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Frederick Ashton's *A Month in the Country*: An Evocation of Feminist Practices

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the influence of women on Frederick Ashton's choreographic outputs and practices. I argue that narratives that connect Ashton's aesthetics and Marius Petipa's and George Balanchine's approaches due to their shared belief in classicism obfuscate the significant impact of women on Ashton's work, as well as female dancers' agency in the development of classicism. By focusing on *A Month in the Country* (1976), dedicated to Ashton's mentors Bronislava Nijinska and Sophie Fedorovitch, I demonstrate the importance of women in Ashton's oeuvre and contend that this ballet may be considered a sensorial archive of past female performance and choreographic practices.

KEYWORDS

Frederick Ashton; *A Month in the Country*; Bronislava Nijinska; Sophie Fedorovitch; ballet; feminism

Introduction

This article seeks to establish the important roles women played in Frederick Ashton's choreographic outputs and practices. More specifically, I argue that, through his collaborations with female artists, Ashton developed a working practice that aligns with what today might be called "feminist" approaches to creativity. In particular, this research highlights Ashton's openness to input from dancers, as well as his care and respect for the artists he worked with. To illustrate the influence of women on Ashton's ballets, I develop an extensive analysis of *A Month in the Country* (1976), a ballet that Ashton dedicated "to the memory of Sophie Fedorovitch and Bronislava Nijinska, Chopin's compatriots and my mentors."[1]

This research departs from scholarship that has associated the choreographic works of Frederick Ashton with classicism. Critics, historians, and biographers have often aligned Ashton with Marius Petipa and George Balanchine due to their shared belief in a classical vocabulary of ballet and its formal qualities.[2] This "classicist narrative" has sometimes been

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used to differentiate Ashton's work from Kenneth MacMillan's (1929–1992), who "confronted audiences with grim dramatic material."[3] For instance, critic Jennifer Homans claims that, in the European context, Ashton was "an island of classicism: ballet in the rest of Europe was moving fast into the murky waters of sex and violence that MacMillan had been charting all alone."[4] Here, Homans associates Ashton with classicism as a way of distancing his choreography from MacMillan's. Other critics have compared Ashton to Balanchine as a way of strengthening a "choreographic trinity" consisting of "Petipa the father, Balanchine the son, and Ashton the Holy Ghost."[5]

These alignments between Ashton and classicism can be traced to dance critics' writing as early as 1944 when Arnold Haskell described Ashton as "the least specifically English and most in the direct Russo-international tradition" due to his ability to develop "his characterisation through 'aria' rather than 'recitative' dancing."[6] * In 1961, dance critic Clive Barnes proclaimed that "the two major figures of the post-Fokine ballet are probably the neo-classicists George Balanchine and Frederick Ashton."[7] Dance critic Deborah Jowitt also emphasized this association when she noticed how Russian classicism was "cultivated by such British choreographers as Balanchine's peer, Frederick Ashton."[8] Another critic, Arlene Croce, referred to Ashton and Balanchine as "the two great classical choreographers of our time" and noted stylistic similarities between the two choreographers.[9] In 2018, critic Alastair Macaulay referred to the "choreographic trinity" in his lecture *Ashton and Balanchine: Parallel Lives* because "they both worshipped the tradition of classicism they had inherited from Marius Petipa."[10]

These conscious, and perhaps unconscious, associations between Ashton and Balanchine as classicists are unusual for several reasons: first, neither Ashton nor Balanchine worked directly with Petipa. For Ashton, his knowledge of Petipa's works came from the Russian ballerinas who had worked with Petipa and from the women who believed in the importance of Petipa's works to ballet traditions in England.[11] Furthermore, these associations seem to ignore the significance of women in Ashton's career and their importance to the development of classicism itself. Ashton repeatedly acknowledged his indebtedness to female artists, and scholars like Geraldine Morris, David Vaughan, and Julie Kavanagh have underscored how female artists, including Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Isadora Duncan, and Bronislava Nijinska, affected Ashton's choices of movement material in his ballets.

Ashton's Matrilineal Lineage

Few male choreographers have been as open and generous as Ashton in their acknowledgment of the influence of female artists on their careers.*

In fact, a woman inspired every turning point in Asthon's career as a dancer and choreographer, starting with his decision to become a dancer after seeing Anna Pavlova in Lima in 1917. As he expressed on several occasions: "she injected me with her poison."[12] He then turned his attention to choreography when Marie Rambert identified his choreographic talents. Ashton then worked with Rambert until choreography "became irresistible under her wise and patient guidance."[13] Following her advice, he auditioned for Les Ballets de Madame Ida Rubinstein in Paris, where Bronislava Nijinska allowed him to sit next to her while she was choreographing, enabling him to learn "practically everything I know from her."[14]

After returning to England, Ninette de Valois invited him to join her newly formed company, the Vic-Wells Ballet, having seen and appreciated his first choreographic work, *A Tragedy of Fashion* (1926), for which she congratulated Rambert on having found "a real choreographer."[15] De Valois gave Ashton space and resources to advance his career, even at the expense of her own choreographic aspirations.[†] Furthermore, Ashton's collaboration with Sophie Fedorovitch influenced and guided his own choreographic processes from the early days at the Mercury Theatre, which was the home of Ballet Rambert, directed by Marie Rambert. Ashton later referred to Fedorovitch as "my greatest artistic collaborator and adviser."[16]

Ashton's exposure to Petipa's ballets came from the ballerinas whom he saw interpreting Sergei Diaghilev's *The Sleeping Princess*[*] (1921). Some, like Lydia Lopokova (1892–1981), became his friends and had a tremendous influence on his career. Lopokova also convinced Ninette de Valois of the importance of Petipa's works and to call upon Nicholas Sergeyev[†] (1876–1951) to stage them for her company,[17] which allowed Ashton to benefit from exposure to the formal qualities present in those ballets. As he explained years later, Petipa's oeuvre, and more specifically *The Sleeping Beauty*, was "a miracle of choreographic structure, shapes and brilliantly constructed climaxes."[18] Ashton learned from and kept returning to these ballets for inspiration, especially after the Second World War, in order to have, as he admitted, "a private class."[19] Geraldine Morris has noted that Petipa's influence may have affected the structure of Ashton's works from *Scènes de ballet* (1948) onwards, but his movement, even in this ballet, was more influenced by Nijinska.[20] Nijinska had actually worked with Petipa, and she had her own interpretations of Petipa's classicism, as seen in her ballet *Les Biches* (1924).

The Choreographic Trinity: The Genius Narrative

Historically, writers who have focused primarily on Ashton's classicism have, willingly or not, downplayed the importance of women in Ashton's

work. An obvious example appears in the BBC documentary *A Real Choreographer*, written and directed by John Selwyn Gilbert, where a male voice* narrates Ashton's biography and artistic development. At a key moment, the narrator states that Ashton "went to audition for a newly formed company in Paris, where he came in contact for the first time with a great choreographer: Nijinsky's sister."[21] When Ashton describes his encounter with Nijinska, he explains that "she was a tremendous influence on me. She really taught me how to work. She also increased my vocabulary of movement because I admired her tremendously."[22] Not only does the documentary's voice erase Bronislava Nijinska's name, but it also minimizes Ashton's own words, in what seems to be an attempt to generate a "genius" narrative, that reinforces male creativity and that, as scholar Christine Battersby explains, functions "by a process of exclusion" of women in history.[23]

Clive Barnes also underplayed Nijinska's influence by naming her only three times in his sixty-three page essay on Ashton, even though Barnes admitted that between Léonide Massine and Bronislava Nijinska, it was the latter who made "the greatest impression on the young artist."[24] Despite this assertion, Barnes names Massine eighteen times, most of them to show his influence on Ashton's work, and he also names George Balanchine fourteen times to establish a connection between the two "neoclassical" choreographers. Dance scholar Andrea Harris has shown how American critics like Lincoln Kirstein (1907–1996), John Martin (1893–1985), and Edwin Denby (1903–1983) reframed ballet choreography in the 1940s by classifying those ballets that used narrative and valued expression "as feminine against neoclassicism's masculinity."[25] Aligning Ashton with this gendered framing of neoclassicism caused critics to devalue women's influences throughout his career.

