Meaning in Motion:
Curtsies, Cotillions and Counter-Ritual in the *Belle Époque*

Erica Christine Schauer
Lincoln, Nebraska

Bachelor of Arts, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2005
Master of Arts, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2008

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of French

University of Virginia
May, 2014

Table of Contents

Introduction

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."
—Aristotle

Human bodies are culturally conditioned to move in ways that show others who they are. This dissertation is a study of the critical and lifelong training of women's bodies conducted not in the classroom, but in familial and social settings. I argue that, despite parents' intentions, this physical instruction was never simply a matter of reproducing past gender roles and class structures. Rather, the internalization of certain gestures and postures, along with body movements at more formalized rituals, often allowed young Frenchwomen of the *Belle Époque* to generate an innovative space for the production of new meaning in the conduct of their lives. As I am to demonstrate in this thesis, physicality—that is, the socially inscribed postures, gestures, and movements of human interaction—is a useful category of cultural analysis.

The corpus of my dissertation comprises etiquette manuals, photographs, and early documentary film produced in France between 1860 and 1914. In addition to these non-fictional texts, I analyze literary representations of physicality in Emile Zola's novel, *Pot Bouille* (1882) and in short stories by Gustave Guesviller's *Catherinette!* (1904) and Mathilde Alanic's *Bal blanc* (1910). Through these rich and diverse sources, I hope to better understand how non-cognitive muscle memory—or, embodied knowledge—was ingrained over time, and how it encouraged young women to perform identities intended to reflect dominant social values.

Rather than considering the formal education French girls received in schools, this dissertation considers the embodied knowledge that was learned outside the classroom—at home, at balls, in society, from family and friends. Here, I seek out the ways in which girls' bodies were trained in private so that they fulfilled the expectations of the French public between 1870 and 1914. Why did French society need young women to fit such a particular model of civility and comportment? Certainly we have learned much from cultural historians on girls' institutional education in France, but analyses of the physical training done outside the schoolroom remain underdeveloped. Physical control learned at the dinner table, on the ballroom floor, or at the piano bench, in fact, constituted a large part of these young women's social and cultural education. To locate this particular type of instruction, I turn to the prescriptive texts of the period that were meant to guide parents in teaching their children the intricacies of contemporary society.

Blanche Soyer (pseudonym Baronne Staffe) (1843-1911) was arguably one of the most well known voices in the etiquette manual genre in France at the end of the nineteenth-century. Her most famous text, *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* appeared in 1891, and as noted in the announcement of Staffe's death in the 1911 edition of *Les Annales Politiques et Littéraires,* "Le succès fut foudroyant, cent éditions de l'ouvrage en moins de deux années, s'écoulèrent" (1). Baronne Staffe, though, never actually lived in polite society. Rather, she was stationed outside of Paris with her two aunts, in Savigny-sur-Orge. An unlikely candidate for an author who treats the subject of *politesse*, Baronne Staffe was nevertheless respected as the most reliable voice on manners and comportment. In the *Le Monde* article entitled "Il y a un siècle: Un Président qui essaie de bien se tenir," President Armand Fallières (1841-1931) refers to

Baronne Staffe as *the* authority on manners in 1910. In his "vrais efforts pour être un parfait homme du monde," Armand states:

> Et la baronne Staffe qui vend des milliers d'exemplaires de son *Usages du Monde,* elle n'est pas plus aristocrate que vous et moi, figurez-vous. Dans sa démure de Savigny-sur-Orge, elle se contente de faire des cakes et des gâteaux au chocolat pour tous les marmots qui passent et consacre le reste de son temps à écrire—avec talent—sur les bonnes manières d'un monde qu'elle ne fréquente pas. (Fallières, 1)

Although oddly coupled with her subject matter, Baronne Staffe's manuals were the most trustworthy go-to reference guides for matters of French *savoir-vivre, civilité,* and *politesse. Usages du monde,* for example, originally published in 1891, the etiquette manual had fifty-four editions printed within its first year, and was in its one hundred twenty-second edition by 1897. In her text, Staffe recommends that mothers train their children's' bodies early on in order to accustom them to socially acceptable behaviors and manners. If practiced in childhood, these movements would, over time, come to "feel natural." As she explains to her reader, "Il vaudrait mieux leur recommander de tenir les coudes au corps, quand ils marchent et qu'ils sont au repos. Ce mouvement redresse naturellement et exclue toute raideur, quand on en fait une habitude d'enfance" (110). A mother can—and should—pay close attention to the everyday movements of her child, as their movements soon become the *habitudes* that physically communicate to the exterior world the child's level of upbringing. These gestures and postures constituted a coded language that could only be read and appreciated by the initiated. Staffe assures

women that they can mold, shape, and ingrain the physicality of their daughters. They can naturally correct specific comportments at a young age so that the child will grow up with a foundational, embodied, physical comprehension of her place in society.

Indeed, *filles à marier* (that is, girls of a marrying age) of the leisure classes were taught to be self-sacrificing, sexually virtuous (or to at least uphold an image thereof), and skillful in the ways of domesticity—but how was this instruction embedded in the very fibers of their beings? What were the physical manifestations of these lessons, and more importantly, what did these young women do with this training? In what ways did women individualize their comportments to create distinct meaning with their bodies, as well as new ways of physically inhabiting and affecting the world around them? How did French daughters at the turn of the twentieth-century help shape what future women would have available to them in their repertoire of postures and gestures?

II. Methodology and Terminology

To frame my argument concerning the plasticity of culturally informed body movements, I draw upon the theoretical works of Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Victor Turner and Ronald Grimes. My analyses on etiquette manuals have Foucaudian and Lefebvrian foundations, as both theorists ask how institutional power continually permeates daily life. I ask how Frenchwomen inhabited a sort of culturally prescribed physique as they navigated the social climate that produced these norms. Finally, Michel de Certeau, along with two anthropologists focusing on ritual—Victor Turner and Ronald L. Grimes—will help to

conceptualize one of the driving questions behind my research: How does the meaning of gestures and postures come to change over time?

In this thesis, I distinguish between "habits" and "daily rituals" by using the former to indicate an individual's repetitive actions (such as cracking one's knuckles or twirling one's hair) and the latter to invoke collectively-recognized and enacted movements that are products of social conditioning (such as bowing, shaking hands, toasting, and making or avoiding eye contact). I use and understand the French term *habitude*, however, not simply as the English "habit," but as it is defined in Emile Littré's 1878 *Dictionnaire de la Langue française*: "une disposition acquise par la répétition des mêmes actes"—a physicality that is learned through the repetition of key postures and gestures on a repetitive basis (1,967). In a similar vein, I speak of "habitualization" and "ritualization" in much the same way, using them interchangeably to refer to the action of acquiring socially constructed physicalities.

It is my view that daily rituals, or "habitudes," change over time, and I aim to demonstrate that culturally inscribed physicalities have their own history that will visually and kinesthetically enrich our understanding of the *fin de siècle*. Indeed, "for the historian of a specific period, […] the fundamental question would be to grasp a certain quality, difficult to define and yet essential and concrete, something that 'just a quarter-of-an-hour alone' with a man from a distant or extinct culture would reveal to us" (Lefebvre, 7). In this dissertation, I seek out glimpses of the physical, moving, daily French life at the turn of the twentieth-century and ask how polite physicality was, at times, used as a tool for social advancement and not simply as a way for the leisure classes to differentiate themselves from the working classes.

In *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961) and *Surveiller et Punir* (1975), Michel Foucault suggests that individuals are highly influenced by contextualized and goal-oriented structures of power relations that, in turn, define and create the positions from which these individuals may act. The Foucaudian concept of "discourse" involves various unseen mechanisms within these power structures, including "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices" (Isara, 285). Focusing on the somatic "practices" of discourse, I seek to illustrate Foucault's relevancy to studies of historical physicality. Invisible power dynamics were very much at play when these women positioned and moved their bodies according to specific, legible 'codes of conduct.' The flagrant display of material wealth and spending was considered tasteless. Signs of status, therefore, had to be subtler. To successfully move through a Parisian *salon* at the turn of the twentieth-century was to physically embody these social discourses, showing others that the codified language of body movements had been understood, mastered, and at times expanded upon. In this dissertation, I uncover the ways in which somatic practices such as postures, gestures, and carrying a conversation can be 'read' as physical constructions of competing discourses in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. The body movements of French citizens expressed national discourses on low birth rates and increasing divorce rates, and familial discourses concerning honor and status. The ways in which members of society discipline themselves—down to the body language they employ in everyday social interactions—is a tangible object of study that is being read, in this thesis, at the site of the body in France at the turn of the twentieth-century.

Henri Lefebvre, writing from a neo-Marxist position, sees political power structures at work in daily life. Lefebvre suggests that members of a society are not only subjugated to regulation in the political and economic realms, but rather mechanisms of social control exist within their everyday routines. For example, individuals control their bodily functions in the presence of others as a way of demonstrating their approval of and submission to certain social values. These norms are enacted on an individual and daily basis, and in turn reinforce larger over-arching political and economic institutions. The Lefebvrian and Foucaudian idea that social expectations permeate every level of life—down to the physical gesturing and posturing of the body—structures my close readings of French etiquette manuals, periodicals, and novellas dating from 1864 to 1914.

Similarly, Marcel Mauss proposes the term "technique du corps" (or, "techniques of the body"), to suggest that there exist culturally-constructed ways of executing tasks specific to daily life. In his 1936 essay *Les Techniques du corps,* Mauss takes the example of walking, noting that: "La position des bras, celle des mains pendant qu'on marche forment une idiosyncrasie sociale, et non simplement un produit de je ne sais quels agencements et mécanismes purement individuels" (7). In this study, I analyze the family- and socially-instilled repetitive actions that Frenchwomen of the Third Republic adopted, combined, and expanded in order to navigate the social waters of their day-to-day lives.

