests without masks, servants and musicians, nondescript ordinary folk, and at least four characters from the *commedia dell'arte* are elbow to elbow.

There must have been parties much like this one in Venice, parties where people wore masks and overlaid roles onto their everyday social role-playing, transforming their world into a dynamic theater where one could be both actor and spectator at once. But there is also a pictorial genealogy, descending from seventeenth-century Flemish paintings of the so-called courtly company type, depicting festive gatherings of patricians in outdoor settings.

On the right a woman seated on a chair holds a cup of coffee or chocolate; a man in a mask addresses her. Behind them is Coviello, one of the Zanni or servants of the *commedia*, with plumed hat and long nose, playing the bass viol. Further back is an indistinct row of musicians, painted—like the figures looking down from the window—in a brown monochrome. Harlequin, with patched coat and black mask, climbs a ladder propped against a tree. Below that tree is a cluster of barely distinguishable figures, including a woman in pink with

back turned and head covered; a figure with both arms raised, head screened; a man in black, the character known as the Doctor; an elegant woman wearing a black full-face mask; and finally Pulcinella, another Zanni or servant character, unmistakable in his white tapering cylindrical hat and long-nosed mask.

The clustered figures form the foil for the dancing pair: she, in yellow, the unmasked double of the woman just behind her, to her right; he, in red, masked and in costume. These figures emerge out of the context to which they lately belonged. They are the only dancers. Yet there is little space cleared around the pair of dancers, and one cannot say that either the picture or the company is organized around them. The dancers are not the entertainment. Some have identified them with the *commedia dell'arte* characters Lelio and Isabella, others with Mezzetino and Columbina, all of them of the class of *innamorati* or young lovers, and characters who normally did not wear masks. But it is not clear that the woman is a theatrical character. Their face-to-face dance has been described in the art historical literature as a minuet, but it may simply be a courtship dance, high-stepping and provocative in the folk manner.

The emphatic figure in red, dead center, the painting's fulcrum, activates a possibility of dance latent throughout the company. The partygoers tread on the threshold of the dance because all their movements are already shaped for social intercourse. The figure in red lures the woman out of her patrician identity and into a temporary couple—unless she is a professional actor realizing a theatrical type; namely, the elegant young society woman. In that case the actor would be barely distinguishable from the nonactor women all around her occupying their social roles. Their coupling is prefigured throughout the picture by all the unpaired but pairable men and women. Such multiplications and doublings endow the ground—the ground out of which the dancing figures emerge—with depth.²

A painting similar to this one, now in the Louvre, was described in the 1779 catalogue of the collection of Francesco Algarotti as *Festa da ballo con copiosissimo intervento di bizzarre maschere*, or “dance party with a most copious intervention of bizarre masks” (*maschere* is the common synecdoche for the masked *commedia*

1. See catalogue entry by Everett Fahy, in *The Wrightsman Pictures*, ed. E. Fahy, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2005), 103–6 (no. 30).

2. On the continuous, layered, and formless quality of the ground, which comes into being together with the figure as the origin of that figure, and as the guarantor of the “iconic difference,” or the reciprocities and articulations that constitute visual artworks, see G. Boehm, “Der Grund: Über das ikonische Kontinuum,” in *Der Grund: Das Feld des Sichtbaren*, ed. G. Boehm and M. Burioni (Basel, 2012), 29–92.



Figure 1. Giovanni Domenico (Giandomenico) Tiepolo, *A Dance in the Country*, ca. 1757. Oil on canvas, 75.6 x 120 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980.67. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1980. Photo: www.metmuseum.org (public domain). Color version available as an online enhancement.

dell'arte characters, i.e., all characters other than the *innamorati*).³ The promiscuity invited by any event involving mask wearing is compounded by the presence of people dressed as characters from the commedia dell'arte, as they were wont to do in Venice, on a Sunday afternoon, for example, in the piazza.⁴ The dense tangle of the festive muster is made palpable by the pressing of all the heads into a narrow band a few inches wide running across the middle of the picture—all the heads save those of the girl at the far left, the dog, Harlequin on the ladder, and the not fully colored figures at parapet and window. Such a confusion of roles must have been intoxicating in life, and even this brilliant painting only thinly summons such an experience. The picture reduces the party to the measure of the salon, a sample of controlled chaos, a swatch.

3. Paris, Musée du Louvre, RF 1938-100. A. Mariuz, *Giandomenico Tiepolo* (Venice, 1971), 131.

4. See the description by Gasparo Gozzi, published February 3, 1762, of the Pulcinellas he saw in the piazza, their heads buried among the bulges created by the sacks they wore on their chests and backs, under their clothes; quoted in S. Loire, *Peintures italiennes du XVIIIe siècle du musée du Louvre* (Paris, 2017), 348.

The painting adds dimensions of ambiguity absent in life. The painting allows for doubt about whether Pulcinella and Harlequin are costumed guests or professional actors playing the well-known roles. Or perhaps they are Pulcinella and Harlequin themselves! Why would one raise this last, preposterous possibility? Because other works of art force the doubt on us, a special kind of doubt peculiar to our involvement in artworks but never experienced in life. Giambattista Tiepolo made many drawings and etchings documenting the existence of Pulcinella beyond the stage. His son Giandomenico decorated his family's villa at Zianigo with frescoes depicting Pulcinella, multiple Pulcinellas. In the late 1790s he made several hundred drawings under the title *Divertimento per li ragazzi* depicting the extratheatrical adventures of Pulcinella. His drawing depicting *Pulcinella's Farewell to Venice* is exemplary (fig. 2).⁵ Pulcinella is seen off at the dock by a pack of identical comrades. This attribute of Pulcinella,

5. Here he pursues a theme developed by his father: see the painting *Pulcinellata*, depicting at least eight Pulcinellas around a campfire; G. Lorenzetti, *Le feste e le maschere veneziane*, exh. cat., Ca' Rezzonico (Venice, 1937), 52, fig. 31.