Another important aspect in Ashton's works stems from his collaborations with female artists during his creative process, which encouraged dancers' involvement. This kind of collaboration positions Ashton closer to what nowadays is defined as "feminist artistic practices,"* which have "a tendency to valorize art produced cooperatively, collaboratively, or collectively—a move which has the potential to dislodge the romantic notion of the work of art as the product of genius."[26] Ashton worked collaboratively with dancers during rehearsals. As Geraldine Morris explains, "he needed the co-operation of the dancer to fashion his dances, making their strengths and skills a significant part of his dance movement style."[27] Clive Barnes also commented on Ashton's collaborative work by describing the process as if "the ballet is being created by a committee of inquiry,"[28] and he quoted Margaret Dale, dancer and television producer, because she bestowed on Ashton the great virtue of giving "each dancer a strong feeling that he also is contributing to the creation."[29]

Prior to becoming the director of the Royal Ballet, Ashton spent his career in companies directed by women: Marie Rambert, Bronislava Nijinska, and Ninette de Valois. Although these women ran their companies with strong determination, Rambert's and Nijinska's more inclusive approach to artistic collaborators had a profound effect on Ashton's working methods. As scholar Lynn Garafola has pointed out, "Nijinska's ballets for Rubinstein were dominated by a female sensibility" that had women occupying important onstage and offstage positions.[30] Moreover, when Rambert recalled Ashton's beginning as a choreographer, she explained that he began by altering the movements that she had set for him in a choreographic sketch *for A Tragedy of Fashion* "so successfully that he turned it into an excellent dance."[31] Rambert's words show a collaborative approach to choreography far removed from the view that "ballet has revolved around overdisciplined (and often underfed) young women with bound feet and restricted movements controlled by authoritarian male choreographers."[32]

A Tragedy of Fashion also introduced Ashton to designer Sophie Fedorovitch, who influenced Ashton's creative process. Her way of developing her designs around the individual dancer's movements, and her willingness to modify her creations after attending rehearsals, epitomized her ability to evolve and change "with the dancer and the dance at the heart of it all, [which] was the key to the success of the Ashton-Fedorovitch collaboration."[33] Ashton was "patient, gentle and sympathetic with his dancers,"[34] and he admitted that he "loved dancers. They're wonderful people, therefore human, hard-working, dedicated."[35] In 1958, he wrote that "the choreographer should always try to work *with* his dancers, drawing expression from them rather than imposing actions on them. They are not just executants; they are—or should be—artists."[36]

When describing Ashton's choreographic process, Michael Somes explained how Ashton usually started work on the movement with an idea that he had dreamt, "followed by a description of some human waterfall or massive pyramid effect."[37] Dancer Antoinette Sibley remembered how, during the creation of the final *pas de deux* in *The Dream* (1964), Ashton provided her and Anthony Dowell—the original cast—with images that he had seen in a dream and that they had to translate into action. They initially found this impossible, and Ashton left them to "sort it out."[38] Once they did, their sequence became an important moment in the duet, where Titania flexes her torso towards her supporting leg, folds her arms above her head, does a *développé penchè arabesque*, and Oberon turns her on her supporting leg.[39] Ashton also allowed dancers to improvise, so that he got a sense of what they could deliver as artists. At a rehearsal of *Marguerite and Armand* (1963), Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev got so carried away that Nureyev had to stop and ask, "what steps are we actually doing?"[40]

Although Ashton did not define himself or his works as "feminist," this research identifies characteristics of Ashton's approach as feminist practices to expand awareness of both Ashton's methods and the vital roles women have played in ballet history. It is important to emphasize that feminist practices do not belong solely to women. As a matter of fact, Ninette de Valois described Ashton's choreographic approach as "laziness, nothing but laziness,"[41] because her own process was quite different: she worked in a less improvised and less collaborative manner, preparing her choreography beforehand and telling dancers what to do. Attention to feminist practices subverts a discourse that champions individualism and "genius" narratives and amplifies the crucial roles of these practices—and of women—in Ashton's legacy.[42]

The Poet and the Muse

David Vaughan, when writing about Anna Pavlova's and Isadora Duncan's influence on Ashton, explained that they "occupy honoured places in Ashton's personal pantheon of muses, together with Karsavina, Markova, and Fonteyn."[43] Likewise, when Clive Barnes tried to explain the creative partnership created by Ashton and Margot Fonteyn, he first acknowledged that "what Ashton owes to Fonteyn, and what Fonteyn owes to Ashton cannot be disentangled,"[44] only to conclude later that "Fonteyn was the muse, […] but it was Ashton who was the poet."[45]

The word "muse" carries negative implications for feminist vindications of women's agency, for it can strengthen the prominence of the male creator and evanesce women's artistic contributions. Music scholar Susan A. Rutherford suggests that, rather than "murdering the muse," there should be proper investigation on the position of "a working partner" who, through her command of performance practices, "helps the composer to develop his understanding of the performative possibilities of the roles which he composes."[46] Ashton's words about his working relationship with Fonteyn reinforce this view: "we fed each other tremendously… I taught her a great deal and she also enriched me."[47] Ashton worked *with* dancers and, among them, Fonteyn held a special place in his career. Anthony Dowell remembered how, when Fonteyn retired and Ashton was still creating for the company, he would exclaim: "Oh God, I can still see her!"[48]

Geraldine Morris explains that artists like Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Isadora Duncan, and Bronislava Nijinska "were all individuals from whom he drew inspiration, and his style needs to be considered in relation to their respective dance movement and choreography."[49] Moreover, they were extremely important artists in their own right by the time Ashton came in contact with them. They defined the art form in different and personal ways. It is important to remember that Ashton considered Pavlova "as much of an innovator as Nijinska," since both women

personalized ballet and made it live.[50] Likewise, Soviet choreographer Fedor Lopukhov (1886-1973) dedicated his book on choreography to Pavlova,[*] and described Karsavina as "well-read, educated, living for the interests of the art," and "significantly superior to other artists.[*]"[51] Isadora Duncan's influence was felt at the Imperial Theatres[†] and, especially, on Mikhail Fokine's choreographic development before Ashton even saw her. The implications of positioning these female artists as muses and, thus, diminishing their influence on Ashton minimizes their traces in his ballets. Therefore, it is important to consider to what extent their "inspiration" was imprinted and embodied in Ashton's works and ensure that dancers are aware of these "traces" so that they may inform their interpretations and convey them to present audiences.