The concept of "habitus" as defined by Pierre Bourdieu refers to the way a person inhabits—and habituates him or herself to—a highly contextualized social milieu. Habitus includes the way a person speaks, dresses, holds her body and assigns respect or disdain towards others. It is something that is learned over a length of time and

engrained on the body as permanent dispositions. According to Emile Littré's 1878 definition of "disposition," this includes one's "manière d'être," ("way of being") or "disposition habituelle du corps" ("habituel disposition of the body"), "Être de bonne disposition. Se porter bien. Être de mauvaise disposition. Se porter mal" (1,186). At the turn of the twentieth-century, physicality was not something one could possess without a sizable amount of leisure time to devote to training the body. Movements needed to look as natural as possible, coming across to observers as reactions rather than actions. The embodied knowledge that an upper-class French *fille à marier* developed outside of the official school system constituted a sizeable portion of her habitus, and this dissertation seeks to unveil its gestural components.

As Bourdieu explains, "the habitus is powerfully generative" (Bourdieu, 1980, 134). Each member of a society collects and combines gestures to create an individualized physicality that he or she then performs for others, introducing the audience to new gestures that they can, in turn, integrate into their own bodily dispositions. This mixing and combining of gestures functions as a kind of individualized, physical expression of what Michel de Certeau calls "tactics," which he defines in his 1980 book *The Practice of Everyday Life* as "a way of thinking invested in a way of acting, […] an art of combination which cannot be dissociated from an art of using" (xv). Here, I pay close attention to the physical combinations of gestures at the *bal blanc* (or the "debutante ball") and the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* (Saint Catherine's Day, which celebrated unmarried women of 25, 30 or 35 years of age) that reveal a generative, innovative and ritualized "art of using" the body. In this study, I coin the term "bodily bricolage" to refer to the gestural enactment of individualized physicalities

adapted to the social and cultural context of their enactments. This generative and cyclical process provides future tacticians with gestures and postures that will, in turn, form the basis for their own set of original, personalized combinations. Bodily bricolage, therefore, provides the historian with a paradigm that leaves room for change over time and allows for tangible narratives of historical physicalities.

The interdisciplinary field of Ritual Studies has greatly influenced the development of my line of inquiry in this project. Ritual itself has often been conflated with conservative, traditional, religious rites. However, scholars such like Victor Turner and Ronald L. Grimes have stated in their own fields of anthropology and Ritual Studies, there is nothing inherently religious or conservative about ritual. I instead consider the ways in which ritual can be a progressive and innovative cultural form. The term "ritualization" provided the foundation for my considerations of daily life. According to Ronald L. Grimes, former Religious Studies scholar and current Ritual Studies specialist: "'Ritualization' is the term used by ethologists […] to designate the stylized, repeated gesturing and posturing of animals. [It is] a sequence of actions having no obvious adaptive or pragmatic functions such as getting food or fleeing an attacker" (Grimes, 1995:41). Instead, it seems to originate in the social realm of life, and is therefore, an essential part of the human animal's individual and collective experiences. Performances of ceremonial rituals physically enact a person's passage from one era of his or her lifetime to another. Daily rituals, on the other hand, aid in marking the passages of smaller amounts of time, imbuing the day itself with cultural significance. In juxtaposing daily ritual with ceremonial ritual—a combination which at first seems mismatched and even illogical, given that the former refers to the ordinary, whereas the latter brings to

mind the extraordinary—it is my hope to demonstrate that the "big-day" moments and the "just-another-day" moments in historical periods often intersect in ways that affect one another. Certainly, Frenchwomen of the Third Republic trained for their big days everyday. This thesis aims to uncover and untangle the ambiguity that exists between gesturing in everyday life, and the polished physicalities adopted at ceremonial rituals. I ask how the body movements absorbed over the course of one's childhood and adolescence were used during ritual moments to replicate, interrogate, or undermine dominant cultural ideologies in France at the turn of the twentieth-century.

The idea that rituals always involve both performers and a live audience is a key concept in ritual studies. Victor Turner highlights the performative and malleable character of ritual in his 1987 study *The Anthropology of Performance.* In his foundational text, Turner regrets that scholars of ritual studies tended to focus solely on the procedure of rituals and on their prescriptive qualities, and instead proposes that focusing on individualized performances of ritual (and not just the ritual's prescriptive steps) will instill it with unstable, flexible and creative properties. Turner argues that "[T]he basic stuff of social life is performance. […] Self is presented through the performance of roles, through performance that breaks roles, and through declaring to a given public that one has undergone a transformation of state and status" (13). The first two chapters of this dissertation focus on the physicalities behind this "basic stuff of social life," seeking to offer a description of these social roles for the *fille à marier* of the *Belle Époque,* and how their bodies were trained in such a way as to reflect these roles to the well-versed, understanding onlooker. The final two chapters study ceremonial rituals

involving "transformations of state and status," and ask how individual Frenchwomen simultaneously participated in and parted with tradition.

Historians of girls' education in nineteenth-century France are also concerned with questions of prescriptions and their subversion. As I lay out below, Françoise Mayeur, Jo Burr Margadant and Rebecca Rogers have already written expansively on the topic. Mayeur provides extensive historical data regarding the formal schooling received by young French girls over the course of the "long nineteenth-century." Jo Burr Margadant and Rebecca Rogers, on the other hand, focus on the individual experiences of female educators and argue that women were constantly breaking new ground in their daily lives. I draw from Mayeur in seeking out specific canonical messages in chapter one of this thesis, and from Margadant and Rogers in implementing an approach that reveals subversion in places where we expect to find submission.

In *L'Éducation des filles en France au XIXe siècle* (1979), Françoise Mayeur highlights a variety of similarities between the lessons taught to girls following the French Revolution and those received earlier, under the Ancien Régime, challenging scholars who claim that the Revolution ushered in a vast overhaul of the French education system. Although her earlier work focuses mainly upon the administrative and institutional settings for girls' education in nineteenth-century France, Mayeur increasingly calls for "attention to all aspects of education broadly conceived, not just to what takes place within the formal structure of schools" (Harrigan, 594). Here, I respond to her request by considering the education of girls that occurred outside the official school system, with a particular focus on the physical training that they received from family and friends.

Jo Burr Margadant's *Madame le Professeur: Women Educators in the Third Republic* (1990) takes an innovative approach in recounting the emotional experiences of graduates of the Sèvres normal school for girls. Margadant shows that, although each of the Sévriennes was often marginalized for her brave efforts to bring about new opportunities for women, they nevertheless "had considerable influence over their own destinies" (5). As Margadant, Bourdieu and de Certeau all suggest, personal combinations and mutations of received values are constantly sending the significance of prescriptive cultural norms into a whirlwind of novelty, providing each new generation with tools they, too, can use in revolutionary ways. Although this dissertation does not treat the subject of professional educators, I consider the ways in which individual *bodily bricoleurs* are constantly questioning traditional roles in the most conservative of settings—even at ceremonial and traditional rituals like the *bal blanc* and the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine*.

Finally, Rebecca Rogers's 2005 study *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* continues the tradition of seeking out subversive acts within a restrictive environment by asking how "institutions opened up spaces for cultural experimentation where new social practices and identities were forged" (11). This dissertation is concerned with questions of subversion and the forging of identities, though I draw my examples from a setting outside the educational institutions so thoroughly analyzed by these French historians. It is my hope that the juxtaposition of theoretical models of subversion and innovation with historical evidence of new meaning being generated at the site of the body will create a space for my readers to consider the implications of physicality in their own fields of study.

III. Corpus

In the chapter entitled "*Savoir vivre au salon et au bal"* of her 1874 guide *Le Savoir vivre,* Louise d'Alq reveals that there is a secret hand-shake that members of the leisure classes can perform in order to demonstrate their belonging to the moneyed sub-culture of France: "It is always the left hand that one offers; it is utterly wrong for most people to thing that it is preferable to give the right" (d'Alq, 98). To what extent did upper class Frenchwomen of the leisure classes use physical comportment as a way to distinguish themselves from the working classes? What were these comportments, and where did they come from? Could all French citizens train themselves to reflect these codes of *civilité* and *politesse*? To access the types of movements involved in the daily ritual of a French *fille à marier,* I comb through a number of etiquette manuals, French women's magazines, and periodicals dating from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, cataloguing the types of gestures and actions prescribed therein.

Baronne Staffe's *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891) includes chapters entitled *Les visites, La conversation,* and *Le diner* which precisely detail the different bodily movements that make up French *civilité* and *politesse*. Subsections of these chapters such *Les gestes, Les présentations, Les différentes manières de saluer, La poignée de main,* and *Le rôle de la maîtresse de maison* highlight the minutia of each lesson on physicality.

Le Savoir-Vivre (1874) by Madame Louise d'Alq offers a glimpse into the expectations leisure class parents held concerning the physical comportment of their

daughters. Of special interest will be her chapters entitled *Le Savoir-vivre en famille* and *Le Savoir-vivre à table et de la table.* A new version of the book, entitled *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* was published in 1884 and includes chapters that establish what, precisely, phrases like *savoir-vivre, civilité* and *politesse* meant to readers in France at the turn of the twentieth-century. In her introduction, D'Alq devotes two subsections to these definitions, titling them "*De la politesse,*" and "*Du savoir-vivre proprement dit.*"

This dissertation also considers a text by journalist and Republican senator Hugues Leroux (1860-1925) whose works, although far removed from the etiquette manual genre, nevertheless had ideas about how a young woman's body should be coached at home. In *Nos filles, qu'en ferons-nous?* (1898), Leroux laments the useless training that young upper class Frenchwomen receive to help them find husbands. According to Leroux, France is in far greater need of strong working women who can follow their husbands to Africa or America. Women are, according to Leroux, the bearers of tradition, and as such they are needed in all parts of French territory to ensure the continuation of French customs, manners, and morals abroad.