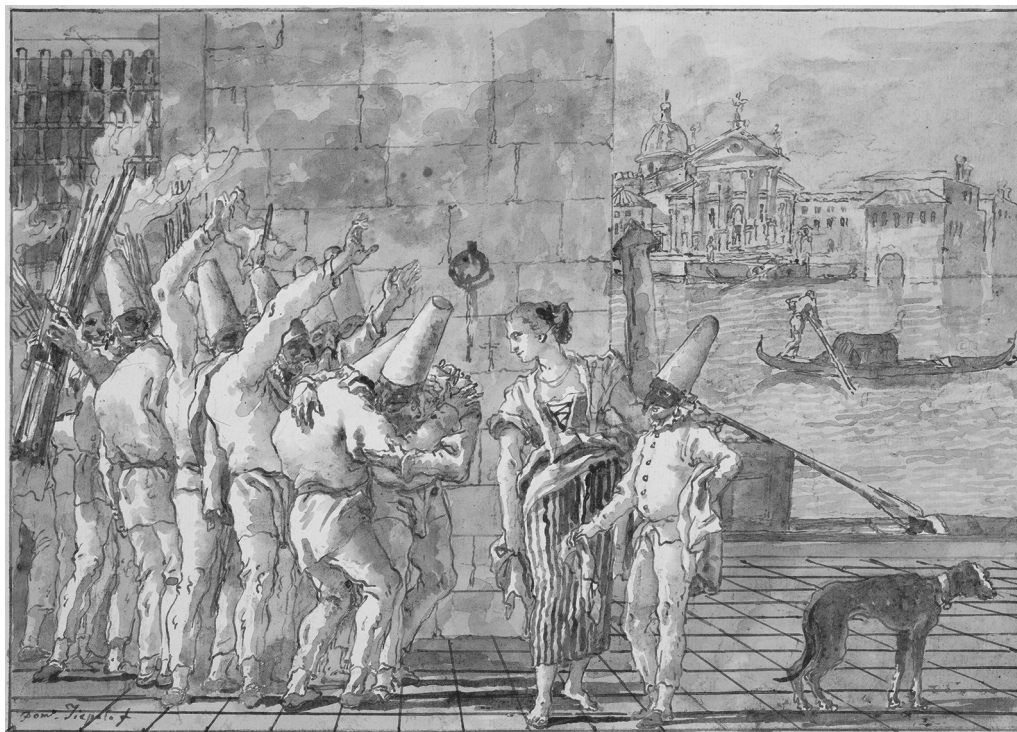


Figure 2. Giovanni Domenico (Giandomenico) Tiepolo, *Pulcinella's Farewell to Venice*, 1798–1802. Pen and brown ink with brown wash on paper, 35.1 x 46.7 cm. Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, 1979.76.4. Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith. Photo: Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (public domain). Color version available as an online enhancement.

proliferation, is respected in the paintings, where further cylindrical hats (one extra hat in the New York picture, four in the Louvre picture) appear behind the character. Tiepolo imagines the adventures of Pulcinella beyond the scenarios of the commedia. The extension of a fictional life into domains outside its fictional homeland (novel, stage, movie) is the genre known to us as “fan fiction,” a mode of vernacular artistic creation common in our own time but widely practiced already in the eighteenth century and indeed earlier. A two-volume edition of the *Letters of Charlotte, during her connexion with Werther* [sic], for example, was published anonymously in 1786 in London, seven years after the first English translation of J. W. Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. Goethe's novel had consisted mostly of letters written by Werther to his friend Wilhelm chronicling his hopeless love for Charlotte, a woman engaged and before long married to another man. Everything we know about Charlotte we learned through the prism of Werther's letters. Now suddenly there was the *Letters of Charlotte*, a parallel correspondence, Charlotte's letters to her friend, a

certain Carolina, revealing a quite different perspective on events.

Tiepolo extends Pulcinella's fictional afterlife into the plausible but itself semitheatricalized event depicted in the painting. At the same time the painting, qua artwork, is itself a kind of stage, a fictional domain on the same level of reality as a play or a poem, into which the character Pulcinella might have migrated in the same way that Werther migrated into a collection of letters not written by Goethe. That is, it is not clear whether Pulcinella has migrated into a party, which was then depicted by Tiepolo, or whether he has migrated into a painting. It is also not clear whether this is Pulcinella the commedia character or a real being Pulcinella whom the commedia character represents. For the painting, in league with the other works by the Tiepolos, proposes the fantastical conceit that the real Pulcinella, not an actor but the poor creature himself, this antihero, with his hunchback and nose and towering hat, roams about crashing parties. The outlandishness of the costume, its hyperbolized difference, locks the actor into the role and creates the outlandish comedy of an offstage existence.

An equivalent would be the cartoon character who joins the rest of us in noncartoon existence, as represented in so-called live-action animated film.

The costume also exempts Pulcinella from any serious role in life, signaling his comic status: his innocence and nonresponsibility. He lives by his appetites and converts responsibilities into gags. The costume means that no mistake can be made: no one else dresses or looks like this. It is the precondition for the multiplied existence. Think of Elvis impersonators, or the many devotees of characters from television and movies who don costumes or even engage in so-called live role-playing. The outfits and hairstyles are usually so bizarre that you are confident, when you see one, that you are seeing an impersonator.

Metalepsis is a rhetorical trope designating a transgression of the frontier between the world narrated and the world of the narrator.⁶ Here there is no narration; Pulcinella is bound by no diegetic text—he narrates himself by improvising or even concocts narratives for others.⁷ But the world beyond the stage is the world that “wrote” the character Pulcinella, and so his abandonment of the stage and penetration of that world can be understood as a metalepsis.⁸

Isn't the conceit of Pulcinella as inhabitant of the wider world ruined by the mask he wears? If Pulcinella is someone whom we might actually meet one day in life, then in Tiepolo's painting, which nurtures this conceit, Pulcinella should properly *not* wear a mask, as the actor impersonating him onstage would. The painting ought to show us the one true “type,” maskless, of whom all the masked imitators are mere tokens. But he *does* wear a mask in the painting, just as he does in the many works by the Tiepolos tracking his offstage life. Pulcinella's mask is not a prosthetic face allowing an actor to transform himself into a character but rather part of his continuous existence, which is imitated onstage, perfectly, by someone wearing a mask. Pulcinella cannot be unmasked.⁹ This is the reading forced by this painting and reinforced by the other works depicting

Pulcinella offstage but masked, for otherwise the mask would only be explicable as a stage prop that has persisted by mistake into the painting, spoiling the painting's poetic conceit that Pulcinella is a real denizen of the world.

Because he comes forth from the theater and enters the world, Pulcinella would seem to be participating in the movement we are designating as *la parade*. Offstage, he is profiled, by his grotesque form and costume, against a ground of social convention. He is sociable but lonely. But he does not perform, he does not dance. He represents a counter-*parade* to the pair of dancers in the New York painting, who through performance move in the opposite direction to Pulcinella's: they emerge from the social ground into theatrical existence.

The painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art may once have had a pendant, which would contribute substantially to its interpretation. Evidence for this is the pendant of the Louvre painting, in the same museum: a scene depicting the performance of a quack dentist (fig. 3). The description in the Algarotti catalogue reads: “Platform with charlatans in a piazza, one of whom extracts teeth while another dispenses balm; charming ladies toss and receive handkerchiefs: surrounding the platform a crowd of people and some most capricious masks [commedia characters]” (three Pulcinellas, in fact, and one Harlequin).¹⁰ There is a similar pair in Barcelona: again a festive dance and a pendant depicting a charlatan or quack doctor selling snake oil.¹¹ On the right side of the Barcelona pendant, and paying no attention to the charlatan, is a courting pair, a masked lady and a character from the commedia, Mezzetino. The juxtaposition of quackery and courtship, the theme spelled out by the paired paintings, is reproduced inside the one painting.

The Louvre paintings were engraved by Giacomo Leonardis in 1765. Inscriptions on the engravings make the theme of the pairing obvious: “Many are the costumes but desire is one; all seek to flee sadness and grief,” and “Whether with the voice, or the hand, the charlatan takes your money or your teeth.”¹² The scene of dance as depicted in the picture in the Metropolitan Museum, whether that picture was once paired with a charlatan or not, is a conventional site of

6. G. Genette, *Figures III* (Paris, 1972), 243–46.

7. See S. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 195, on Pulcinella's metanarrative gifts. (“Zany” derives from Zanni.)