"Touched by history"

Geraldine Morris describes Ashton's choreography as a "dialogue with the past,"[52] and I extend this line of inquiry to consider how his choreographic practices, meaning movement invention, patterns and forms, as well as choreographic processes, expanded significant approaches for ballet history. While Morris cites influences such as Nijinska, Pavlova, Karsavina, and Duncan on aspects of Ashton's choreography, I widen this lens to consider how he transformed working relationships and amplified the vital roles these women played in his own career and that of other artists. As Julie Kavanagh explains, Ashton's first encounter with Pavlova made the young boy want to dance like her,[53] meaning Ashton not only admired her dancing, but wished to incorporate her style into his own. I draw from Ann Cooper Albright's essay, "Touching History," to suggest that the influence of these women on Ashton's career went beyond visual imitation and toward somatic incorporation. Albright writes, "I want to think about how one is touched by history. Touch; touching; to be touched—these words evoke a relationship in which self and other are joined in an exchange that opens up the boundaries of critical discourse to the subtle energies of live performance."[54]

I argue that Ashton not only observed the female artists he admired, but he also absorbed their kinesthetic connections and behaviors. Albright continues, "[O]ur current postindustrial culture reifies the visual almost to the exclusion of our other senses, including those of touch, hearing, and kinesthesia."[55] From Pavlova, Ashton absorbed her "movement, expression, use of her eyes, her unorthodox freedom of gesture, and above all her theatricality."[56] From Karsavina, Ashton incorporated her "dignity, her command of the stage, her extraordinary eyes."[57] In other words, Ashton paid homage to the women who inspired and guided his career, and his choreographic works are archives of female performances. Ashton's *A*

Month in the Country[*] offers an excellent case study of his respect for female artists as well as the generative capacities of feminist practices.

A Month in the Country (1976)

On March 12, 1976, the Royal Ballet premiered Frederick Ashton's *A Month in the Country*. The ballet was one of Ashton's final works and remains one of his most performed pieces.[†] The ballet, based on Ivan Turgenev's play with the same title,[‡] has music by Frederic Chopin, arranged by John Lanchbery[§] (1923-2003) and designs by Julia Trevelyan Oman (1930-2003).[#] It was dedicated to his mentors Fedorovitch and Nijinska. Ashton had wanted to create a ballet inspired by Turgenev's play since 1968,[58] and, according to Julie Kavanagh, both artists shared an affinity for female sensibility.[59] Toward the end of his life, Turgenev fell in love with young women, a situation similar to Ashton's relationship with Martyn Thomas, who was forty years younger than Ashton.[60] The ballet, *A Month in the Country*, is, according to Kavanagh, Ashton's "depiction of an erotic passion that annihilates reason, his admission of the intoxicating elixir of youth."[61] Both Turgenev and Ashton drew from autobiographical material in their respective creations. For Turgenev, *A Month in the Country* resembled his complicated relationship with the opera singer Pauline Viardot (1821-1910), her husband Louis Viardot (1800-1883), and the composer Charles Gounod (1818-1893). Pauline became Natalia Petrovna, who "spurns her passionate admirer Ryabinin (Rakitin in *A Month in the Country*) when she falls in love with her son's tutor, the student Belyaev (Turgenev later confessed that Rakitin was himself)."[62] In contrast, Ashton "made no secret of the self-portraiture in Natalia, as 'he kept relating to her,'" as dancer Lynn Seymour explained.[63]

Despite these similarities, there are major differences between Turgenev's play and Ashton's ballet; for example, Turgenev's play is divided into five acts and lasts over two and a half hours, while Ashton's ballet is one act and lasts around forty minutes. For Ashton's condensed version, he eliminated "all the characters who were simply talkative and brought nothing to the plot."[64] Instead, Ashton focused on the story's main characters: Natalia Petrovna, her husband Yslaev, their friend Rakitin, their maid Katia, their ward Vera, their son Kolia, and his tutor Beliaev. This approach mirrored his work on *Marguerite and Armand* (1963) and *The Dream* (1964). The result was a chamber ballet that captured Turgenev's main themes and symbolism through the simplest means of expression.

Adapting literary works onto the stage involves altering and editing an original work to accommodate a new medium, whether that is opera, drama, cinema, or ballet. Following this idea, Ashton's ballet can be seen

as an example of a good adaptation, utilizing the craft that Ashton might have acquired throughout his career as a choreographer. Many authors credit Rambert and Fedorovitch with encouraging Ashton's facility with adaptation. Vaughan writes that Ashton's way of reducing the story to "its essential components" and conveying it "in dance terms" was something that he had learnt "many years ago when he was making ballets for the tiny stage of the Mercury Theatre."[65] The small size of the Mercury Theatre meant that artists needed to negotiate space and resources carefully. Rambert helped Ashton learn how to use "every gesture imaginatively, every step, and of course every dancer."[66] Rambert herself described how she contributed to Ashton's choreographic development by "understanding, guiding, and developing the mind and talent of the young choreographer,"[67] without interfering too much but working closely to help produce new ballets. Ballet critic A. V. Cotton also credited Rambert when identifying Ashton's ability to learn "the most effective way in which to utilise duration of dance-phrases; impact of the music; dramatic tensions between the several characters."[68]

As this example demonstrates, Ashton absorbed and extended lessons learned from prominent women like Rambert, which become visible in multifaceted ways in *A Month in the Country*. In the following paragraphs I examine aspects of the ballet according to the women who motivated and influenced Ashton's creation, starting with designer Sophie Fedorovitch, followed by Bronislava Nijinska, Lynn Seymour, Isadora Duncan, Tamara Karsavina, and Anna Pavlova. The purpose of this approach is to highlight how women played a crucial role, both in terms of movement vocabularies as well as choreographic processes.

Ashton's admiration of women was not limited to the lessons he absorbed from their artistry but extended to narrative choices in the ballet itself: Marie Rambert's theatre and its economy of means attracted designer Sophie Fedorovitch, who helped Ashton "apply the lessons learned at the Mercury to ballets designed for larger stages"[69] by sharing with him "her method of scrupulous elimination" in order to purge "the dance to its essence."[70] Ashton echoed this idea when explaining his own choreographic process: "it's not what you put into a ballet, it's what you take out."[71] Fedorovitch also gave constant advice to her collaborators, and Fonteyn remembered how, during rehearsals, Fedorovitch sat next to Ashton, who relied on her judgment because, while he was "involved with the movement, Sophie *thought* about everything,"[72] and commented on how an effect could be either amplified or simplified. Simon Fleet, a lyricist, actor, and set designer, observed that Fedorovitch had the power to create imaginary worlds with the simplest means of expression.[73]

Fedorovitch's influence on *A Month in the Country* can be felt in Ashton's elimination of all superfluous characters and situations and in the transformation of the symbolic elements present in Turgenev's play. For example, Kolia's first appearance with a bow and arrow in the play, an obvious reference to Cupid, was transposed in the ballet to the scene when Kolia shoots imaginary arrows at Natalia and Beliaev from the bridge in the background. Kolia's kite, a symbol of freedom in the play, is also used in the ballet. When Kolia flies it, running around the room, it provides a lively transition between highly dramatic scenes. Natalia's comments on the breeze entering the room, an allegory of love, and Rakitin's reply, alluding to the preceding storm, provided Ashton with the elements to accompany Belaiev's first entrance, reminiscent of Aurora's climatic appearance in *The Sleeping Beauty*.*