Catholic writers also treated the topic of polite physicality, likening *politesse* and *civilité* to the Christian values of self-sacrifice and generosity. Mathilde Bourdon, for example, directs her young, Christian, female readers to the Virgin Mary as a prime example of elegance, grace, and virtue, in her 1864 text dedicated to French youth *Politesse et Savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes.* Bourdon was first and foremost an author of Catholic children's books such as *Léontine: Histoire d'une jeune femme* (1861)*, Le Droit d'aînesse ou le Dévouement filial et fraternel* (1871)*,* and *Les Béatitudes ou la Science du Bonheur* (1872). The advice given in *Politesse et Savoir-vivre* is strongly

indicative of a common appreciation for *civilité* and polite physicality that crosses the genres of the etiquette manual and the children's book. Of equal importance for this thesis, the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes' 1896 book *L'Enfant bien-élevé* provides a detailed introduction to late-nineteenth-century Catholic ideals of physical comportment. Founded in 1684 by Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, the religious teaching congregation Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes focused on education, paying close attention to the outward, physical expressions of the lessons offered by the Catholic Church. Early in the introduction to their manual, the authors point out that "*Le vêtement, le rire, la démarche de l'homme,* dit le Sage, *font connaître ce qu'il est.* L'extérieur révèle les dispositions de l'âme" (4). In this thesis, I examine the advice given to mothers of French *filles à marier* from a large range of sources from literary, secular, Catholic and political works, seeking out themes and values that conflict and/or converge with one another.

The three fictional texts analysed in the chapters to follow—Emile Zola's novel, *Pot Bouille* (1882), Gustave Guesviller's short story, *Catherinette* (1904), and Mathilde Alanic's novella *Bal blanc* (1910)—each treat the subject of the unmarried Frenchwoman at the turn of the twentieth-century. The first, Emile Zola's *Pot Bouille* (1882), develops the relationship between Eléonore Josserand and her two daughters, Berthe and Hortense. Throughout the text, Madame Josserand devotes much time and effort to training her daughters' bodies to attract potential suitors, struggling to accomplish the task of marrying off her daughters within the socially allotted time frame of three years. Scenes of frustration paired with detailed descriptions of ideal corporal comportment highlight the importance of polite physicality to the psychological well being of these characters. Similarly, the unmarried female protagonists of Mathilde Alanic's *Bal blanc,*

Mademoiselle Tiercin and Germaine, both express feelings of desperation and isolation that are instilled with a sense of duty towards same-sex family members. In *Bal blanc*, the reader learns that Mademoiselle Tiercin remained unmarried for years because she stayed home to take care of her aging parents. At the end of the story, the still-single Germaine signs up to join the nurses of the Red Cross on their voyage to Morocco in order to ensure that she, too, can earn enough money to take care of her ailing mother. Gustave Guesviller's novella, *Catherinette,* also follows an unmarried Frenchwoman named Sophie Mahout through financial ruin after the death of her father and her sacrificial attempts to fill the roles of breadwinner and caretaker in his absence. To describe the dynamics at play between same-sex family members, I coin the term "homofamilial" in this thesis. In each of the texts read closely in this thesis, homofamilial bonds create a strong sense of duty that drive the mothers and daughters of these narratives to action.

Visual representations of corporal training in this thesis are drawn from early photography and documentary film footage. Photographs from Agence Roi dating from 1900-1914 offer images of upper class Frenchwomen who had mastered the art of polite physicality at the Auteuil races of 1913, along with photos of women walking through the streets of Paris at the 1900 Exhibition according to the standards set forth in the manuals of Louise d'Alq and Baronne Staffe. The film "Paris 1900: A Recreation of the Belle Époque," released in 1947, is a piecemeal documentary composed of footage taken in Paris from 1900 to 1914. In one scene of the film, upper-class Parisian women gather for one of the salon *visites* described in great detail in the etiquette manuals analysed here. Entering a room, greeting other guests, sitting, and chatting are all demonstrated by the

women on film, and each of the motions are paired with their textual descriptions in the advice manuals of the same time period.

The corpus of this thesis ranges in medium, genre, authorship and subject matter. Yet, each of the primary texts considered—be they literary or visual, fictional or not—reflects a widespread concern in France for physical, exterior manifestations of manners, civility, and *politesse.*

IV. Chapter Synopses

The first chapter of my thesis uncovers and analyzes the canonical principles behind the everyday, corporeal movements of life in turn-of-the-century France. I categorize types of deference according to economic status, age, gender and circumstantial factors such as who plays the role of host and that of guest. I address the fact that the advice given in the corpus of the chapter is given by such a disparate bunch, and ask what conclusions might be drawn from this widespread agreement on standards of polite physicality in the French Third Republic.

In chapter two, I focus on the specific actions of elite, young, unmarried Frenchwomen—*les filles à marier*—as they carried out their daily rituals, such as curtseying, bowing their heads and placing their hands quietly in their laps. I move from treatments of the task of training the child's body to be stationary (such as teaching her to avoid fidgeting, making unseemly noises with her body, and picking her nose) and gradually move to textual treatments of more complex motions from walking, dancing the *cotillion,* and receiving guests.

The third chapter of this study investigates ritual enactments of polite physicality behind closed doors at the *bal blanc* (or "debutante ball"). I give a brief history of the ceremonial ritual and an illustrative description of the *fin-de-siècle* ball as seen in the historical documents analyzed in this thesis. Within this setting, I question our current attempts at defining the "bourgeoisie" in economic or sartorial terms, and propose instead that we consider this sub-culture in terms of its ritualized actions—both at formal ceremonies like the *bal blanc* and in its daily life.

In my final chapter, I highlight the more subversive movements of the *fête de la Sainte Catherine,* a yearly public gathering of French spinsters in the streets of Paris's Sentier district. Following the *fête* from its rural beginnings to its early-twentieth century manifestations in Paris, I trace the development of the *catherinette* figure and highlight the ways in which she used her body on Saint Catherine's Day to subvert and up-end societal expectations of the unmarried woman. The *fête* provides an exemplary setting for certain women to lay claim to the city as *Parisiennes* of a different sort—not as world-class dignified *dames* who sought status in distinction, but as working-class single ladies who found strength in solidarity.

V. Conclusions:

It has been my goal here to propose a study that will ask how physical comportment was used during ritual moments to reproduce, question or subvert dominant cultural ideologies in France from 1870 to 1914. As Ronald L Grimes suggests, there exists a certain embodied knowledge—one that is held in our "bell[ies] and [our] bones, not only

in [our] brain[s] and tongue[s]" (Grimes 2012:98). This physical awareness "enables you to balance a bike or put on your clothes without having to think. Embodied knowing is what enables you to type without pronouncing words in your mind. Embodied knowing is what enables a musician to play an entire concert without ever looking at a page" (Grimes, 2012:87). What did this physical know-how entail for young women in France at the turn of the twentieth-century? How did it vary amongst women of different economic classes? How did these young, as-yet unmarried women use their bodies to both demonstrate their mastery of the socially coded postures and gestures, and create new meaning for onlookers in the process? And finally, how did ritual serve as a tool for this creative task?

This is a study of historical physicality that will examine the variations in Frenchwomen's gestures, postures, and their meaning at the turn of the twentieth-century. I will seek out moments of dialogue, engagement, and resistance embedded deep within traditional ritual ceremonies that, at first glance, might seem to represent little more than Marionette Theater. The women in this dissertation are anything but passive puppets being animated by the invisible social forces described by Foucault and Lefebvre. Quite the contrary. Not only did they move their bodies on their own accord, they took hold of the strings and yanked back—pulling and displacing the hands presumed to be controlling their every move.

Chapter One: Meanings Behind the Motions: Categorizing Difference and Deference in the *Belle Époque*

I. Introduction : Corporal Codes of *Civilité*

At the turn of the twentieth century, women of the uppermost echelons of French society were trained their daughters to recognize and adopt codified social values on a daily basis. Families made every effort to demonstrate that their daughters were bone fide members of an elite group who proudly upheld and practiced certain rules of etiquette and lifestyles of leisure that defined their cultural status. The non-working classes of the *Belle Époque*, who form the object of this study, were a diversified and complex group that increasingly relied on somatic status markers to set themselves apart from the masses. The cultural forms analyzed in this chapter—that is, the bodily movements associated with manners—were used to categorize difference and deference. Culture, in this evolving elite world subjected to the socio-economic changes of modernity, was marshaled as a dividing line far more indicative of class membership than was wealth. In this rarefied world of rivaling socioeconomic sub-strata, displays of ostentation were not allowed. The cultivated goal of this elite milieu was to achieve something intangible, understated, refined, but yet quite readable—a lifestyle that was centered on family, tradition, morality, respectability, and outward appearances of propriety.

These detailed social codes acted as a tool for the non-working classes to distinguish themselves from the working classes. *Savoir-vivre* was communicative of something above and beyond questions of monetary capital. It was a sought-after form of

cultural capital available only to those who had time to spend learning these rules of etiquette. As I demonstrate below, at the turn of the twentieth century, French *savoir-vivre* encompassed a way of interacting with others and provided a common understanding of propriety and respect that permeated class boundaries.

The French term "classe," according to the Littré's 1878 *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, can also refer to the "ensemble des personnes qui ont entre elles une certaine conformité d'intérêts, de mœurs, et d'habitudes" (638). Saying a person showed class often referred to the way he or she handled social situations. Having class included the ability to verbally adhere—or non-verbally, as I suggest here—to widely-accepted semiotic structures of mutually shared morals and values that reached far beyond the confines of economic status. Louise d'Alq, one of the foremost authoritative voices on etiquette in late nineteenth-century France, makes this perfectly clear in her widely-read 1884 etiquette manual, *Le Nouveau Savoir-vivre*: "l'ouvrière qui sait rester à place est plus savante à ce sujet [de savoir-vivre] que la grande dame faisant parade de ses titres" (46). Money alone was an insufficient marker of status in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France. Other signs of social and cultural belonging were required, one of which was a code of manners, and a particular form of acquired manners belonged to the realm of gesture.