8. See G. Agamben, *Polichinelle, ou Divertissement pour les jeunes gens en quatre scènes* (Paris, 2017), 63–70, on Pulcinella trespassing between art and life.

9. See R. Ubl, “Pulcinellas Fest für das Auge: Zu Édouard Manets Maskenball in der Oper (1873),” in *Die Farben der Prosa*, ed. E. Esslinger, H. Volkering, and C. Zumbusch (Freiburg, 2016), 130: a painting that un.masks nothing.

10. Mariuz, *Giandomenico Tiepolo*, 131.

11. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 64988 and 64989.

12. Mariuz, *Giandomenico Tiepolo*, 131.



Figure 3. Giovanni Domenico (Giandomenico) Tiepolo, *The Charlatan, or, The Tooth-Puller*, 1750s. Oil on canvas, 80 x 110 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, RF 1938-99. Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

disappointment. The pleasure-seeker who dons a mask, and who dares to match wits or steps with those of the Dionysiac household, whose masks are immanent to their characters, will be deceived. Real trickery is depicted, possibly, in the New York picture: the hand of the man at the lower right may be seeking the purse of the woman drinking chocolate. Such a theft would be chiasmically paired with the courting couple embedded in the notional pendant about quackery, as in the Barcelona picture. The rhyme of charlatany and courtship would be reproduced inside each painting of the pair. But there is not enough pictorial evidence to decide if that is what is really happening on the right edge of the painting. A clue that the pocket is being picked, however, is the downward gaze of Harlequin from his perch on the ladder.

The figure on parade typically pushes itself to front and center, an occupation of the center from the margins. Here, the dancers edge outward, toward us,

into position. The trickery is displaced onto the pair at right, revealing the true meaning of a sideshow.

The dancers repeat the theme of disappointment. The woman in yellow emerges from the chaotic ground, her spirits surging, but later she will subside back into the ground. The ground's potential to proliferate, to add layers, made visible by the horde of Pulcinella, augments its gravitational pull on figures. There is in reality no exit from the theater of society into the emancipatory self-loss and self-reinvention represented by the coupling dance. The male dancer, in red, emerges from the ground in clear profile, and yet trails the indistinct ground behind him.

If Antonio Canova would later strive with his dance-
icons, painted and sculpted, to keep chaos at bay, Giandomenico Tiepolo strove for the opposite: to cut his pictures from the very cloth of chaos and to contain those self-sufficient bodies, exemplified by dancers, that aspire to flee the disorder into a self-motivated,

context-free animation. This chaos, which is the transgressive promiscuity sampled in Venice, is grasped as a ground only when a figure tries to escape it.¹³ Tiepolo did not permit his dancers to distinguish themselves from the company. Their orbit does not quite create a center of interest sufficient to command the collective attention.

The woman is tempted by the capering figure in red who hails from the underworld, his ribbons fluttering. She misrecognizes this diabolic figure who embodies a principle of formlessness against the stylized movement that is supposed to fend off chaos, not court it. The exact center of the picture falls between the red dancer and Pulcinella, his apparent rival but in fact accomplice, as Pulcinella's insolent eye suggests. The red dancer is harmonically supported by touches of red at the far edges, left and right: the wheel of the carriage and the displaced chair. Harlequin's red coat has been tamped down to a *brunaille* so that it does not compete with the bracketing red stains. The dancers are also bracketed and doubled by the woman at the far left in profile and the bass viol player, who have perhaps made eye contact across the costume/no costume, or character/not character, divide.

The masks try to subvert the social order but they themselves are contained by the project of painting. This mode of painting does not defer to dance any more than it defers to sculpture and to the principle of the sovereignty of the human figure that sculpture asserts. The painting assembles bodies that are already highly stylized, the products of social discipline and dance lessons, bodies ready to be painted, ready for inclusion in an artwork, ready-made modules of style that can be recombined ad libitum. This is painting that can absorb and master anything, natural or artificial, high or low, formed or unformed. No body is disentangled from the social weave, singled out and re-placed, *dargestellt* or placed-there.

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I switch scenes, to Antonio Canova, a generation later. Canova was born in the Veneto in 1757, around the time Tiepolo painted his dancers and charlatans. He was interested in the impossible task of rendering the dancing body in marble. Canova's aims are the opposite

of Tiepolo's: he wants his figures to possess a grace that banishes chaos. The *Hebe* (1796) gives us movement and high spirits as such (fig. 4).¹⁴ The goddess of youth, cupbearer of the gods, trips eagerly forward, precarious on her base of clouds, amphora held high. Her upper body is imperturbable but the furor of drapery propels her.¹⁵ She seems on the point of taking a tumble.¹⁶ A moving figure bereft of her environment, such that we can only guess whom she is about to serve, is a challenging task for the sculptor. She teeters between her functional movement and the free movement of dance. Hebe's problem, it seems, is that she is still inhabiting a role—cupbearer—which requires a context, a supporting cast. Her attributes or props—amphora and cup, in gilded bronze—have persisted from that context into the freestanding sculpture, which if it is to succeed must create its own context.

Canova's next step is the representation of dance as such, a reduction of dance to its essence, a project unthinkable for the ironic sociologist Tiepolo. In February 1798 Napoleon's army invaded Rome and proclaimed the Republic of Rome. In May Canova left the city, taking refuge from the political turmoil in Possagno, his native town in the Veneto. In the spring and summer of 1798, and then again in the following spring and summer, deprived of his sculptor's tools and materials, he drew and painted. In Possagno Canova made several series of paintings of nymphs with Cupids; Muses with philosophers; and dancers, single dancers, pairs, and groups.¹⁷

Canova painted dancers in two different media. Some are rendered in monochrome: brown tempera and white lead on raw canvas dyed ochre. One such composition features a trio of women in classical garb and with their hair tied up; one figure dances with a billowing ribbon to suggest elasticity and tension, while another holds aloft small metal cymbals (fig. 5).¹⁸ Canova envisions figures in self-explanatory, joyful movement: not performers but simply women, inspired to dance, for themselves and for each other. According to the 1816

14. G. Pavanello, *L'opera completa di Canova* (Milan, 1976), no. 98.

15. See the excellent description and analysis in O. Stefani, *Antonio Canova: La statuaria* (Milan, 1999), 84–88, as well as Stefani, *Canova pittore* (Milan, 1992).

16. The version at Chatsworth House (1808–14), based on a new model, puts her on terra firma.

17. On Canova's Possagno dancers, see M. Guderzo, ed., *Canova e la danza*, exh. cat., Museo Canoviano, Possagno (Crocetta del Montello, 2012), esp. G. Cunial, "Le tempere di Possagno: Il genere grazioso in Canova," 41–49, and cat. nos. 2–40.