Bronislava Nijinska: Choreographic Emotion

Bronislava Nijinska was the other dedicatee of Ashton's ballet, and he never ceased to acknowledge his debt to her. This debt is visible in Ashton's choreographic decisions, movement vocabularies, and the evocation of emotions. David Vaughan's analysis of *A Month in the Country* begins by highlighting Nijinska's influence on Natalia Petrovna's opening variation, "with its basically simple steps accented by twists and bends of the torso."[74] Geraldine Morris also remarks on the amount of movement involved in this solo, characteristic of Nijinska, and noticeable in her choreography for the Hostess* in *Les Biches*, where the contrast between the *petit allegro* steps performed with the lower part of the body and the expressiveness and constant movement in the torso seem to demand our attention, just as Natalia's solo "controls our perception. She communicates through her upper body but then encourages us to look at her feet."[75] This emphasis on curved shapes, this new interpretation of classroom steps, as well as the use of *bourrées* and intricate footwork, speaks of Nijinska's influence on Ashton's choices. Morris also highlights Nijinska's characteristic "flow and absence of breath pauses"[76] in the duet for Natalia and Beliaev, which contains long, fluid choreographic phrases that allow the dancers to express the depth of their passion (see Figure 1).

In *A Month in the Country*, the *pas de bourrée* also becomes a vehicle for the expression of emotions. In Vera's duet with Beliaev, Ashton "used the rapid execution of *bourrées* as a way of portraying Vera's ardor, but by distancing Beliaev physically, he generates the impression of brotherly love," which contrasts with Ashton's use of the *bourrées* in Natalia's duet with her son's tutor, where these have a "tender quality that is absent from Vera's duet, their sensuality portrayed by the closeness of the couple, by the gentle lift and by the use of repetition."[77]

Even the references to choreography by Marius Petipa that appear in *A Month in the Country* could be interpreted as filtered through the influence of Nijinska. It is evident that Petipa's structures are present in *A Month in the Country*, notably in Beliaev's entrance, which is reminiscent of Aurora's entrance in the first act of *The Sleeping Beauty*. Additionally, the ballet opens with Chopin's *Variations on Là ci darem la mano*, a musical choice that allowed Ashton to follow the compositional basis of *The Sleeping Beauty*'s Prologue,[†] where once the scene is presented, characters express themselves through variations, and the action is carried forward in mimed scenes.[*] It is worth repeating that Ashton's admiration for *The Sleeping Beauty* came from the Diaghilev production in which Bronislava Nijinska had actively participated as choreographer and repetiteur. Nijinska's reinterpretation of *Violante* (the finger variation) became Ashton's favorite variation in the entire choreographic repertoire.[78] Ashton must have known that this variation was rechoreographed by Nijinska,[79] which makes his admiration for Petipa move seamlessly towards his mentor Nijinska, whose presence in *A Month in the Country* can be felt in the choreography itself.

Lynn Seymour: Feminist Practices as Collaborative Practices

Ashton's choice of cast members was particularly important due to the fact that he needed dancers who could develop his ideas and movement style, in addition to contributing their own ideas during the choreographic process. For *Month*, Ashton cast Seymour as Natalia Petrovna, Anthony Dowell as Beliaev, Derek Rencher as Rakitin—a non-dancing role, similar to his portrait of Elgar in *Enigma Variations*, Denise Nunn as Vera, Wayne Sleep as Kolya, Marguerite Porter as Katia, and Alexander Grant as Yslaev—another non-dancing role, reminiscent of his role as William Meath Baker in *Enigma*. These esteemed dancers gave Ashton an opportunity to trust his interpreters and to focus "on what they were best at, adding his own specific touches, challenging them to their limits."[80]

In order to recreate the intimacy of the play, he kept the cast "locked up together in the studio and refusing to allow understudies to attend initial rehearsals."[81] They were mostly friends who had collaborated before, the only exception being Denise Nunn, who created Vera's part at Seymour's suggestion. Nunn was a young dancer still in the *corps de ballet* and Ashton loved her looks and feet, which he amply exploited in her variation. Ashton asked Seymour to take care of Nunn, thus duplicating the drama's situation in real life,[82] while also showing care and concern for the young dancer.

Ashton's choice of Seymour to interpret Natalia Petrovna was made at a time when Seymour had overcome "a difficult period in which she had danced only intermittently."[83] Therefore, for Seymour, the role was "a gift from Sir Fred," because he gave her "the exceptional opportunity to portray

a mature woman just a few years younger than myself."[84] Moreover, Seymour explained, since she was a bit heavy for Anthony Dowell, who used to partner Antoinette Sibley, Ashton "did not put in any huge lifts. Our duets were exuberant and airy."[85] Seymour's matter-of-fact comment is especially important nowadays, when female dancers have more agency in voicing concerns about certain choreographers and directors, notably those who compromise women's health in order to fulfill choreographic decisions and to safeguard men's physical strength.*

As dancer Alexander Grant explained, Ashton's collaborative practices allowed dancers to "do things we wouldn't try for another choreographer,"[86] a testament to Ashton's ability to foster trust and curiosity during the choreographic process. Grant recalled that the cast felt the results of their exploration would always present them at their advantage. In other words, Ashton's method of collaboration positively affected not only the dancers' experience of the creation process, but also the resulting choreography and performances.

Isadora Duncan's Theatricality

Isadora Duncan was another major influence on Ashton's choreography. He had seen her dance in London in 1921 and, as he would later recall, was captivated by her "immensely strong personality that came right across the footlights and held the audience and compelled them completely."[87] Memories of Isadora would linger in Ashton's creative mind throughout his life, especially "her power and quality of repose. She had an ability to cover the stage and a wonderful way of running".[88] As he had done with Pavlova, Karsavina, and Spessivtseva, Ashton showed Duncan's movements and mannerisms and explained her theatrical impact to the dancers he worked with. He chose Lynn Seymour for the role of Natalia Petrovna in *A Month in the Country* after they had collaborated in his *Brahms Waltz** (1975), an homage to Isadora Duncan, that was later expanded into *Five Brahms Waltzes in the Manner of Isadora Duncan*.

Ashton told Seymour about Duncan's theatricality, especially her ability to remain still or to move at terrific speed.[89] According to Geraldine Morris, these qualities can be seen in Beliaev's solo in *A Month in the Country*, with its "long threads of stage-covering running."[90] Morris also noted Duncan's presence in the duet between Natalia and Beliaev, mainly in "the fluidity and rapturous, expressive arms," but also "in the sudden slump at the beginning of the duet," with its feeling of gravity and abandonment.[91] There are also several running sequences in the ballet that evoke Isadora's way of running, "leaving herself behind."[92] Duncan's theatricality and sense of drama, her "sculptural depth,"[93] are traits permeating Natalia's characterization. Ashton and Rambert saw in Seymour the perfect

incarnation of Duncan's dancing, "with her mystery and heart."[94] In choosing Seymour, Ashton knew he could count on the ballerina's acting ability and sense of gravity to embody the qualities he admired in Duncan, and that he strove to keep in his ballets.