The proliferation of etiquette manuals, novels, photography and early cinema allowed people of all social classes access to "the rules of the game" – the rules of *savoir-vivre* that the leisure classes followed. Indeed, one needed only the few *sous* to purchase an etiquette manual to begin an education on manners in general, and on polite physicality in particular. The body, like most anything else in nineteenth century France,

constituted a tool for social advancement. However, if manners were to become second nature, if elegance and poise were to become innate qualities, the rules of *savoir-vivre* described in these etiquette manuals had to be learned and practiced "dès le plus bas âge" (D'Alq, *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie,* 23). As Pierre Bourdieu explains in his 1979 article "Les trois états du capital culturel," "son accumulation demande du temps, [l'habitus est un] bien social difficile à s'approprier par procuration" (3). *Savoir-vivre* itself was not for sale, but the rules of the game were increasingly more available in the *Belle Époque* and could, over time, become inherent traits of future generations. The chance to begin or expand an education on etiquette was open to anybody with access to print, photography or film. The vast amounts of free time required to render these lessons inherent, however, were reserved for the non-working classes of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

A young woman's gestures, the physical positioning of her body, head, arms, hands and feet, were part of an elaborate and shared cultural code. Training a girl's body to reflect the values held by her community required leisure time, practice, and attention to detail on a daily basis. Embodied knowledge was not something that could be purchased and worn. It was not sartorial—it was somatic. It was not a mask, but rather a personification, an embodiment, and a state of physicality that reached much further into the corporal awareness of the self and of the situation at hand. Respectability in the *fin de siècle* was something that was both read on and performed by bodies in such a way that has yet to be fully understood in the field of French Studies, and it is my hope that this dissertation will provide its readers with a new set of questions concerning historical physicalities that they can then pose in their own fields.

II. Methodology

To locate the types of movements involved in the daily ritual of a French *fille à marier,* I rely on a number of etiquette manuals, French women's magazines, and periodicals dating from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, cataloguing the types of gestures and actions prescribed therein. I analyze physical aspects of the advice given by Louise d'Alq in *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874), *Le Nouveau Savoir-vivre universel, vol. 2: de la science du monde* (1884) and *Notes d'une mère* (1883). In addition, I probe the suggestions on polite comportment given in Baronne Staffe's *Usages du monde: règles du savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891), Ermance Dufaux's *Savoir-vivre dans la vie ordinaire et dans les cérémonies civiles et religieuses* (1883), Hughes Leroux's *Nos filles, qu'en ferons-nous ?* (1898), Mathilde Bourdon's *Aux jeunes personnes : Politesse et savoir-vivre* (1864), and the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes' *L'Enfant bien élevé ou pratique de la civilité chrétienne* (1901).

Providing a glimpse into the expectations parents had concerning the physical comportment of their daughters, these texts offer a clear illustration of French *fin-de-siècle* prescriptive body posturing from a large range of sources. The authors vary widely in economic status, occupation, and political affiliation. Two were literary women writing within the etiquette manual genre (Louise d'Alq and Baronne Staffe), three were heavily influenced by the Catholic Church (Mathilde Bourdon, Ermance Dufaux and the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes), and one was a secular Republican (Hugues Leroux). As I lay out below, the authors cited in this chapter, whose political and religious viewpoints

decidedly influenced their opinions on the topics, all appear to place a high value on wide-spread physical education of *politesse* that was to be practiced repeatedly both in the home and in social settings. These authors shared the goal of inciting parents to teach their children to embody respect and deference to others, carrying out physical expressions of French *savoir-vivre* and *civilité*. As different as these writers were from one another, as varied as were their reasons *why* manners were important, they all pushed for a physical training that would produce a type of bodily knowledge worthy of the French term *politesse*.

From this wide range of commentators emerges a common voice. Parisian socialites and priests alike call out to parents, imploring them to teach their children that good manners, *savoir-vivre, politesse* and *civilité* are traditional, respectable, French values. These disparate texts converge on a model of manners that defines a national and identifiable French code of conduct. For the authors cited in this study, these standards of *politesse* and *savoir-vivre* were very much a part of what it meant to be French in the *fin-de-siècle.* As scholars like Karen Offen have pointed out, this was a time during which elite social status was being challenged by new models of behavior, an anxiety echoed by writers who touted traditional, gendered and deferential codes of conduct as preservative of national French character. Much like the nation's standing had been challenged by its military defeat in 1870, new models of conduct—ones that subverted traditional gender roles—were threatening France's dominant cultural values. These authors collectively believed that well-mannered French women had their role to play in the preservation of French standards of conduct, and that parents had a patriotic duty to guarantee the inculcation of French manners in their daughters at a very young age. The alternative to

this behavioral standard was uncertain, undefinable, and thus threatening, and it was up to parents to preserve *politesse* by raising exemplary young Frenchwomen who carried themselves with poise and grace.

III. Defining the Need for *Savoir-Vivre*: *Devoir, Respect,* and the *Juste-Milieu*

In the introductions and conclusions of their treaties on manners, authors like Louise d'Alq, Baronne Staffe, the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes and Hugues Leroux all express the common desire of a lasting effect of the social exchanges that occur in the daily lives of their French readership. In *Notes d'une mère* (1883), Louise d'Alq proclaims: "Ce qui nous facilite (l'effort qu'on fait pour être de bon maintien), c'est la conviction de faire notre devoir, de faire quelque chose d'utile, pas seulement à nous, mais à l'humanité" (25). For social commentators of both Catholic and secular influences, it was also the duty of the parents—and, more specifically to this discussion, it was the duty of the mothers of *filles à marier*—to ensure that the environment provided at home made learning polite physicality achievable. D'Alq explains in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884) that she cannot accomplish the task of raising well-mannered young women on her own. Instead, she is dependent upon her readership's compliance: "Je compte sur le bon sens des mères" (242). Mothers must make great efforts to teach their daughters good manners—including the gestures and postures appropriate to specific encounters—and this also meant constantly embodying this system of polite physicality in their own actions.

The inculcation of the non-working class *fille à marier*'s embodied knowledge become ritualized, habitualized and normalized within the confines of the home. As Mathilde Bourdon warns her young reader in *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864), "Encore un coup, si vous n'êtes pas chez vous, polie dans votre langage, élégante dans vos manières, vous ne le serez pas non plus chez les autres; tous vos mouvements seront gauches et la crainte de mal faire vous poursuivra incessamment" (50-51). Elegance is not something that can—or should—be turned on and off. It is a subject to be mastered, a skill to be perfected, and a physicality to be performed at all times.

A graceful composure should not involve exaggerated movements, but instead required natural-looking, smooth motions that were the result of years of physical training. Ermance Dufaux, author of *Le Savoir-vivre dans la vie ordinaire et dans les cérémonies* (1883), comments upon individuals who have a tendency to over-perform these movements: "Qui veut trop prouver ne prouve rien. La galerie songe que c'est surtout lorsque le fond manque, que l'on soigne la mise en scène" (22). For Dufaux's Catholic readership, this maxim serves as a reminder that movements should seem ordinary, not exaggerated. A careful balance between familiarity and formality—that is, the *juste milieu*—is key to good manners, including polite physical comportment.

Louise d'Alq, for example, asks that her reader take careful consideration when greeting others by taking into account the social station of their partners. As she explains in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884): "La manière de saluer dénote la distinction ou la vulgarité, plus que les sentiments; la façon de toucher la main est souvent le baromètre du cœur" (128). A young woman's exterior comportment, then, was a

reflection of her internal character. The handshake—this "manière de saluer" treated by D'Alq in her manuals, was weighted down with cultural signification even before it was executed. One most certainly did not extend his or her hand to just anyone in *fin de siècle* France. Rather, it was the privilege of whoever held the higher rank *vis à vis* social status, age, and sex to make such an offer. As the author explains, "On ne doit pas tendre la main le premier à quiconque est au-dessus de vous. Tendre la main n'est pas une politesse, c'est une marque d'affection, d'estime, de familiarité qu'il appartient à la personne […] le plus haut placée d'octroyer" (48). Once the decision to extend a hand has been made by the higher-ranking intergestulator (or, participant in a communicative gestural exchange), custom dictated that the handshake be firm, brief, and employ the entire hand. Baronne Staffe explains in her 1891 manuel, *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne*, "Ceux qui ne vous tendent qu'un ou deux doigts ne sont pas plus polis; en outre, ils dévoilent leur nature froide, indifférente ou trop égoïstement réservée. C'est également un manque d'éducation de retenir trop longtemps une main dans la sienne" (145). In this passage Baronne Staffe makes a poignant observation: *savoir-vivre* is not synonymous with snobbery. The importance of the *juste milieu* extended to all expressions of polite physicality, and unveils the respectability of the gestulator—something that neither title nor wealth alone can gage.

In France at the turn of the century, parents were encouraged to teach their children to identify and execute gestures appropriate to their rank. Also, parents were instructed to teach their children to show physical deference an early age if good manners were to be internalized. In doing so, they effectively trained the child's young eyes to recognize information concerning the status of others, and the child's body to react

appropriately. Ritualization, then, created a unique type of kinesthetic, bodily knowledge that was extracted from the canonical messages being communicated in movement. By paying attention to what authoritative voices like Louise d'Alq and the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes had to say about the body movements of young Frenchwomen, we are able to ask: What did their bodies know about life in the *fin de siècle* that we do not? How did these young women use their bodies to show that they "fit" into a sub-culture—or not? What social values did her physique communicate as it embodied the very "strangeness" of the past that we are constantly striving to unearth?

In her 1864 etiquette manual *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes,* Mathilde Bourdon provides her reader with an exemplary anecdote about a young woman who, after coming into a substantial sum of money following the death of a relative, decides to move to a new town and try to insert herself into high society. The young woman, not feeling adequately trained to attempt a "visite" with a society lady, refuses many invitations—an action that, in and of itself, was considered exceptionally rude. After a few weeks of practice and preparation, she finally accepts an invitation to dinner at the home of her new neighbors. She hopes that her studies in etiquette have prepared her for this social situation, and walks into the apartment feeling confident in her new skills:

> Instruite donc à marcher sans chanceler et à faire une révérence par principes, je me hasardai, il y a trois jours, à me rendre à l'invitation de madame Thomas; pleine de confiance en mes nouveaux talents, et persuadée qu'ils me donneraient assez d'intrépidité pour regarder les personnes en face. Mais combien est vaine *la théorie* lorsqu'elle n'est pas soutenue par *la pratique !* (Bourdon, 137)

Demonstrating the multitude of petit mannerisms required in keeping polite company, Bourdon lists all of the gestures and postures executed by the young woman that were utterly "gauches." Her hosts, however, being thoroughly trained in polite physicality, show no outward signs of disgust or of being offended as she clanks her glasses and spills her soup and speaks out of turn. They simply direct the conversation in new ways until the next mishap. By the end of the soirée, our heroine goes home with stains on her dress, drenched hair, and the shame of knowing that she is no closer to belonging in polite society than she had been at the beginning of the night. For the young woman to comport herself properly as a guest at the dinner table, her body needed to be trained. The gestures needed to be repeated and the postures practiced over a much longer period of time. Crash-courses on manners would not suffice if polite physicality was to become inculcated and appear as part of the individual's innate physicality—a point upon which secular and Catholic writers like D'Alq and Bourdon seem to have agreed.

The Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes share a lexical field in the introduction to their text on the well-mannered child with secular authors like D'Alq and Staffe. In their 1896 text, *L'Enfant bien élevé,* the Frères declare that: "Nous devons [du respect] aux personnes avec qui nous sommes en rapport: notre tenue, si elle est convenable, témoigne que nous les respectons; dans le cas contraire, elle leur serait une offense" (4). Four key words compel me to pause here for closer consideration: "devoir," "tenue," "convenable," and "respecter." Speaking in the affirmative and leaving no room for ambiguity, the Frères insist that *politesse*—respectful and polite behavior that upholds hierarchical values—is the child's duty as a Catholic. She owes respect and grace to the

people with whom she is in contact. According to Amédée Beaujean's 1891 *Dictionnaire de la langue française abrégé du dictionnaire de Émile Littré de l'Académie française,* the noun "tenue" refers to "maintien," or the physical comportment or lack thereof in social situations: "Tenue: Maintien, manières. La tenue de ces personnes est excellente. Manquer de tenue, n'avoir point de tenue, manquer de maintien dans le monde" (1,181). In addition, Emile Littré's 1878 definition of "maintien" is the "manière de tenir le corps et le visage" (390). The Frères were speaking about the physical comportment of young Catholics, highlighting the fact that their duty as well-taught Christians was first and foremost to ensure the comfort of others. Showing deference with one's body was a fundamental skill that needed to be inculcated in the French Catholic youth on a daily basis in order to uphold traditional values of self-sacrifice and respect for hierarchy. The third salient term here is the adjective "convenable" that the Frères use to describe the gestures and postures they promote in their writing. Each movement executed must be "suitable" to the position of both intergestulators—the movements must "fit" the situation. Again, the question of deference is brought to the foreground (who receives it? who gives it?), and is used as a basic blueprint for appropriate positioning of the body. Finally, the verb "respecter" is presented as the ultimate goal of the ritualized gestures that are suitable to the social stations of those performing the exchange. The Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes repeat these specific words—"devoir," "respect," "convenable," "tenue," and "maintien"—are repeated throughout *L'Enfant bien-élevé*. Likewise, Baronne Staffe and Louise d'Alq make use of the same lexicon in their prescriptive etiquette manuals. The juxtaposition of these concepts that are so key to understanding the French system of *savoir-vivre*—"devoir," "respecter," and "convenable"—with

questions of physical comportment—"tenue" and "maintien"—is indicative of a shared expectation that manners involved gestures, and that *politesse* was, at times, also a question of physicality.

V. Catholic Influences

Catholic authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constituted important and authoritative social commentators. In this section, I introduce the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes who, in addition to two female Catholic writers—Ermance Dufaux and Mathilde Bourdon—believed that polite physicality was particularly important to a Catholic child's upbringing.

The Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes is a Catholic teaching congregation that has existed since its conception in 1684 by Jean-Baptiste de la Salle. Banned during the French Revolution for refusing to take oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the Frères saw some of its own members executed (such as Nicolas Leclerc *dit* Frère Salomon on September 2nd, 1792) before being reinstated by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808. The congregation, which remains active on a global scale today, focused on educating young people of the middle and lower classes of French society. Of the authors analysed in this chapter, the Frères seem to be the only ones to have written guides of conduct specifically for young people who did not come from the leisure classes. This suggests the Frères believed that polite physicality was not limited to the salons of the Parisian elite, but rather that corporal expressions *politesse* and *savoir-vivre* were encouraged of all Catholic children, regardless of their parents' social standing.

Their 1896 text *L'Enfant bien élevé* provides its reader with a rich and detailed illustration of a proper French Catholic upbringing. Although this description is not gender-specific, many clear points of intersection occur between the physicalities advocated for girls in polite society by secular etiquette manual authors such as Baronne Staffe and Louise d'Alq. The Frères describe the *enfant bien élevé* as having a graceful and regulated style of composure—much like the ideal *filles à marier* of Staffe and D'Alq. However, their goals are fundamentally different: whereas the *fille à marier* should pay attention to physicality to secure her place in society (i.e., to find a husband suitable to her current or desired social station), the *enfant bien élevé* did so in order to imitate and to show deference to God, Jesus Christ, and—specifically for girls—the Virgin Mary. The Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes explain: "Sa vie est ainsi la pratique de la civilité *chrétienne*, qui, tout en réglant l'extérieur des actions selon les usages de la bonne société, leur donne pour motif un bien de l'ordre de la grâce et les rend méritoire pour le ciel" (3). To deserve God's grace, the *enfants bien élevés* needed to pay every bit as much attention to their outward expressions of self-sacrifice, respect and deference as they do to their inner spirituality. The Frères do not deny that polite physicality has its place in social situations. They instead link the need to move appropriately to their spiritual need to follow Christ. The inculcation of appropriate gestures and postures was as important to a Catholic education as it was to a salon apprenticeship for young *filles à marier*, though, for the Frères, this was something that children owed to their parents and to their priests, and most importantly to God:

> Il faut que notre maintien, c'est-à-dire l'ensemble des attitudes et des mouvements de notre corps, n'ait rien que de digne et de bienséant, soit que nous soyons seuls,

> soit que nous soyons en société. Nous le devons à la présence de Dieu […] Nous le devons à nous-mêmes, parce que nous sommes les enfants de Dieu […] et que notre corps est devenu, par le baptême, le temple du Saint-Esprit. (Frères, 3-4)

The body was to be used to externalize the *enfant bien élevé*'s spiritual education, communicating to the outside world that the child has understood and incorporated Catholic values.

Ermance Dufaux de La Jonchère was born in 1841 just south of Paris in Fontainebleau to a prosperous, land-owning Catholic bourgeois family. As a Catholic writer, Dufaux felt that manners in general, and polite physicality in particular, reflected inner piety and adherence to religious guidelines. Catholic parents needed to ensure that their children physically expressed deference in ways that reflected Catholic values—including respect for hierarchy and self-sacrifice. As she explains in her 1878 etiquette manual, *Le Savoir-vivre dans la vie ordinaire et dans les cérémonies*, "Presque toutes les prescriptions du savoir-vivre ont ainsi leur raison d'être dans quelque loi *physique* ou *morale*" (59, emphasis mine). Every action taken by a child, according to Dufaux, reflects the morality of his or her upbringing, therefore a Catholic child should be trained to physically demonstrate his or her understanding of God, fellowship and respect.

Mathilde Bourdon, née Mathilde Froment, wrote children's books for Catholic schools. She penned moralist titles for Catholic children such as *La Vie réelle* (1859), *Souvenirs d'une Institutrice* (1859), *Léontine: Histoire d'une jeune femme* (1861), *Le Droit d'aînesse ou le Dévouement filial et fraternel* (1871), *Les Béatitudes ou la Science du Bonheur* (1872), and *La Charité: Légendes* (1876), all of which had multiple editions.

The first section of Bourdon's *Politesse et Savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864), titled "De la Politesse au point de vue chrétien," clearly communicates her very conservative Catholic view on respectable French conduct, and gives Jesus and the Apostles as key figures for all children to emulate, and the Virgin Mary for young girls in particular. This etiquette manual is written in the first person and its maxims are directed at a fictional reader named "Suzanne." The ninth chapter of this text, "Du Maintien," is aimed specifically at polite physicality, and Catholic modesty is touted as its primary goal: "Là encore, ma chère Suzanne, la modestie intérieur aidera puissamment à vous donner l'extérieur, l'attitude d'une personne bien élevée et de bon goût" (78). The narrator continues by suggesting that Suzanne read Saint Ambrose's description of the Virgin Mary's physicality: "cette fille de David devait offrir l'image la plus noble et la plus gracieuse de la femme chrétienne, parce que la pureté de son âme se reflétait en son extérieur et réglait harmonieusement ses gestes, sa voix et ses regards" (78). Exterior comportment flows from interior morality, the former being a moving reflection of the latter.

According to Bourdon, there existed unique tidbits of embodied knowledge that were common amongst children of Catholic upbringing, and these were very much in line with the polite physicalities seen in the social encounters described in the secular texts of D'Alq and Staffe. For example, Bourdon's narrator directs "Suzanne" to "marcher à pas lents" and to "parler bas"—suggestions that are well matched with styles of walking and talking seen in Staffe's *Usages du monde* and in D'Alq's *Le Savoir-vivre universel* (Bourdon, 35). However, for Catholic commentators, the body is not simply an instrument for social climbing. Rather, the body exists a temple of the Holy Spirit, as a

tool for the spiritual advancement of the individual in particular, and the expansion of Catholic morality in general.