18. Pavanello, *L'opera completa*, no. D 81.

13. On the primal chaos out of which the figure emerges, and with it the possibility of "iconic difference" or art; and on the persistence of chaotic movement in the artwork, in the form of indeterminacy and instability, see G. Boehm, "Die ikonische Figuration," in *Figur und Figuration: Studien zu Wahrnehmung und Wissen*, ed. G. Boehm, G. Brandstetter, and A. von Müller (Munich, 2007), 33–52, esp. 50–52.

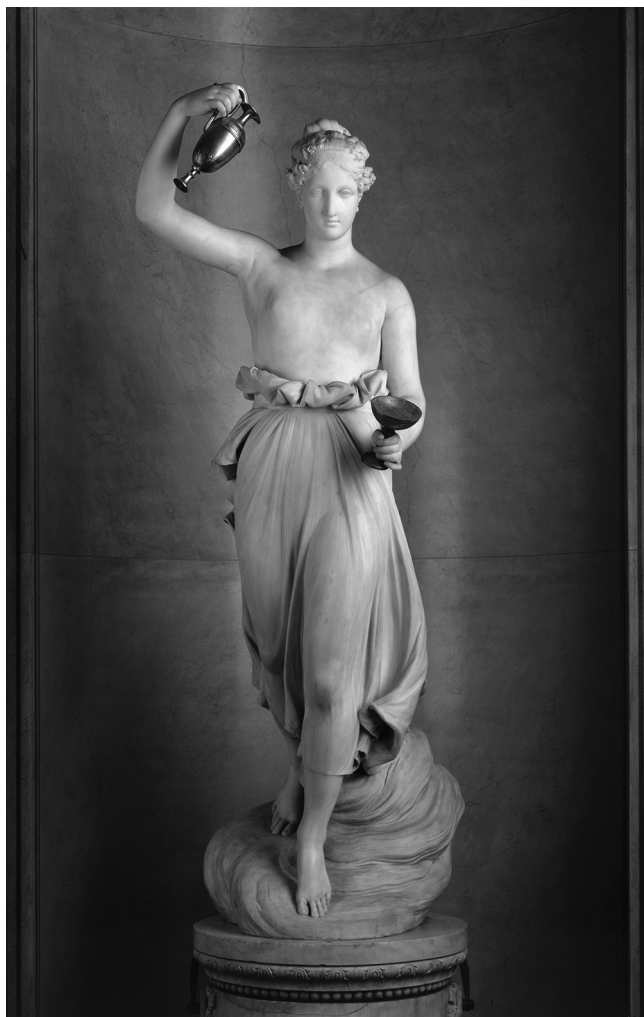


Figure 4. Antonio Canova, *Hebe*, 1796. Marble, 160 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo: bpk Bildagentur / Alte Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Klaus Göken / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

catalogue of Canova's works, the paintings were made "per solo studio e diletto dell'artista."¹⁹ And in this work indeed the scale varies from figure to figure; this is only a study.

Another series is in tempera on cardboard, colors on black grounds, directly inspired by the paintings excavated at Herculaneum, for example, the frieze of horizontal panels with mythological and Dionysiac scenes, from a house near the Teatro di Ercolano. An engraving after one of these panels, depicting musicians

19. Cited in Pavanello, *L'opera completa*, 138.

and a woman dancing with cymbals, on a black ground, had been published in volume two of *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte*, labeled "Chorus of Bacchantes."²⁰ In his own work Canova imagines a rarefied domestic context: youthful aristocratic women and a winged putto watch a pair of women dance (fig. 6).²¹ Again, this is unmotivated movement, figures not entwined in plot or composition but simply ranged in patterns. Perhaps this was how Canova read J. J. Winckelmann, understanding the German art historian's celebration of the classical sculptural nude, and his contempt for the decorative tendencies of the painting of his own time, as a call for context-independent sculptural treatment of the nude body and as a liberation of the figure from story.

Canova possessed no great talent as a painter. Perhaps he thought that in paint he could capture a certain quality of blitheness that he wanted for his sculpted figures. Canova's dancers are modern, superficial maenads, out of earshot of the more fevered rhythms. He wants balance and serenity, not chaos. This is *otium* (Canova's biographer Leopoldo Cicognara reported that the artist called the Possagno paintings his *ozii*, his idle pursuits²²): there are no external pressures.

Although occasional and private, the depicted performances are samples of an absolute theatricality: the self prepared for others, as beauty; a theatricality redeemed by innocence.²³ For in the infantile, nonsexual, fairy world conjured by Canova in Possagno, in his childhood home, theatricality easily flips over into absolute absorption. Canova, harking to Winckelmann, may have sought to recover for sculpture the original responsibility for placing bodies that the classicism of his day, the so-called neoclassicism, too citational, too laden with subject matter, risked defaulting on. But his painted dancers lack gravity. Although denizens of antiquity, they are stripped of mythic pathos. Canova invented a mindless tribe moved by harmless animal spirits. He identifies dancers not as mediums but as sources, as self-starting bursts of energy. He finds precedents for such forms in the fugitive art form of

20. *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte* (Naples, 1760), 2:127–30, plate XX. See D. Esposito, *Le pitture di Ercolano* (Rome, 2014), 116–17, plate 85, no. 3L.

21. Pavanello, *L'opera completa*, no. D 65.

22. Cited in Pavanello, *L'opera completa*, 139.

23. See Agamben, *Polichinelle*, 3: the figures are comic because they have no destiny. On beauty—as opposed to truth—as something conceived and prepared for others, see N. Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (Stanford, CA, 2000), 258. For Luhmann, this division between truth and beauty was created by the "double framing" of early modern painting and theater: the simultaneous staging and unmasking of illusions.

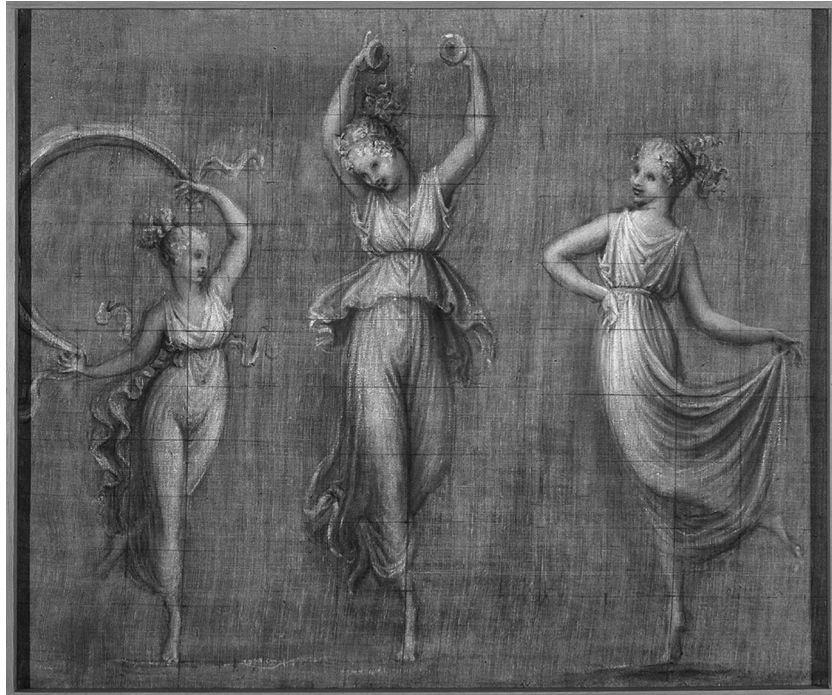


Figure 5. Antonio Canova, *Three Dancers*, 1798–99. Tempera and white lead on canvas, 65 x 75 cm. Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa. Photo: HIP / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

antiquity, painting, so climbing down, in his rustication, from the agon with Phidias and Praxiteles. Paint is freedom because Canova cannot create figures like these in marble, so attenuated and pliable, unreal and