Tamara Karsavina: Gesture and Nuance

In her memoirs, Fonteyn commented that Tamara Karsavina was a ballerina "whom he [Ashton] adored as much or more"[95] than Pavlova, possibly because Ashton had danced with her in *Les Sylphides* in 1930 and, afterwards, he choreographed the role of Venus for her in his ballet *Mercure* (1931). Her influence remained in his memory and works, and he also impersonated her to younger dancers. As he acknowledged, Ashton "learnt the meaning of gesture, 'nuance,' the drama of movement inherent in the dance"[96] from her. It was Karsavina who taught Ashton *Les Sylphides*, after choosing him as her partner, and it was thanks to her that he "got a great feeling for the fluidity and continuity of movement in *Les Sylphides* which Fokine wanted."[97] In 1946, she coached Margot Fonteyn in *Le Spectre de la rose*, a work she had also staged for Rambert's company.[*] In *A Month in the Country,* there are moments in the choreography where echoes of these two ballets can be seen: Beliaev's first variation has been compared to the Spirit role in *Le Spectre*.[†] Scholar Stephanie Jordan questions if what the audience sees is a male figure dancing or a projection of Natalia's imagination, "a representation of love… Is he not another image of the androgynous dream figure in *Le Spectre de la rose*?"[98]

Additionally, the ending of *A Month in the Country* evokes the end of *Le Spectre*: after Natalia's solo, Beliaev enters the room, kisses Natalia's ribbons that trail from her back and leaves behind the rose that she had previously given him.[‡] When he leaves, she sees the rose and, after picking it up, runs to the open windows, only to realize that he is gone. In the last moments of the ballet, Natalia walks towards the audience, letting the rose fall out of her hand, and staring at the audience. In *Le Spectre de la rose*, the girl wakes up after the Spirit has left the room and picks up the rose. In some versions of the ballet, the Girl runs towards the window and smiles at the thought of her dream, while in other versions she just smells the flower and brings it close to her chest.

Stephanie Jordan has written about two possible endings for *Month*, which she heard dancer Karen Kain explain: Natalia can run to the window and then pick up the rose or she can pick up the rose and then run to the window, and the choice changes the perception of Beliaev as an abstraction of love or as a person.[*] [99] Whereas in *Le Spectre*, the rose symbolizes the awakening to love, in *Month* it marks

Figure 1. Image of Lynn Seymour and Anthony Dowell performing in Frederick Ashton's *A Month in the Country*, 1976. Photograph by Leslie E. Spatt, ©Leslie E. Spatt /ArenaPAL.com.
Image Description: Anthony Dowell and Lynn Seymour in a moment of their duet in the ballet *A Month in the Country*. Lynn Seymour leans against Anthony Dowell, head backwards, right arm extended upwards, her left arm and hand are holding his right hand, while his left hand is folded around her waist. She holds a low first *arabesque*.

its end. Kavanagh explains that "at Ashton's request, Karsavina had twice mimed for him"[100] the end of *Le Spectre de la rose*, hence it is plausible that those memories inspired Ashton's choreography for the end of *Month* (See Figure 2).

Ashton emphasized the qualities he admired in Karsavina's dancing to Seymour, who excelled at both expressive and expansive theatricality and restraint, as well as the subtle use of her eyes. It is these traits that command the scene in the last moments of the ballet, precisely the qualities that Ashton admired in Karsavina, and that he always insisted on passing on to his dancers. Similar to the transmission of Petipa's aesthetics through working with Nijinska, Ashton understood Fokine's style from the women who had worked with him: Tamara Karsavina and Anna Pavlova.

Additionally, there were precedents for Ashton's decision to subvert gender norms in his choreography for male characters like Beliaev: Mikhail Fokine's choreography for the Poet in *Les Sylphides* (1909) shares the same dream-like quality and lyrical, flowing response to the music.[101] In Turgenev's play, Beliaev is an aloof young man who "did not even think about any matters of the heart until Natalia Petrovna openly confessed her love to him[†]."[102] Geraldine Morris, who accessed Ashton's copy of the

play, explains that Ashton underlined Michael Redgrave's description of Beliaev: "if Rakitin is the mirror to Natalia's heart… the young tutor is the bright morning sun,"[103] a metaphor for Natalia's image of love. Morris also noticed that Ashton's creations for Anthony Dowell differed from traditional male movement, since "Ashton drew on calmer, cooler qualities choosing to explore these other aspects which are more usually features of female ballet dancing."[104]

Anna Pavlova: The significance of sadness

Sadness, according to Fokine, was what made Pavlova's dancing unique. After her death, Fokine wrote a long article in which he expressed his admiration for the ballerina and what made her artistry unequalled. He concluded that "her element was sadness[*]",[105] which she expressed through her body, in her neck and in her long arms. On a home video, Ashton is seen on a beach imitating Pavlova in moments of her ballets *Christmas* and *La Nuit*: he evokes her arms, hands, and use of the head.[106] These movement motifs can be seen in many of Ashton's works, and, more specifically, they found their way into *Month*'s final moments in the sarabande.

Natalia's sarabande starts with her entering the room running towards the open French windows at the back of the stage after Belaiev has left the room. She stops there, in profile to the audience, her left arm stretched out before folding it against her chest. Turning slowly towards the audience, she walks down the step and reenters the room in a pensive mood, raising onto her pointes and taking trembling, knitting, little steps forward, while her arms start raising upwards with punctuating wrist movements that recall Ashton's movements on the beach and Pavlova's expressive use of her arms and hands. Once her arms are open, Seymour looks upwards, exposing her neck, before folding her arms around her head, framing her, in a pose reminiscent of Pavlova's *Swan*. She then turns, giving her back to the audience, arms stretched upwards recalling *La Nuit*, where Pavlova also moves her arms over her head, just as Natalia does, emphasizing her body in diagonal movements with arms extending her lines in space. After a short running sequence, arms stretched backwards, ribbons in her hands, Seymour holds a fourth *croisé* position, back to the audience, arms extended diagonally, exhibiting her ample and supple *épaulement*, which is also found in Pavlova's dancing in *Invitation to the Dance* and *Californian Poppy*. In Pavlova's dance, the position is the starting point for a series of turns on the spot; in Seymour's phrase, the turns travel across the stage and culminate in a first *arabesque* that falls into the ground as the extended leg changes into a kneeling position. In *La Nuit*, Pavlova also uses this motif to culminate a phrase, though she adds a *jeté en tournant* as a

connecting step between the *arabesque* and the kneeling position.* Once on the ground, Pavlova stretches her arms backwards, then forwards. In *Month*, Seymour stretches her arms backwards and rises to start her sequence of turns with *développé à la seconde*, into *tendu derriére*, until she reaches centerstage, head backwards, arms extended, again recalling Pavlova's dancing in *La Nuit* and Fokine's words on how Pavlova—and Seymour—express sadness through the use of the neck, arms, and hands.

These gestures are recurring movements in Ashton's *oeuvre*. Dancer Robert Helpmann explained that "every ballet that Fred choreographed, one knew or one saw that the principal female role would have been ideal for Pavlova," and when he asked Ashton about this, he replied, "Yes, of course she would have been wonderful. Because I think of her when I'm working all the time."[107] Ashton left traces of Pavlova's dancing in all his works, where his "Fred Step"* is present in different variations and uses. Interestingly, in *Month*, Ashton choreographed one of the most pliant, expansive examples of this recurring *enchaînement*, giving this motif to both Natalia and Rakitin as a duet that establishes their closeness, while also acting as a transition between scenes.