IV. Secular Voices

Louise d'Alquié de Rieupeyroux (1840-1901, pen name Louise d'Alq) authored a number of etiquette manuals and literary pieces whose subject matter ranged from afternoon *visites* to appropriate horticulture in the salon. Louise d'Alq was the founder and owner of the periodical *Les Causeries familières dédiées aux jeunes filles et aux mères de famille* (1882-1884) and the fashion magazine *Paris-charmant* (1881-1887). She published twenty-three titles throughout the course of her career, including collections like her *Anthologie féminine, les femmes poètes et prosateurs depuis la fondation de la langue française jusqu'à nos jours,* the 1893 text that was "couronné par l'Académie Française," and literary works such as *La Conquête de la liberté et l'enfant recueillie, romans pour jeunes filles* in 1897. Her most famous texts, however, were undoubtedly *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie,* first published in 1874, and its updated version, *Le Nouveau Savoir-vivre universel*, published a decade later in 1884. In her *Savoir-vivre* œuvre, D'Alq focuses on proper French etiquette and explains in great detail the physical training required therein. As the numerous editions of each of her texts suggests (*Le Nouveau Savoir-vivre*, for example, already had fifty editions by 1885), her audience was large and faithful, her works widely known, and her corpus was an authoritative source for questions on etiquette and manners in France at the turn of the twentieth-century. Louise d'Alq's recommendations on *politesse* and *savoir-vivre* were

detailed, exhaustive, and specific. She had things to say about the postures, gestures and general physical composures of her readership, and had a large platform from which to speak.

Baronne Staffe, born Blanche-Augustine-Angèle Soyer in 1843 to a petit bourgeois family, also published twenty-three titles in her career. Unlike D'Alq, Staffe lived a more or less reclusive life with her two aunts in Savigny-sur-Orge. Her writings, however—be they novels or etiquette manuals—all focused on one or more aspects of social life and French *politesse* ranging from letter writing (*La Correspondances dans toutes les circonstances de la vie,* 1894) to beauty regimens (*Le Cabinet de Toilette,* 1891) to table manners (*Traditions Culinaires et l'art de manger toutes choses à table,* 1893). She published at least one text every year of her career from 1889 to 1908, with a short dry spell lasting from 1903-1905. Although Baronne Staffe lived her life as a recluse, withdrawn from the very society whose rules she so carefully delineated in her writings, she was nevertheless widely published and known in her time as an authority on manners and etiquette.

Hugues Leroux (1860-1925) worked as a journalist for the *Revue politique et littéraire,* the *Temps, Figaro,* and *Journal* in the late nineteenth-century, and served as a republican senator from 1920 until his death in 1925. In the title examined here, *Nos filles, qu'en ferons-nous?* (1898) he argues that Frenchwomen are needed to be wives to Frenchmen in all of France's territories. According to Leroux, the nation no longer needs delicate young ladies who yearn for luxurious apartments and fine dresses—rather, France of the *fin de siècle* needs solid women whose habits were adapted to much more active and participatory conditions. France needs women who could follow their

husbands to faraway lands, bringing with them French tradition, manners, and values. As he proclaims in his introduction,

> Il faut créer une France au dehors. Un jour prochain, je compte rechercher par quels efforts pratiques cette œuvre pourrait être préparé. Nos filles y ont leur place marquée à côté de nos fils. Nous expatrierons inutilement des jeunes gens d'élite tant que nous n'aurons pas formé des femmes capables de les assister, des femmes qui referont pour eux la patrie, et, au loin, seront les gardiennes de nos chères traditions. (Leroux, 2)

Frenchwomen were needed abroad to spread French culture—specifically, French manners and morals, and particular to this discussion, the French gestures and postures that communicated these manners and morals. Hugues Leroux's vision of appropriate physicality may have differed from writers like Baronne Staffe, who was writing for society women, and who preached the importance of the *arts d'agrément.* However, the writers share the common position that the physical repetition of gestures was key to molding physicality in young Frenchwomen, and that physicality reflected a desirable, respectable, French character. Be they Catholic, secular, male, female, monarchist, or Republican, all of these writers spent a significant amount of time and effort arguing for the ritualized physical education of young Frenchwomen at the turn of the twentieth century, insisting that outward expressions of respect were vital not only to the honor of the young women themselves, but to the honor of their families, communities, congregations, and country.

VI. Canonical Messages

As a rule, polite physicality was mainly concerned with corporal demonstrations of deference. The following descending scale of importance regarding questions physical deference is drawn from the advice given in the etiquette manuals cited in this thesis: First, the ability to identify the socioeconomic position of each participant in a social exchange seemed to be of the utmost importance. Second, considering the age of each intergestulator was a highly promoted skill of *savoir-vivre* that the authors considered in this chapter each advocated. Third, a person's sex determined various aspects of polite physicality ranging from greetings to curtseys to dance positions. Finally, specific circumstances—such as which person is acting as host and which as guest—must also be taken into account when deciding upon the correct positioning and movement of the body.

i. Social Class and Classlessness

In the elite social circles in France at the turn of the twentieth century, social station influenced a plethora of physical performances ranging from the order in which people would sit down (highest ranking person was seated first, then the rest in order of descending social position), the order in which people were served food during a dinner function (again, the most important person was served first), to the withholding or presentation of applause. Even moving down a sidewalk was complicated by questions of rank and status: should an individual come into contact with a person of a higher social

status, he was expected to "céder le haut du pavé"—a French tradition dating back centuries. Louise d'Alq explains:

> Jadis, on appelait *céder le haut du pavé,* abandonner à la personne qu'on voulait honorer le côté de la rue qui était le plus élevé, car, ainsi qu'on le voit encore dans les anciennes rues, le ruisseau se trouvait au milieu et le pavé allait en pente ; aussi a-t-on continué à dire, par allusion à cet usage, de quelqu'un qui domine et qui est le maître : « il tient le haut du pavé ». Maintenant, on se contente de céder le trottoir, et surtout le côté du mur, lors même que ce n'est pas du côté droit, à toute personne […] à qui l'on doit du respect. (*Nouveau savoir-vivre,* 210-211)

Physically ceding prime space for walking certainly followed a schematization that was highly influenced by the socioeconomic position of both passers-by. However, there was nothing inherently respectable about one's social station. Instead,"manquer du savoir-vivre" could be defined simply as acting out of place, not playing the appropriate part in an intergestural exchange—and unfortunately, people of the non-working classes were often guilty of this crime against civility.

Louise d'Alq states this position very clearly in her 1883 guide to contemporary mothering, *Notes d'une mère*: "Maintenant, tout le monde a un droit égal de s'abreuver aux sources de l'instruction; la femme de la cour ne jouit pas de plus de privilèges que la simple boutiquière, et c'est cette instruction qui est le grand niveleur de toutes les classes" (48). As Daniel Gordon has argued about conversational skills in the 17th and 18th centuries, the art of conversation was decidedly democratic. As he explains in his book

Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789 (1994), etiquette was often used in order to "establish a more sociable mode of living, one in which good manners, instead of merely acknowledging power and status, could be a source of status in themselves" (88). It is my view that the art of polite physicality—like Gordon's art of conversation—acted as a democratic tool for social advancement in France at the turn of the twentieth century, and not only as a way for the leisure classes to distinguish themselves from the popular classes.

Baronne Staffe and the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes agreed with D'Alq, and saw physical expressions of polite social exchanges as vital knowledge for members of all the social classes—serving not as a mere marker of wealth and status, but rather as indicative of a good upbringing, as a sign of the individual's respectful character. If a *fille à marier* showed deference to those below her or superiority to those above her, she would be exposed as *mal élevée,* thus negating any respectability associated with her person and her family. As the reader will recall: "l'ouvrière qui sait rester à place est plus savante à ce sujet [de politesse] que la grande dame faisant parade de ses titres" (D'Alq, *Nouveau Savoir-vivre,* 46). The working-class Frenchwoman who understands and executes the proper etiquette of her social station, then, is *mieux élevée* than the socialite who shows no signs of humility. Proficiency level in the physical aspects of *savoir-vivre* at the turn of the twentieth century was measured by an individual's ability to identify where she fit within the larger social milieu, to know where others fit, and to move her body according to these specific guidelines.

Should the playing field be completely level, however—should all need for hierarchization to cease to exist—*savoir-vivre* as a tool of physical expression would be

moot. Louise d'Alq argues that complete and total equality is an unrealistic dream "On veut l'égalité; or l'égalité est impossible […] si la modiste se croyait l'égale de sa cliente, l'employé de son patron, le soldat de son officier, l'enfant de ses parents, le laquais de son maître? […] l'égalité ne serait pas encore atteinte, les rôles seuls seraient intervertis" (*Nouveau savoir-vivre universel*, 47). For D'Alq, to rid society of its need for hierarchy would require the end of commerce, armed forces, familial respect, and domestic employment. Equality is an ambiguous and fluid concept for D'Alq. She certainly believes that social mobility is possible, and that polite physicality was, indeed, an attainable tool for social advancement—otherwise there would be no sense in writing an etiquette manual in the first place. Families seeking social advancement could purchase the etiquette manuals of Staffe and D'Alq and, over time—most likely over generations—acquire the innate physicalities of the elite, non-working classes. Individuals and families could master polite physicality, ascending the social ladder and changing roles. According to Louise d'Alq, though, the ladder itself will always be made up of steps, and these rungs will always be hierarchized.

ii. Respecting France's Elders

Regarding questions of age, Mathilde Bourdon reminds her young readers in *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864) that respecting one's elders is not only polite, but pertinent to their own social respectability later on in life: "Soyez attentive avec les femmes âgées, ce sont elles qui font la réputation des jeunes personnes" (119). Recognizing the social influence held by an older woman and acting in such a way as to

express respect is a key skill that should be developed at a young age, paying close attention to the internalization of appropriate gestures of deference. Physical encounters between persons of different age groups required above all that the younger participant ensure that the older person be as comfortable and as unburdened as possible.

In her popular 1883 guide for mothers, *Notes d'une mère: cours d'éducation maternelle,* Louise d'Alq puts forth a regrettable anecdote from her personal experience as a connoisseur of *savoir-vivre*:

> —Eh bien, oui! l'autre jour je regardais sortir de chez moi une dame avec sa fille, jolie personne de dix-sept à dix-huit ans; la porte de la rue était fermée; la fille avait les mains dans son manchon, elle se mit un peu de côté; la mère ouvrit la porte qui est assez lourde, la fille passa, la mère la suivit et ferma la porte, pendant que la première faisait demi-tour, toujours les mains dans son manchon, d'un air parfaitement stupide. Comment une mère peut-elle tolérer cela? (D'Alq, 26)

The teenaged daughter is portrayed here as "parfaitement stupide" because she apparently is ignorant of polite conduct in the presence of persons older than herself. First of all, we are told that this girl has her hands in a "manchon"—a fur muff—which was a signifier of upper-class inactivity. Pointing her elbows outward with limp wrists bundled in warm fur, the adolescent's physicality in this passage clearly communicates a position of leisure and of idleness. As well off as this young woman might be, the fact that these movements are being executed in the presence of her mother—to whom she owes not only respect, but also physical deference—demonstrates her failure to acquire an

acceptable level of embodied knowledge of polite French physicality. Were the girl truly *bien élevée*, she would most certainly have known to hold the door for her mother, wait for her to pass through, and close the door behind her. Instead, the roles are reversed, leaving the daughter looking like a prissy ingrate.