Mannerist. The black grounds are a way of denying that the figures need grounds. A figure who appears to emerge from a ground recreates that ground as chaos, as a stratified, unavailable zone of origin. The black here is



Figure 6. Antonio Canova, *Two Dancers with Four Nymphs*, 1798–99. Tempera on cardboard, 33 x 65 cm. Possagno, Gypsotheca e Museo Antonio Canova, inv. 130. Photo: Courtesy Fondazione Canova onlus–Gypsotheca e Museo Antonio Canova. Color version available as an online enhancement.

no such ground, it generates no fear. It is as if the black does not belong to the artwork. Insubstantial the figures may be, but they are sculptural in the sense that the edge of the work is the edge of the body. (The monochromes, which create more volumetric figures, even more so.)²⁴ Canova's *Danzatrici* are emblems of an art that is always starting over again, from the figure outward, as opposed to an art that proceeds by making adjustments to a prior composition, an already-integrated amalgam of figure and ground.

Canova's Possagno paintings reassert the pointlessness of dance. The dancers have no audience but each other. This is dance deprofessionalized, a revalidation of the participatory dance of the ancien régime, which had never disappeared, of course. These scenes or nonscenes seem far removed from *la parade*: no traveling actors here, everyone is deeply embedded in domesticity.

Let us now turn to the three sculpted dancers that Canova created in the decade after his return to Rome in 1799, to discover what Canova learned from his sabbatical in Possagno. The *Dancer with Hands on Hips* (1805–12) has put her hair in a bun and a garland on her head (fig. 7).²⁵ She pulls up her dress, suggesting that she is not in a dancing costume. Like the women in the Possagno paintings, she is not a professional dancer. Her hands are not symmetrically placed—she swivels. One shoulder strap slips just a bit, a naturalistic, not to say carnal, detail we did not find in Possagno. The dishabille brings in the physical reality of dancing, the emotions and sweat. In letters of 1813 Canova insisted that he had not represented a Muse—some had misunderstood the work as a new version of his Terpsichore—but simply a modern dancer, in a style more *giocondo* than severe.²⁶

Two dancers initiated in 1809 were prefigured in the Possagno paintings. *Dancer with Finger on Chin* (1809–14) wears a folded peplos, with its double layering (fig. 8).²⁷ She has hung her garland on her wrist. Her gesture is casual, coquettish, undignified. Is this a pose or a dance step? Finally there is the *Dancer with Cymbals* (1809–14; Berlin, Staatliche Museen), who also wears the peplos and whom we recognize from Canova's *Three Dancers* (fig. 5), although her proportions are tamed.²⁸ She has the best classical pedigree of Canova's dancers. Yet she shares with her sisters a certain quality of inauthentic simplicity, a



Figure 7. Antonio Canova, *Dancer with Hands on Hips*, 1805–12. Marble, 176 cm. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photo: Heritage Image Partnership Ltd. / Alamy Stock Photo.

touch of the popular. This quality was not present in the attenuated figures of the Possagno paintings but emerged only when the artist reinstated the more natural proportions required by sculpture.

This ambiguous quality was signaled by a remark by Carlo Blasis (1797–1878), the influential Neapolitan dancer and choreographer, theorist of dance, and director of the school of ballet at La Scala in Milan. In his 1820 treatise on dance, Blasis commented on the Canova body type. Here he identifies three levels of dance style, each suited to an appropriate subject

24. Stefani, *Antonio Canova*, 76–83.

25. Pavanello, *L'opera completa*, no. 172.

26. H. Honour, "Canova's Statue of a Dancer," *National Gallery of Canada Bulletin* 11 (1968): 2–13.

27. Pavanello, *L'opera completa*, no. 230.

28. Pavanello, *L'opera completa*, no. 232.



Figure 8. Antonio Canova, *Dancer with Finger on Chin*, 1809–14. Marble, 177 cm. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome. Photo: Alinari / Art Resource, NY.

matter, and each calling for a certain body type: the high or noble style; the low, comic, and pastoral style; and finally a middle or mixed style, more charming than serious, which he calls *demi-caractère*.²⁹ The *demi-caractère* dancer must not attempt the *grand temps* (sequences of steps) of the serious genre but can only represent the steps of Mercury, Paris, Zephyr, or a faun, or “les manières gracieuses d’un élégant Troubadour.”³⁰ Blasis illustrates the three styles with engravings. Whereas the elite and lowly dancers reveal quite a lot of

29. C. Blasis, *Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l’art de la danse* (Milan, 1820), 91–93. The passage is translated in C. Blasis, *The Code of Terpsichore: A Practical and Historical Treatise on the Ballet, Dancing, and Pantomime*, trans. R. Barton (London, 1828), 90–91.

30. Blasis, *Traité élémentaire*, 93.

breast and leg, the middle-level dancers are modestly clothed in stylized modern country dress (fig. 9). They possess neither the timeless rude quality of the pastoral dancers, nor the timeless gravitas of the high-style dancers. Even today *demi-caractère* is a technical term in ballet denoting a style halfway between classical and “character” dancing, or dancing in the popular or “national” style.

Now let us note what Blasis says: “Le danseur demi-caractère doit être d’une stature moyenne, avoir des formes élancées et élégantes. Une taille comme celle du Mercure, ou de l’Hébé de Canova, serait convenable au genre demi-caractère ou mixte.”³¹ By Mercury he means the Mercury of Giambologna, reproduced in this book.³² This work as well as the *Hebe* of Canova, the greatest modern sculptor, exemplified for the early nineteenth-century ballet master, who was also steeped in Winckelmann, the body type of the *demi-caractère*. Blasis must have been referring to a certain soft or fleshy quality, a lack of contour, in some of Canova’s figures, as well as an ingratiating manner. The contrast Blasis draws between the body types of the middle and the high style, however, is not made clear by the engraving. The main difference is that the dancers of the middle style are fully clothed, and so more realistic, just as their proportions are in principle more naturalistic.

Blasis’s comment resonates with a comment of August Wilhelm Schlegel on Canova’s art: an “unstatthafte Vermischung des Dargestellten mit dem Wirklichen” (an inadmissible blending of the represented with the real).³³ Schlegel meant that too much of the model, the naked body as we experience it, the yielding of flesh, its unexpected tints, survives into the representation which, it goes without saying, was expected to improve on nature. Canova’s sculptures fall in Schlegel’s eyes into a kind of uncanny valley. Schlegel surely disapproved, for the same reasons, of the infiltration of coquettish manners into Canova’s marbles.