Pavlova's presence in *A Month in the Country* is felt most poignantly in the sarabande, which communicates Natalia's sadness at the loss of love, and which relies on expressiveness of the torso and arms as well as knitting pointe work. The sarabande includes moments of contained movement, combined with runs covering the stage, as if Natalia's soul is trying to break free one last time, before she releases the ribbons from her arms that act as symbols for love.† The sarabande finishes with Natalia leaning sadly on the chair, a gesture that, once again, calls into mind Pavlova's performance in *Christmas*, when she holds her head in her arms and sinks into her divan.

Ashton knew that he could rely on Seymour's intelligence to develop her character's dramatic conflicts and on her ability to respond to his choreographic movement. As Vaughan recalled, Ashton said that Seymour had Pavlova's feet, "and he showed her tricks that Pavlova had used to show them off."[108] In fact, Kavanagh saw the ballet as "yet another tribute to Pavlova, whose presence is manifest in Seymour's semi-camp, silent-movie star swoons, deep plunges, rhetorical flourishes of arms, and exposed swan neck."[109] In *Month*, Ashton highlighted all of Seymour's qualities, "her deep arabesque, fluent movement and liquid arms, her acting skills and promoting her highly arched feet."[110] The choreography unfolded swiftly, as Seymour recalled: "Natalia's opening allegro dance with dainty knitting steps and her melancholy sarabande just before she finds a rose dropped at her feet by the departing tutor were executed within the first days."[111] Interestingly, though the opening allegro dance has been analyzed in detail, few scholars have commented on the "melancholy sarabande,"

the final part of the ballet and one of the major departures from Turgenev's play. It is a moment of inner reflection for the character, full of melancholy and sadness.

Beyond the use of certain steps, Ashton inspired Seymour's dancing to absorb Pavlova's qualities: her nuances, her drama, and her sadness. Although this made Arlene Croce initially criticize the solo for dashing "pathos on the rocks of sentimentality,"[112] she later understood Ashton's intentions when admitting that "Ashton manipulated Turgenev's characters to tighten the correspondences that *he* found between the play and his life."[113] Towards the end of his career, Ashton paid homage to Pavlova by employing his memories of her in devising Natalia's solo, just as he had done throughout his career with many of the roles he had created.

Ashton's Gaze in *A Month in the Country*

As Kavanagh observes, both Turgenev and Ashton were artists with a natural sensitivity for female characters,[114] which is why both artists made Natalia Petrovna the central character in their respective works. In the play, Natalia's character and her relationship to the rest of the characters evolve first when she admits her love for Beliaev and second when she realizes her own cruelty towards Vera. In Turgenev's play, when Natalia hears Vera's confession about her love towards Beliaev, she resolves to marry her to an old man, Bolshentsov, out of jealousy. As Svetlana Patapenko explains, Natalia's "involuntary rivalry…, her own resourcefulness, deceit and cruelty towards the ingenuous and trusting girl, who is in her complete power, amazes her no less than love[*]."[115] In the ballet, because of the elimination of Bolshentsov's character, Natalia's cruelty is shown by slapping Vera after hearing the young girl's love confession. This is a key moment in the ballet, as it shows the complexity of Natalia's character and her internal turmoil. As Seymour explained, "I think he liked her [Natalia] because she was a bit frivolous and a bit petulant, and yet totally capable of falling desperately in love."[116]

Ashton's female characters are rarely one-dimensional and, in Natalia's case, Seymour believed that "he felt terribly sorry for her," as in those days, he explained, "you were considered over the hill at thirty. Life had ended in terms of any *amour*, or any more excitement in life. … And this is one of the things he wanted to bring across."[117] Furthermore, Seymour argued that Natalia's tragedy, unlike other dramatic female characters, was also social:[*] "her juices were still flowing but there was no way out of the spider's web."[118]

Ashton's sympathy for Natalia motivated the major difference between Turgenev's play and Ashton's ballet. Turgenev's autobiographical connection with Rakitin led to an end in which Natalia is abandoned by all those

who knew of her love for Beliaev. As Patapenko observes, "in the last act everything happens, as Rakitin advised," leaving "the society lady shouting almost with hatred to her loved ones: '… you are all wonderful people… everyone, everyone… and yet…†'"[119] Natalia leaves the stage, but the play continues.

In Ashton's version, Natalia is given a moment to express her sorrow and loneliness, to have her love for Beliaev confirmed, and to show her sadness about her future. By giving Natalia this opportunity, Ashton exercised the authorial right that the writer Joan Didion describes as, "the act of saying I, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying *listen to me, see it my way, change your mind.* It's an aggressive, even a hostile act."[120] It seems as if Ashton's self-portraiture through her character imbued her final moments. These moments were not only about plot development but also tapped into Ashton's "thinly disguised autobiography,"[121] according to critic Arlene Croce, and into his beloved female artists' movement archives. Dramatically, the ballet's last moments belong to Natalia Petrovna, while choreographically they capture his memories of Pavlova and Karsavina, ballerinas he revered.

Conclusion

Just as I have analyzed Ashton's choreography through a framework of feminist practices, instead of the more popular "classicist" lens, I also analyze *A Month in the Country* as an exceptional example of Ashton's respect for women. Geraldine Morris describes this ballet as "quintessentially Ashton," in that it contains the movement qualities associated with his work and the musical inventiveness that Stephanie Jordan identifies in Ashton's ballets.[122] His compositional devices are also recognizable: although Petipa's influence can be seen in the structure of the beginning of the ballet, Ashton's movement qualities reflect the choreographic emphasis on continuous movement taught by Bronislava Nijinska and the expressiveness and theatricality of Isadora Duncan, Anna Pavlova, and Tamara Karsavina.

Ashton's distillation of Turgenev's play through the elimination of all characters and elements that might disrupt the main action is also present in previous ballets. It was a distinct skill he honed at the Mercury Theatre, where he was mentored by both Marie Rambert and Sophie Fedorovitch. From Fedorovitch he also learned collaborative practices, especially in working with the dancers, who informed not only his choreographic movement, but also the individuality of their characterizations. Likewise, Ashton's respect for dancers is manifest in the creation of this ballet and in their roles.

Figure 2. Image of Tamara Karsavina and Margot Fonteyn in a rehearsal of Mikhail Fokine's *Le Spectre de la rose*, c. 1946. Photographer unknown. Creative Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tamara_Karsavina_n_Fonteyn_%27Spectre%27_1.jpg
Image Description: Pictured from left to right: Tamara Karsavina and Margot Fonteyn. Tamara Karsavina steps forward, while extending her right arm, palm facing upwards, while her left arm extends backwards, palm facing downwards. Margot Fonteyn is dressed as the Girl in the ballet *Le Spectre de la rose*. She stands with her eyes closed, her left hand against her chest and her right arm extended sideways. The scene shows a moment of their rehearsal, probably the final scene, when the Girl awakens from her dream.

Women's influences on Ashton's career are vividly demonstrated by *A Month in the Country*, which can be seen as an archive of past female choreographic and performance practices. However, for these influences to inform our present and shape the future, they need to be acknowledged. When critics associate Ashton with a choreographic trinity that consists solely of male choreographers, this gendered narrative obscures many relevant aspects. Most notably, this categorization diminishes the appreciation of his ballets by both dancers and audiences and the acknowledgement of different choreographic sources embedded in the performance. Ashton's *oeuvre* is indebted to and enriched by those female performers who inspired him, and whose legacies he passed on to new generations.