When greeting an older woman, girls were taught to perform their best curtsies, showing as much respect as they could muster by dipping down just a little bit lower than normal. As Baronne Staffe makes clear in *Usages du monde: règles de politesse dans la société moderne* (1891), "Une jeune femme qui salue une femme âgée doit s'incliner assez profondément et nuancer son abord d'un air de déférence" (Staffe, 101). Young women must nuance their "abord" if they are to show the proper deference to these older women who had the power to make or break reputations. According to Emile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1878), in a physical and gestural context, the "abord" is an: "Approche de deux personnes et [un] accueil qu'on se fait réciproquement. […] Abord facile. Homme d'un difficile abord. Empêcher l'abord de quelqu'un. Son abord inspire le respect" (16). One of the main goals of this social and familial education—that is, of the repeated, stylized actions reinforced on a daily basis—is to train the body to act appropriately in all situations, to cultivate the child's "abord," and for these actions to be done in a natural manner so as not to appear forced, false, "gauche." In order to encourage spontaneity in their physical reactions to social situations, movements were repeatedly performed in order to build muscle memory. By physically repeating these same gestures in as many social situations as possible, young bourgeois and aristocratic women arrived at a level of embodied knowledge appropriate to their social station. Indeed, young women in the *fin-de-siècle* put great weight on the

extent to which they could physically demonstrate to older women that the latter did, in fact, “inspirer le respect,” while at the same time hoping to warrant respect one day in their own right. The verb “devoir” (“Une jeune femme qui salue une femme âgé *doit* s’incliner assez profondément”) helps Baronne Staffe here to reinforce the sense of responsibility that affects the positioning and posturing of these young women’s bodies. They *must* do these things to fit into society; it is their duty as moving mascots of their upbringing, and in turn, of their family’s claim to respectability, to bend slightly at the knee when approaching a woman to whom they must show physical signs of respect.

As we have seen with the offering of the handshake, the kiss is instigated by the higher-ranking (in this case, older) person: “Une dame âgée embrasse une jeune fille; celle-ci ne l’embrasse pas; elle lui baise la main" (D’Alq, *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel,* 48). This act of the lower-ranking person kissing the hand of the higher-ranking person is overtly Ancien Régime and visually reminiscent of a pre-revolutionary, Catholic society. Traditionally, one would kiss the ring of the Pope (or Cardinal or other officer of the Catholic Church) to show respect for the Papal office. It has been a sign of devotion between vassal and master as well as a symbol of respectful chivalry towards European ladies of the upper class. It would seem, then, that a long history of gestural ritualization was still manifesting itself in ways that were surprisingly hierarchized in the century of democratic revolution and merit-based social climbing. Bodies showed respect in ways that reflected long-standing French customs, and mothers worked hard to train their daughters’ bodies to reflect these deep-seated gestural traditions.

An older woman should, according to French rules of polite physicality, always be given the best seat in a room, the best cut of meat at a dinner, and the last word in a

conversation. Indeed, as Louise d'Alq instructs in *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes circonstances de la vie* (1874), "rien n'est plus ridicule que des jeunes gens ayant l'air de vouloir apprendre quelque chose à des vieillards" (101). As an authoritative voice on manners and etiquette in France at the turn of the twentieth century, D'Alq recommends that young women pay close attention to what they do with their bodies in the presence of their elders:"Si, par hasard, [une jeune fille] occupe le canapé ou un fauteuil, et qu'une dame âgée vienne à entrer, elle se lève aussitôt pour le lui céder" (98). Mathilde Bourdon gives the same advice, suggesting that young Catholic women always show physical deference by standing up to offer their elders the best seat in the salon: "Ne souffrez pas qu'une femme âgée soit sur une chaise, tandis que vous avez un fauteuil, et ne prenez jamais la place du coin du feu, qui est la place d'honneur, place que la maîtresse de la maison ne cède que dans des cas fort rares" (130). In addition, in some cases young *filles à marier* were expected to remain standing while older women were allowed to sit: "dans bien des occasions où une personne âgée est autorisée à rester assise, les jeunes gens doivent se lever et se tenir debout" (96). Comfort, therefore, was not proper to youth but rather the property of those "dames âgées" who had already "paid their dues," as it were. For Catholic and secular commentators alike, young women were expected to show outwards signs of physical deference to their elders.

iii. *"La femme est une esclave qui se fait servir, l'homme un roi qui obéit"*: Gender and Gesturing at the Turn of the Century

In the French system of leisure class polite physicality at the turn of the twentieth century, women took precedence over their male counterparts. The gestures and postures of men, not women, were expected to show deference. It was women, and not men, who occupied the higher position, thereby possessing the power to extend a handshake or not, to greet and curtsey or not, to offer a seat in the room, or not. Louise d'Alq indicates in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884) in clear and concise terms that men are—at least in terms of *politesse*—the weaker sex:

> Ainsi, elle ne se fait pas prier pour accepter, elle *prend* même de droit les meilleures places partout, les meilleurs morceaux à table; la femme est une esclave qui se fait servir, l'homme un roi qui obéit; ainsi, elle ne *sert* jamais l'homme, sauf à table; elle ne ramassera pas un objet qu'il laisserait tomber, tandis qu'elle laissera son cavalier ramasser ce qu'elle aura laissé tomber; elle ne le fera pas passer devant à une porte, ne lui portera pas un paquet, ne se dérangera pas pour lui. (D'Alq, 76-77)

This insightful maxim uses the rhetorical trope of slavery and highlights the ambiguity that existed within intersexual exchanges in polite society. Whereas women were, in other situations, assumed to be the passive members of these relationships, polite physicality brought forth an entirely different set of circumstances. Regarding questions of corporal expressions of *politesse*, "la femme est une esclave qui se fait servir, l'homme un roi qui obéit" (76). Indeed, "elle ne sert jamais l'homme, sauf à table" (77). As we

saw in the cases of social status and age, within the codified structure of polite manners, the female sex is meant to be as comfortable and as unburdened as possible.

According to D'Alq, when greeting a woman, a male member of polite society was expected to offer his hand with his fingers extended toward her and his palm facing the ceiling. This gesture was called "extending the hand." Women, however, were meant to respond to this movement with a limp wrist, fingers extended toward her male intergestulator, palm facing the floor—a gesture termed "offering the hand," which better reflects the power of choice held by the female intergestulator. D'Alq explains:

> *Les femmes donnent la main, les hommes la tendent.* Prière de méditer la différence des expressions ; au figuré, cela signifie que le sexe féminin accorde, tandis que le sexe masculin sollicite ; au propre cela indique que les femmes offrent le dos de la main (suite de l'usage du baise-main), les hommes la présentent renversée, la paume en l'air. (D'Alq, 129)

Again, we see the "baise-main," a gesture that leaves the contemporary reader with an image of fealty and courtliness. Here, instead of kissing the back of a hand belonging to a person of superior social status or age, the woman plays the role of lord and the man that of vassal. Men of respectable character in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries had a duty to perform physical signs of deference to women.

Just as the rules of *politesse* prohibited young women from sitting down in the presence of their elders unless otherwise instructed, these same rules instructed men to take their cues from the women in the room. From the Catholic perspective, men should defer to women in intersexual social exchanges. As Dufaux explains, "Un homme, quel

qu'il soit, ne s'assied jamais près d'une jeune fille sur un canapé. S'il n'y a pas de dames et que la maîtresse du logis ait un certain âge, elle peut y faire asseoir un homme près d'elle, mais lui n'y doit jamais prendre place *que sur son invitation*" (86, emphasis mine). Certainly, then, sex mattered when deciding when and how to position and move the body in specific social situations, and men must show women deference and respect.

Louise d'Alq, who so vehemently scolds a young woman for allowing her mother to hold the door open for her and to carry packages in *Notes d'une mère: cours d'éducation maternelle* (1883) brings the same judgment against men who allow the women they are accompanying to be burdened. In *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884) we learn that: "C'est une vraie honte pour un homme de marcher les mains libres à côté de sa femme portant un paquet ou un enfant"(71). Similarly, we see that the "céder le haut du pavé" rule (210) applies in questions of gender as well: "Dans un endroit public, la femme occupe toujours de préférence le *coin,* la place où elle n'est pas frôlée par le public" (77). The woman, then—just like the person of superior social standing—should always hold "le haut du pavé" in the streets.

One of the principal goals of a well-mannered Frenchwoman was to inspire *politesse*, manners, and respect in those with whom she came into contact. Not only did women use their words to reprimand those demonstrating poor taste in their company, they used their bodies to accomplish this same goal. As D'Alq points out in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel,* "Une femme doit avoir assez de timidité et de réserve *dans son maintien* et dans ses paroles pour ne pas provoquer le laisser-aller autour d'elle, et assez de hardiesse, d'aplomb, pour oser le réprimer s'il se produit" (74, emphasis mine). The

actions of those around her, therefore, reflected her character as well, and she needed to use her own body to condemn inappropriateness when it occurred.

D'Alq gives an amusing anecdote about a young French soldier who has not yet fully developed his skills of polite physicality. Paying a visit to his cousin, the young man waits in the antechamber, neglecting to remove his hat, which, according to the French system of manners, is to be removed the moment he entered the building. His cousin, who has mastered the art of *politesse*, uses her body to non-verbally communicate her disapproval of the young man's lack of manners.