Canova was concerned above all to keep the Dionysian horde invisible, safely in the background. And yet his simpering figures trail behind them all of society,

31. Blasis, *Traité élémentaire*, 91–92.

32. Blasis, *Traité élémentaire*, 67–68, and plate IX, fig. 1. This was misunderstood by the English translator, who attributed the Mercury as well to Canova: Blasis, *Code of Terpsichore*, 90. There is no such work by Canova.

33. A. W. Schlegel, *Schreiben an Goethe über einige Arbeiten in Rom lebender Künstler* (1805), in *Sämmtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1846), 9:234; quoted and discussed in C. MacLeod, *Fugitive Objects: Sculpture and Literature in the German Nineteenth Century* (Evanston, IL, 2014), 24–25.

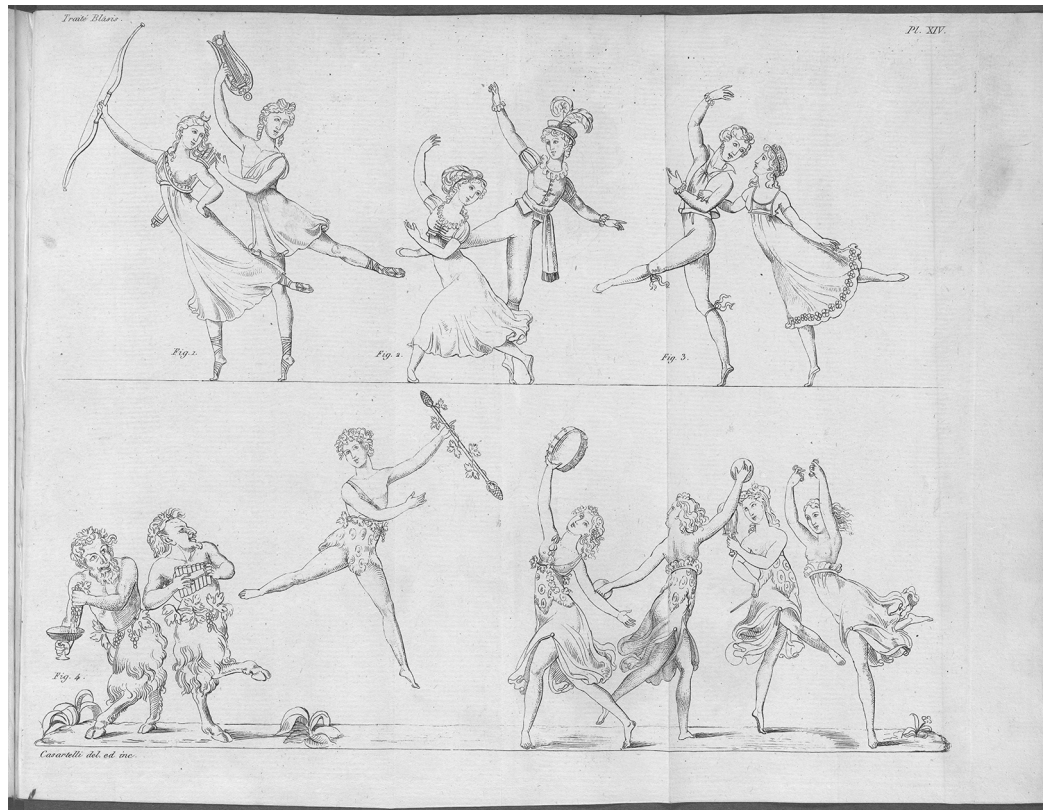


Figure 9. The pair of dancers at the left of the upper row, labeled as “Fig. 1,” represents the “serious or noble” style. The middle, mixed, or *demi-caractère* style is represented by the next couple, labeled “Fig. 2.” “Fig. 3,” finally, at the right, is the pair of comic, pastoral, or “village” dancers. The bottom row, “Fig. 4,” illustrates the composition of groups, including a Bacchanalian dance. Carlo Blasis, *Traité élémentaire, théorique, et pratique de l'art de la danse* (Milan, 1820), plate XIV. Photo: Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Color version available as an online enhancement.

psychology, and manner—all the confusion of our ever-performative lives. Canova has slid back into a mode we know from *la parade*—it is not what Winckelmann had in mind!

By comparison with Tiepolo, Canova is unresolved, disturbing, and this has clouded modern assessment of his art. He strives, unlike Tiepolo, to create autonomous figures but does not quite succeed. His figures are stalked by Pulcinella.

* * *

We move ahead another two generations, to an encounter with a relatively early painting by Edgar Degas, *Portrait de Mlle. E. F. . . . ; à propos du ballet “La Source”* (1867–68), now in the Brooklyn Museum, his first picture involving ballet (fig. 10). The painting remained with Degas until his death. He apparently

made some changes to it in the 1890s, now hard to discern.³⁴ Here, too, the theme of dance supports an artist’s meditation on the proper calibration of figure and composition—on whether the picture is built outward from the body or inward from the frame. Degas called the painting a portrait, and everyone knew that E. F. was Eugénie Fiocre, one of the two female leads in the recent production of a new ballet, *La Source*. Fiocre is portrayed in costume, the striped blue robe, red and gold sash, and jeweled bonnet of her character Noureda, a Georgian princess. And with the unexpected preposition *à propos de*, Degas relaxes his own portrait into a scene, a scene that hints at a narrative even before one knows the story of the ballet.

34. Degas, exh. cat., Grand Palais (Paris, 1988), no. 77, 134. A. Dumas, *Degas’s “Mlle. Fiocre” in Context: A Study of “Portrait de Mlle. E. F. . . . ; à propos du ballet ‘La Source’”* (Brooklyn, NY, 1988).



Figure 10. Edgar Degas, *Portrait de Mlle. E. F. . . ; à propos du ballet "La Source,"* 1867–68. Oil on canvas, 130.8 x 145.1 cm. Brooklyn Museum, 21.111. Gift of James H. Post, A. Augustus Healy, and John T. Underwood. Photo: Brooklyn Museum. Color version available as an online enhancement.

The expansion into scenography, the augmentation of the portrait subject's attributes into cohabitants of a narrative, compel Degas to compose; that was his way. So strongly is the picture patterned, so powerfully do the proportions of the frame reverberate throughout the picture, that without the title's cue one would never think to describe it as a portrait. Degas in general thinks in terms of composition, or pattern in two dimensions. His imposition of planar pattern onto women's bodies, often bathers or dancers, bending them into hieroglyphs motivated by their nonsocial movements—stretching at the barre, toweling down after the bath—and thereby foiling expectations of figural form nurtured by the painting tradition, generates the well-known effects of authenticity and awkwardness and reads paradoxically as a form of sympathy. Eminently composed, *Portrait de Mlle. E. F. . .* is a painting that will not settle into a genre and yet whose coordination with its own source in

life, the ballet titled *La Source*, is unclear. Tiepolo's *Dance in the Country* was a painting in some sense self-explanatory. Yes, there was doubt about whether the man at the right was picking the pocket of the seated woman or whether the picture was more generally drawing a comparison between the deceptions of masked entertainment and the trade of the charlatan or quack doctor. But on the whole the picture drew on a wealth of worldly-wise tradition and one felt guided, not to say manipulated, by it. The painting by Degas, by contrast, does not offer enough information to permit any one interpretation.