By illuminating the sources of Ashton's choreographic practices, this research seeks to deepen appreciation for the traces of history they embody as well as the subtlety and complexity of dancers' characters. As Barbara Newman argues, during the last decades, narrative ballets have been "fading like photographs left too long in the sun as their dramatic characters lost their singular nuances bit by bit."[123] When performers and audiences focus solely on a romanticized love story between Beliaev and Natalia, without attending to the many complexities that Ashton incorporated, the ballet is weakened, and its dramatic nuance is lost. Paying attention to Ashton's values and collaborative practices—as well as his comments on social conventions, women's constraints, and his determination to give Natalia her own voice—makes Ashton's ballet particularly relevant to our current times. Additionally, I hope this research provides dancers with an opportunity to engage with the details and significance of women's performance practices. Acknowledging the influence of female artists on Ashton's career vivifies the historical lineages that are embedded in *A Month in the Country* while amplifying Ashton's investment in keeping their contributions embodied in his choreography.

Notes

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106. Lynn Wake, *Frederick Ashton Foundation, Insights: Ashton Rediscovered. Part Two – Links in the Chain*, London: Royal Opera House, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BDNX79JwkQ&t=1710s.
107. Robert Helpmann in Dominic and Gilbert, *Frederick Ashton*, 124.
108. Vaughan, *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets*, 321.
109. Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 553.
110. Morris, *Frederick Ashton's Ballets*, 211.
111. Seymour, *Lynn*, 298.
112. Arlene Croce in Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 554.
113. Croce, *The Loves of His Life*, 86.
114. Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 548.
115. Patapenko, *Priroda conflikta v dramaturgii I. C. Turgeneeva.*
116. Lynn Seymour in *BBC Omnibus Sir Fred—A Celebration*, produced by Julia Matheson, producer, aired September 30, 1988, (London: BBC, 1988), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HayDXSB_esA&t=5548s.
117. Lynn Seymour in *BBC Omnibus Sir Fred*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HayDXSB_

esA&t=5548s.

118. Lynn Seymour in Barbara Newman, *Striking a Balance: Dancers Talk about Dancing* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1992), 252.
119. See Patapenko, *Priroda conflikta v dramaturgii I. C. Turgeneeva*.
120. Joan Didion, "Why I Write," in *The Writer and Her Work*, ed. Janet Sternburg (1981, repr. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 17.
121. Croce, *The Loves of His Life*, 86.
122. Morris, *Frederick Ashton's Ballets*, 212.
123. Barbara Newman, *Grace Under Pressure: Passing Dance through Time* (London: Dance Books, 2004), 322.

*. The *aria-recitative* concept comes from the operatic tradition, especially from Mozart's operas, where characters explained their inner thoughts through *arias*, but the action of the narrative was carried forward in *recitatives*. David Vaughan, in his analysis of *A Month in the Country,* quoted Ashton saying that, "the structure is operatic, almost Mozartian, with passages of dance ('arias') alternating with the interludes of 'recitative.'" See Vaughan, *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets*, rev. ed. (London: Dance Books, 1999), 297. Stephanie Jordan also picked up on this idea in her musical analysis of the ballet and established further connections between the ballet and Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. See Jordan, *Moving Music* (London: Dance Books, 1999), 248–64.

*. There were also important male influences on his work, most notably his first teacher, Léonide Massine (1896–1979). Constant Lambert's musical education and mentorship to the young choreographer cannot be dismissed either, as this influenced Ashton's early musical choices, and, in Ashton's own words, Lambert (1905–1951) "educated me musically." See John Selwyn Gilbert, "A Real Choreographer" (London: BBC, 1979). Furthermore, male dancers like Alexander Grant (1905–2011), Michael Somes (1917–1994), and Anthony Dowell (1943) also influenced the choice of movement material in his choreographies, as Geraldine Morris has pointed out in her analysis of Ashton's choreographic style. See Geraldine Morris, "Dance Partnerships: Ashton and His Dancers," *Dance Research* 19, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 15, 42–51.

*. After Ninette de Valois's death in 2001, BBC Radio 3 broadcast *Ninette de Valois Evening*, a program featuring archival interviews and testimonials from friends, critics, and artists. In one of the interviews, de Valois acknowledged, "I would have loved to be a solo choreographer, but it would have been all wrong because I didn't have all that talent. … I know that, but there was nothing I loved more than choreography, really … I was more cut out to help in the English picture as, may I say, the choreographer of the general scene." See BBC Radio 3, *Ninette de Valois Evening* (2002), analog tape recording.

†. *The Sleeping Princess* was Diaghilev's staging of Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty* in London. Among the main ballerinas who performed the ballet were Olga Spessivtseva, Lydia Lopokova, and Bronislava Nijinska. Nijinska made changes to the choreography, which she explained in an article published in Russian. See Bronislava Nijinska, "Petipa Won" ("Petipa pabedil"), in *Marius Petipa, Materials, Recollections, Articles* (*Marius Petipa, Materialy, vospominaniya, stat'i*), ed. Yuri Slonimsky (Leningrad: Leningrad State Theater Museum, 1971), https://wysotsky.com/0009/180.htm#36. See also Lynn Garafola, *La Nijinska: Choreographer of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), for a detailed analysis of Nijinska's contributions to Diaghilev's production, as well as of her production for the Marquis de Cuevas Company in 1960.

*. Nicholas Sergeyev left Russia after the Revolution, taking with him the notated scores of Petipa's ballets.

†. The narrator's voice in traditional documentary films has acted as a voice of authority that, in a disembodied form, explains the facts surrounding the images and context of the topic depicted. Historically, there has been an association of this narrator's voice with a male voice, "tapping into a culturally constructed assumption that it is men who speak of the actual world and that they can do so in an authoritative manner." See Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 3rd ed. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 55.

*. I am using the term "feminist artistic practices" as a lens that can help reevaluate and relocate women's influences on Ashton's artistic practices and choreographic outputs. The use of feminist theories and perspectives is prevalent in the existing dance literature, and this article aims to build on those sources. Among them, it is worth citing Lynn Garafola's works *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); "Where Are Ballet's Women Choreographers?" in *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005): 215–28; and *La Nijinska: Choreographer of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), in which she has used feminist perspectives to reevaluate the significance of female choreographers and their disappearance from history. Sally Banes's *Dancing Women, Female Bodies on the Stage* (London: Routledge, 1998) also used feminist theories to analyze women's roles in the ballet repertoire. Ann Daly applied Laura Mulvey's film theory on the male gaze in "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers," *The Drama Review: TDR* 31, no. 1 (1987): 8–21, while in *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), she used Julia Kristeva's semiotics as her basis for the analysis of Duncan's dancing as a feminist practice. As already cited, Andrea Harris's "Gendered Discourses in American Ballet at Mid-Century: Ruth Page on the Periphery," *Dance Chronicle* 35, no. 1 (2012): 30–53, used feminist perspectives to identify the gendered discourses operating in American dance during the thirties and forties. Joellen A. Meglin's *Ruth Page: The Woman in the Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022) also applied feminist perspectives, as well as other theoretical frameworks, in order to throw new light into the choreographer's work and legacy.

*. In *Puti Baletmeistera* (*The Ballet Master's Path*) (Berlin: Petropolis, 1925), Lopukhov wrote, "Посвящаю высшей представительнице хореографического искусства АННЕ ПАВЛОВНЕ ПАВЛОВОЙ" ("Dedicated to the highest representative of the choreographic art ANNA PAVLOVNA PAVLOVA"). All translations by the author.