Degas was thirty-two years old at the moment of the premiere of *La Source* on November 12, 1866. *Portrait de Mlle. E. F. . .* was ready for exhibition at the Salon of 1868, where it was noted by Émile Zola but by few others. Eugénie Fiocre was twenty-two years old at that time and already a celebrity. *La Source* was

choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon, the libretto written by Saint-Léon and Charles Nuitter, and the music composed by Ludwig Minkus and Léo Delibes. Many critics, and presumably the public as well, were enraptured by the elaborate stage sets and by Fiocre's beauty and physical presence, qualities that seemed to some observers more salient than her skills as a dancer or actor. The first scene was set in the mountains and involved running water—a hydraulic spring illuminated by electric light—and real horses.³⁵ The princess Nouredda and her retinue stop by a brook where they encounter a hunter, Djémil. The princess performs a dance, first stately then sprightly, while holding the *gusla*, the stringed instrument traditionally bowed but in the painting (and presumably in the ballet) strummed like a guitar. The embedding of a dance within the ballet is the mark of the modern classical ballet. This double fiction has the effect of naturalizing the overall narration and motivating the set pieces, as if to say: these people walk and move all the time in a stylized fashion, but that is their normal mode of being; sometimes they also dance for one another. After her dance the princess spies and covets a rare flower high among the rocks. Only Djémil is bold enough to retrieve it for her. When he steals a glance at her face behind her veil, however, she repays him by having him bound hand and foot and abandoning him in the mountains.

The ballet as performed in 1866 cannot be reconstructed move by move. One would have to imagine a pause by the banks of the stream after the *Pas de la guzla* and the plucking of the flower (if the red blooms in Nouredda's left hand are that flower). But is the picture to be understood at all as a moment from the performance? Where is Djémil? Can we imagine a stage set that so convincingly reproduces the banks of a mountain stream? The horse was on stage, yes, but was there such an expanse of water? Such depths of rock? One critic of *La Source*, Albert de Lasalle, complained that the painted rocks did not live up to the real water.³⁶ Degas's rocks are also painted rocks, but painted rocks in an easel painting can seem quite real even as the same rocks on a stage flat may not.

Without the cue of the title, one would never identify this as a scene staged in a theater. The three women, the

horse, and the rocky mass are related to one another much as they might be in life, we feel. And more important still, they are related to one another much as they might be in a painting. A logic of composition bears down on them. (How discreet, by contrast, the geometries of the Tiepolo: the rhyme between the red dancer's body and the slants of the tree and the ladder, for example.) A nearly square format is an imposition on any scene, for it summons neither a horizon nor an upright body. In Degas's picture, the near square is reproduced by the pair of women at the left; by the horse, if we were to rotate it and see it drinking from the side; and by the folded form of the third woman.³⁷ The picture is cut in two by the stream's edge, sloping at an angle of about twenty-five degrees, figures above, water below. The water is placid and unbroken; the upper part is knit together by the interlocking bodies and by the downward slope, which reinforces, however, no narrative line. A picture employing a similar device, but upside down, is Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin* (ca. 1606) in the Louvre. This is the overdetermination of the components of the work characteristic of modern art, generating effects of harmony and necessity that one presumably no longer just comes across in life but must be produced.³⁸

There are no clues in the poses or gestures of the figures that signal "ballet staged in a theater," as there are in other depictions by Degas of the ballet. Even today in a still photo in the arts section of your newspaper you can always immediately distinguish between a stage play, a situation comedy on television, and a Hollywood film. The way the characters stand about or move their arms is different in each case.

Why did Degas, if he wished to make a portrait of Fiocre, not simply show her thoroughly embedded in her role? Because then it would not be sufficiently a portrait of her. He wanted to capture some quality of her personhood that he believed he had glimpsed behind her role. (They were personally acquainted: he gave her at least two drawings he made of her, dated "August 1867" and "August 3, 1867.") He wanted to show her in

35. Note Roberto Calasso's comment on "phantasmagoria" suited to the fairground sideshow in Calasso, *Tiepolo Pink* (New York, 2009), 6. On the infiltration of the fairground into the main show in the early eighteenth century, see the classic study by Crow in T. E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, CT, 1985), chap. 2.

36. Dumas, *Degas's "Mlle. Fiocre" in Context*, 12.

37. This is the self-similarity that characterizes, according to Heinrich Wölfflin, the classic art of the Renaissance: parts and whole submitted to the same formal principle, regardless of whether that whole is a face, a body, or a scene; H. Wölfflin, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance* (1899; repr., London, 1968), 159–61. Canova, evidently no longer confident of the classic reverberation of ideal composure throughout every level of art, had tried to realign the whole with the body.

38. The formulation is Fredric Jameson's in *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), 30.

the role and yet not allow her to disappear into the role. What is left of the role? Just the costume and the stage props, including the pile of pillows and the two attendant women. What is left of Fiocre? Just that quality of personhood he hoped to capture. An oil sketch in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo of two nudes in the poses of Fiocre and the woman on the right obviously depict not the famous dancer but a model.³⁹

The bare feet are another clue that we are not seeing a scene from the performance: dancers do not remove their slippers on stage, one would think. It has been suggested that we are seeing a moment in the rehearsal—that is, not the repose of Princess Nouredda and her companions but the repose of Eugénie Fiocre and two other dancers.⁴⁰ But that seems unlikely. The figures are semiposed, too self-aware, possessing none of the innocence of the dancers in Degas's later studies of backstage and between-scenes moments.

So perhaps what we are shown is an episode from the story itself, the fabula—in other words, a pause in the action, quite believable after the princess's spirited dance, that went unregistered in the ballet. That would explain the bathing of the bare feet in the stream. Of course, there was no narrative raw material, no legend preceding the libretto: it was all invented. But no matter, Degas could be indulging in "fan fiction," supplementing the given narrative with an episode of his invention. In that case, the proper title would be more like *Portrait de Mlle. E. F. . . . as Princess Nouredda*; no need to mention the ballet.

Such a reading of the picture is undermined by two survivals of the stage in the painting: the neat row of pebbles along the water's edge,⁴¹ and the pair of pink ballet slippers behind Nouredda, visible between the horse's two front legs. If we stick with the theory that we are being shown a moment in the life of Nouredda, then the slippers can only be fragments of the modern balletic world that have been teleported into the scene. An attempt to deliver an unobstructed view onto a fabula is spoiled by the unnecessary appearance of a conventional stylizing device belonging to another mode of treatment, less realistic, of the same fabula. This is a mode of metalepsis: the trace of the metadiegetic level persisting into the diegesis—the stylized slippers that remind watchers of the ballet that they are watching a professional dancer and not a princess—shifts across into

the medium of paint where there is no need for slippers.⁴² Thus the picture is undecidable. Degas has depicted an interworld that participates in several adjacent worlds, real and fictional. The portrait subject is both on and off the stage at once. Contrast Pulcinella, who is never offstage, so deferring endlessly the crisis of the *Auftritt*, or the stage entrance into full visibility.⁴³

The impossibility of deciding what is depicted is itself reproduced within the picture as Nouredda's or Fiocre's melancholic paralysis. Uncalled for by the story, Nouredda's brooding would have no apparent object. Fiocre is another matter: she may have had many reasons to brood, for all we know. In a general sense the mood is one of deflation or disappointment after the performance of the manic dance. The sheet of water in the lower part of the painting would seem to invite a focused brooding. But the princess stares forward, unseeing, like the woman in Dürer's *Melencolia I*. The figure at the right of the painting, idly rubbing her foot, gazes Narcissus-like at her own reflection. She closes the sequence of female figures, a rotation of a single figure—we feel strongly that the same model sat for all three figures—through three types. The gusla player is absorbed in her playing (she is like the putto who scribbles at the shoulder of Dürer's dark genius). The woman at the right finds what she seeks in the surface of the water: her own image. Only the princess continues to seek.

The picture is hardly conceivable without the example of Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* (1654), in the Louvre. Talk about beauty as the preparation of being for the eye of the other! The old woman's handling of Bathsheba's foot is displaced by Degas onto the seated woman at the right.⁴⁴

The melancholy is also Degas's own sense, projected onto the painting, of having fallen short of a true

42. See the remarks by Roberto Calasso in *La folie Baudelaire* (New York, 2012), 181–84.

43. Juliane Vogel has identified the stage entrance as a "crisis" for classical drama, which relies on the continuity and necessity of the plot and is therefore reluctant to hear the question posed by the entrance—namely, where does the character come from? In her analyses the entering character trails behind it, comet-like (a phrase of Nietzsche's), either the offstage or an indistinct and formless ground implied by the apparition of a figure. J. Vogel, "'Who's there?': Zur Krisenstruktur des Auftritts in Drama und Theater," in *Auftreten: Wege auf die Bühne*, ed. J. Vogel and C. Wild (Berlin, 2014), 22–37, and *Aus dem Grund: Auftrittsprotokolle zwischen Racine und Nietzsche* (Munich, 2018). A painting, by contrast, has no worries about diachronic continuity and can simply "capture" and hold a stage entrance: "Here she is."

44. One would wish as well to see Rembrandt's *Bathing Woman* (1655) behind this picture, with its formless rocks, exotic robes, and pool of water. Degas did not visit London until 1871, however.

39. Buffalo, NY, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1958:2. *Degas*, exh. cat., no. 78.

40. Dumas, *Degas's "Mlle. Fiocre" in Context*, 24.

41. As noted by Dumas, *Degas's "Mlle. Fiocre" in Context*, 35.

painting of modern life, in rhythm with the spectacle, instead collapsing back into citations from other artworks, in the academic manner. The painter profits from the title of the ballet, *La Source*, to raise the question of his own sources—question of questions for a painter of his generation. Other such sources are the painting of the same title by Ingres (1856), depicting a nude woman emptying a vase mounted on her shoulder—she stands against a foil of indistinct rocks not so different from the rocks in the Degas—and the several paintings by Courbet of river sources. Degas activates the iconography of the source or spring in order to ask new questions: Where does the theatrical character come from? Where was it before it appeared onstage? Perhaps the source is the actress herself. To test this hypothesis, Degas lifts her veil—stealing a glimpse of the face of the princess, like the hunter Djémil who was punished, Actaeon-like, for his privilege.

But that is not the answer. The entertainer is lonely because she has become one with her mask. The entrance of the figure into the mode of *parade* is an exit from another stage; every exit in turn is an entrance elsewhere.⁴⁵ The shiftlessness of the *parade* has drifted into art. The atmosphere of the liminal zone where the art is free, where you have not put down any money yet, persists into the theater. The ballet *La Source* was not free entertainment. Painting at this moment was greedy to absorb the *parade*, and the appetite would not subside for decades to come. There was Daumier, and many lesser painters, roaming the sideshows in a story already often told, crowned if not concluded by Georges Seurat's sleek painting of the subject (*Parade de cirque*, 1887–88, Metropolitan Museum).⁴⁶ Seurat condenses and sublimes several decades of iconography of the sideshow, gathering the theme into a suave, continuous entirety, draining it of pathos and psychology, restoring the magic of pure spectacle. There are no ragged edges, no distinct personalities. *Parade* is now sufficient entertainment, and not just the bait. Seurat recapitulates the *parade* as pure composition, a homogeneity unthreatened by outbreaks of self-assertion on the part of

individual performers. No figure emerges distinctly. Seurat reproduces the indistinct ground out of which the satisfaction will emerge. The trombone blends with the other instruments. As always, painting in modernity draws its own exterior inward, metabolizing and negating its own negations.

Degas moves in the direction that will be Seurat's—namely, absorption and exploitation of the vulgarity of the sideshow by submitting it to a powerful logic of composition that does not have its source in the *parade* itself (so the opposite of Daumier). Seurat, convinced of the overall beauty of the phenomenon of the *parade* but not of its elements, relocates beauty on the level of the painting as a whole. Degas, by contrast, still assembles his three women as if they were a troupe of saltimbanques, mountebanks, à la Daumier. Degas also invests in the composition, as we have noted. But with Degas one feels that something uncomposed can open up at any time inside the composition. Degas allows beauty to adhere to the figures. In his painting, there is beauty at both levels. The women and the horse are like the ballet slippers, survivors from an earlier conception of art inside a modern work.

Ballet itself is a survival from an earlier epoch of art, with its affirmative and comic assurances of freedom's victory over necessity. Chaos is overcome, order is restored: in the end Noureda accepts Djémil and the source dries up. For now, in the painting, the movement is suspended. From this state of suspension there is no escape route, no parabasis of the sort practiced by Pulcinella with his comings and goings and his direct appeals to the audience.⁴⁷ The “possession” of the dance is over, Noureda is spent, postcoital, as it were. This possession is not represented but is off to the side, elsewhere. The self-animation, automaton-like, of the *parade* figure is kept off the scene and so can function for Degas as the structure even if not the content of his art.⁴⁸ To the question, What is the source of the stage role? there are two possible answers: the answer of *la parade*, which is a nonanswer, and the answer of *character*, or the hypothesis of an ideal continuity of personhood that may be a fantasy and that painting can anyway not depict. Degas's dancer is paralyzed in thought and so can no longer prevent this unanswerable question from being asked.

45. As the Player says in act 1 of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), “We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else.”

46. See R. Thomson, *Seurat's Circus Sideshow*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2017), as well as the chapter on the painting in J. Cray, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1999). See also the remarks on the painting by Thomas Crow in his essay in the present volume.

47. Agamben, *Polichinelle*, 33–34.

48. See S. Weber, “Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment,” *MLN* 88 (1973): 1102–33, on castration as playing such a role in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Sandman*. Noureda's punishment of the hunter is a castration prefigured by the plucking of the flower.