†. "Начитанная, образованная, живущая интересами искусства, Карсавина была значительно выше других артистов." See Vladimir A. Shekalov, "Prima ballerina goes down to the basement: 'Evening of the dances of the XVIII century' by Tamara Karsavina in 'Stray dog,'" *Vaganova Ballet Academy* No.1 (60), (2019): 79–110, 85.

‡. Isadora Duncan visited Russia for the first time in 1904. Her influence on Mikhail Fokine's work was felt immediately and the choreographer acknowledged it in his memoirs and essays. See Mikhail Fokine, *Protiv Techenia* (Leningrad: Isskustva, 1981).

*. For the analysis of the ballet, I have used four different recordings: a live broadcast from the Royal Opera House with Lynn Seymour and Anthony Dowell (John Vernon, London: BBC, 1978), a private recording with Sylvie Guillem and Jonathan Cope from the Royal Opera House (2002), another recording available on Youtube with Sylvie Guillem and Massimo Murru (Tokyo-Bunka Kaikan, 2005), and the latest live broadcast from the Royal Opera House with Marinela Núñez and Matthew Ball (London: ROH, 2022). I first saw this ballet in 1988 with Antoinette Sibley and Anthony Dowell.

*. The ballet is present in the repertoire of the Royal Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, National Ballet of Canada, Australian Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre.

†. Turgenev's original title was *The Student*, and then *Two Women*, before finally deciding on *A Month in the Country*. See Svetlana Patapenko, "Priroda Konflicta b Dramaturgiy I. C. Turgeneeva" (PhD diss., Vologda State University, 2000).

‡. The music chosen by Frederick Ashton and arranged by John Lanchbery included the *Variations on 'Là cí darem' from Mozart's Don Giovanni, op. 2; Fantasy on Polish Airs, op. 13; Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise in E flat major, op. 22.*

§. Julia Trevelyan-Oman had already collaborated with Ashton in the creation of *Enigma Variations* (1968).

*. Beliaev enters from the back of the stage, from left to right, and when he shows "the kite he has brought for Kolya, a muffled rumble of thunder is heard." See Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), 551.

*. The role of the Hostess in *Les Biches* was choreographed on Ninette de Valois but performed by Bronislava Nijinska herself.

*. Ashton expressed his admiration for this scene in his essay "About Petipa," in *Marius Petipa, Materials, Recollections, Articles* (Marius Petipa, Materialy, vospominaniya, stat'i), ed. Yuri Slonimsky (Leningrad: Leningrad State Theater Museum, 1971), https://wysotsky.com/0009/180.htm#36.

†. Frederick Ashton had already used this structure in *Enigma Variations* (1968), also prompted by the musical score by Edgar Elgar.

*. Erika Lantz's podcast series, *The Turning: Room of Mirrors,* raised this issue in its last episode, *Révérence*, when author Chloe Angyal quoted a male company director who would not renew contracts for female dancers if they gained weight, since he had to think about the spinal health of the male dancers who had to lift them. Angyal wondered, "what if we said, okay, so don't lift her, we'll choreograph something different and you won't lift her, and she'll get to be the size and weight that she is and still have a job." See Erika Lantz, *The Turning: Room of Mirrors, S2, Ep.9, Révérence,* iheart, aired 21 March 2023, https://www.iheart.com/podcast/1119-the-turning-room-of-mirro-82262169/episode/s2ep-10-reverence-111138735/. This issue has pervaded dance culture during the last decades, as Tansin Benn and Dorca Walters also pointed out in their research *Between Scylla and Charybdis: Nutritional Education versus Body Culture and the Ballet Aesthetic: The Effects on the Lives of Female Dancers*, MA Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2001.

*. The original *Brahms Waltz* was created for a gala organized by John Neumeier to honor Vaslav Nijinsky. The success of the solo prompted Ashton to expand the piece into *Five Brahms Waltzes in the Manner of Isadora Duncan* (1976) for another gala, the fiftieth anniversary of Ballet Rambert.

*. Tamara Karsavina staged *Les Sylphides*, *Carnaval*, and *Le Spectre de la rose* for Rambert's company in 1930.

†. This variation is performed by Beliaev while Natalia Petrovna stands with her back towards him, standing against a chair.

‡. Although Ashton said he had never read Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, there is a description of a theatre performance of Boucicault's play *The Shaughram* attended by the main characters where this scene is depicted almost exactly. The only difference is that the rose is absent in Wharton's book.

*. I personally have never seen the first variant.

†. "Молодой человек, появившийся в доме Ислаевых месяц назад, ни о каких делах сердечных и не помышлял, пока Наталья Петровна открыто не призналась ему в любви." See Patapenko, *Priroda conflikta v dramaturgii I. C. Turgeneeva.*

*. "Если надо сказать, что же лучше всего передавала Павлова, в чем же она была

действительно несравненная, то я бы сказал: её стихия была грусть. Не драма, а лирика. В самом физическом сложении Павловой, в её тонкой фигуре, длинной шее, длинных худых руках было столько грусти." See Mikhail Fokine, "Anna Pavlova," *Novoe Ruskoe Slova,* January 25, 1931, in *Protiv Techenyia*, (Leningrad: Isskustva, 1981), 339.

*. This choreographic phrase—*arabesque* into *jeté en tournant*, finishing with a kneeling position—present in Pavlova's *La Nuit*, also became a motif in Ashton's choreography. It can be found in the girl's solo in *Nocturne* (1936), and before the final *pas de deux* in *The Two Pigeons* (1960). Like with the Fred Step, there are also variations of the sequence, as is the case in *Month* and in *Daphnis and Chlöe* (1951), where the phrase finishes in a deep, open, fourth position instead of kneeling.

*. The Fred Step was Ashton's homage to Anna Pavlova and is present in all his ballets. He first introduced it in *Les Masques* (1933). The sequence of steps comes from Pavlova's *Gavotte*, and it consists of *posé en arabesque*, *coupé dessous*, small *développé à la seconde*, *pas de bourrée dessous*, and *pas de chat*, although Ashton altered its end on many occasions.

†. Ashton used ribbons to symbolize love on other occasions, most notably in *La Fille mal Gardée* (1960).

*. "Невольное соперничество с Верой, в которое вступает Наталья Петровна, собственная изворотливость, коварство и жестокость по отношению к бесхитростной и доверчивой девушке, находящейся в полнойее власти, поражают Ислаеву не меньше, чем любовь." See Patapenko, *Priroda conflikta v dramaturgii I. C. Turgeneeva*.

†. Stephanie Jordan has also commented on this aspect in her musical analysis of the ballet. Natalia's duet with Beliaev, set to Chopin's *Andante Spianato*, was written for piano, but Lanchbery transferred the *Semplice* section to the orchestra, making Natalia stop dancing "when the orchestra returns her to harsh reality." For Jordan, the piano section identifies Natalia's abandonment, while the orchestra symbolizes Natalia's spider's web. See Stephanie Jordan and Andrée Grau, eds., *Following Sir Fred's Steps: Ashton's Legacy. Proceedings of the Ashton Conference, Roehampton Institute, London, 12–13 November 1994* (London: Dance Books, 1996): 49–50).

*. "А когда в последнем акте все случается, как советовал Ракитин, светская дама почти с ненавистью кричит близким: "…все вы прекрасные люди… все, все… и между тем…"." Patapenko, *Priroda conflikta v dramaturgii I. C. Turgeneeva.*

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