> La cousine entra sans bruit par derrière et, d'un coup de main bien léger, elle jette le képi par terre. Le jeune homme fait un soubresaut et se retourne : --Ah ! ma cousine ! ma cousine !...mais j'allais l'ôter,…je ne vous avais point vue…vous ne m'avez pas donné le temps…etc., etc. La cousine sourit, sans prononcer un mot, et donna sa main blanche à baiser en gage de l'absence de rancune. La leçon fut comprise ; le jeune officier ôta dorénavant son képi dès l'escalier. (D'Alq, 204-205)

D'Alq's narrative brings to light a unique combination of lessons on embodiment. First, we are told that the cousin enters silently. Other etiquette manual authors make the same suggestion. Baronne Staffe also insinuates that, in polite society, "on s'arrange de façon à ne pas faire sonner les talons" (108). Next, D'Alq shows her reader that the young woman brushes the hat off of the soldier's head with "un coup de main bien léger"—brutal movements are to be avoided in favor of graceful and controlled movements. The soldier, on the other hand, jerks his body and turns around, babbling excuses and

apologies for his indecency. The cousin, without saying a word, proceeds to perform the version of the handshake appropriate to women: she offers her hand for the young man to kiss. This exemplary young woman uses her physicality to reprimand and correct that of her male visitor, and D'Alq boosts her readers' confidence levels by showing them that they, too, are able to decipher the inner workings of this gestural encounter.

iv. Customs of Circumstance

As I have shown above, when deciding upon the proper way of holding and moving one's body in the *fin-de-siècle*, considerations of social station, age and sex all came into play. Specific circumstances also played a key role in determining the appropriate execution of physical gesturing. At times, circumstance could trump these other, seemingly more pertinent considerations. For example, no matter the social station, sex or age of persons entering a woman's salon, it is always the hostess who occupies the seat of honor: "La maîtresse de maison occupe le coin à droite de la cheminée; elle ne cède sa place à personne" (d'Alq, *Le Savoir-vivre,* 98). In this context, playing the role of hostess would have afforded the woman a higher level of gestural influence than would have necessarily been accorded in other situations. Indeed, as d'Alq remarks in *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874), once a hostess takes her position of power, others look to her for direction: "elle indique les fauteuils en face et à côté d'elle aux personnes les plus âgées" (98). In *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884), d'Alq recommends that visitors be invited to sit first: "Il ne convient pas de s'asseoir avant que son visiteur soit assis lui-même" (311). D'Alq gives the guest a great deal of sway in these situations,

insisting that it is up to the guest to decide how long he or she would like to stay. As she points out, "C'est lui qui se lève le premier lorsqu'il juge devoir mettre un terme à sa visite; l'hôte, au contraire, reste assis, ne paraît se décider que difficilement à se lever, afin d'essayer de retenir son visiteur. Il se lève, comme à regret, pour l'accompagner" (311). At this point in the evening, the hostess, however strong her position was next to the chimney, was nevertheless at the mercy of her guests. Under no circumstances could the hostess show any outward signs of annoyance, of impatience or anything else that might betray her desire to see her guests go. Instead, as d'Alq explains, the rules of *savoir-vivre* dictate that she performs a physicality that communicates her deepest regrets of seeing her visitors take their leave.

Circumstances in settings of a more public nature also required special attention. When out with friends on the public promenades, rules of polite physicality were equally complicated:

> Lorsque des personnes sont assises dans une promenade publique, et que d'autres personnes de leurs connaissances ou connues seulement de quelques-unes d'entre elles s'approchent, elles doivent s'empresser de se lever pour leur parler, et rester debout tout le temps que dure leur conversation. Elles ne doivent pas inviter les nouvelles arrivées à s'asseoir, pas plus que celles-ci ne doivent accepter l'invitation. (D'Alq, *NSV,* 215)

Here, we see serious attempts being made to avoid questions of deference. No one is granted the status of "decider"—no one is meant to extend or accept an invitation to sit down. No one should enjoy the advantage of being seated—everyone taking part in the

exchange should endure the minor discomfort and effort of standing. After all, this is a public venue; therefore no one is playing the role of host. Rules of polite physicality differed depending on the location of the exchange. One set of rules applied to the private realm, and a different code of conduct was applicable in public encounters—and experience in both milieus was needed in order to acquire an innate sense of polite comportment.

VII. Shared Concerns—Decadent Desires and Immoral Impurities

Hugues Leroux and Louise d'Alq were both concerned about the condition of secular French morality. Both see contemporary society as fraught with vain and selfish individuals fighting over luxury items in a way that reflected a lack of character. As to take the blame for this shortcoming, Leroux proposes in his 1898 book *Nos filles, qu'en ferons-nous?* that young women should not be judged for their coquettishness, vanity or narcissism. Instead, French society is to blame for their faults:

> Ce serait une hypocrisie et une lâcheté de faire le procès des jeunes filles sans rappeler d'abord que, plus que quiconque, elles subissent les mœurs de leur temps. Dans la passivité de l'attente aussi bien que dans les fâcheuses audaces, elles ne sont qu'un reflet de la société qui les a créées. (Leroux, 33)

If a young woman desires lavish apartments and expensive dinner parties, it is because her family and friends taught her these values. It is, therefore, up to French parents to prepare their daughters for the world into which they will be thrown.

Leroux and D'Alq were both particularly concerned that young women were being trained to attract a certain kind of marriage proposal—or, in this context, economic security—but were not being given an alternative, should their marriage plans fall through. Leroux warns his reader of the unreliable economic waters in which some families find themselves, declaring: "Nous sommes tous d'accord que les hasards de l'argent moderne peuvent réduire une fille, une femme bien élevée à la subite nécessité de gagner son pain" (168). Both Leroux and D'Alq feared that the education received by the leisure-class *filles à marier* in France at the end of the nineteenth-century was misleading towards the young women themselves. Few suitors were able to support a lifestyle of upper-class tastes, and this shortage was a common complaint amongst the families of the *filles à marier* and the young men trying to find wives. Leroux's and D'Alq's writings disseminated information that they deemed necessary for bringing about a foundational change in the way that French *filles à marier* were raised. For these authors, the quest for luxury constitutes a major threat to the future of French society, as a collective sickness of the non-working classes, and in turn, their daughters. Simply put, "la concurrence effrénée pour le luxe est l'inévitable cancer d'une société bourgeoise" (35-36). Great efforts, therefore, needed to be made in the educational agenda of young Frenchwomen to emphasize respect and humility and to stamp out selfish and materialistic desires.

D'Alq sees the rampant striving for material goods as something that can be traced back to childhood, and warns mothers against the dangers of letting their young witness grandiose exhibitions of luxury and wasteful spending so often a part of social settings. In particular, claims D'Alq in *Notes d'une mère* (1883), children's balls are

responsible for instilling youths with dreams of prideful grandeur: "Pour les mêmes motifs je me déclare tout à fait hostile aux bals d'enfants, que je regarde comme pernicieux, et ne pouvant que *vicier leurs natures*" (59, emphasis mine). Indeed, children's balls exposed young girls to a horrible example, teaching them that money is no object, and that gentlemen will always shows up for the last dance. D'Alq laments the fact that, "imbues de cette idée, les jeunes filles croient avoir le droit, ou veulent, par leur instruction, l'acquérir, de trouver ce prince des contes de fées" (52). It is no wonder, then, that certain parents complained of difficulties finding a suitable marriage proposal for their daughters who had been raised to value a luxurious lifestyle.

According to D'Alq, problems with finding suitors are closely linked to the amoral, materialistic upbringing of contemporary French society women: "Quel exemple, ô ciel! pour votre fille, madame, *et comme elle sera difficile à marier un jour, s'il ne pleut pas des millionnaires !*" (*Nouveau Savoir-vivre,* 238). The economic realities of the time did not guarantee that every upper class woman would find an upper class man to marry. D'Alq pleads mothers to confront this reality head-on, instilling in their daughters manners for manners' sake, not just for self-seeking materialistic purposes.

Even toys could be dangerous within this context. Louise d'Alq warned that the "poupée" of the *fin-de-siècle* had the potential to instill notions of grandeur and luxuriousness in young French girls at a very young age. Many of these dolls wore lavish dresses and had elaborate hairstyles that included ringlets and tiny jewels. Since dolls were such a foundational part of the *fille à marier*'s childhood education, D'Alq stressed that they should not be grandiose nor luxurious, but rather simple and reasonable. She maintains that: "Il est urgent de porter une loi somptuaire contre les poupées en général,

comme autrefois on en fit une à Rome contre les dames. […] je dénonce hardiment comme un danger public le luxe des poupées" (236-237). Luxury should be abandoned in favor of more important qualities such as modesty, self-sacrifice and respectability, and recent developments in the toy industry allowed children to practice these proper manners on their dolls.

Figure 1. Joe Ellis Jointed doll, late 19th-century.

Figure 2. French Boudoir Room Box. Lithographed paper on wood, late 19th-century.

In the late 19th century, dolls ceased being porcelain or wooden "statues" and acquired joints, allowing for young children to practice ritualized physicalities with their "poupées."[1] Children can practice curtseys, handshakes and "baise-mains" both with their own bodies and with their dolls'. D'Alq highlights this fact by asking: "Qu'est-ce qu'une poupée, s'il vous plaît? Ce n'est pas une chose ni un objet ; c'est une personne, c'est l'enfant de l'enfant. Celui-ci lui prête par l'imagination la vie, *le mouvement, l'action, la responsabilité*" (D'Alq, *Nouveau Savoir-vivre,* 234, emphasis mine). Mothers who made

[1] Miriam Forman-Brunel explores the cultural and social acculturation of young girls through their playful interaction with dolls in her 1993 study *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930.* Yale University Presses, 1993.

their young girls responsible for the "upbringing" of their own "daughters" employed the *docendo discimus* pedagogical technique, which literally means, "by teaching, we learn." D'Alq explains that "[l'enfant] punit [la poupée] ou la récompense, l'embrasse, l'exile ou l'emprisonne, selon que la poupée a bien ou mal agi; il lui impose la discipline qu'il reçoit" (234). With these new technological developments in the toy industry at the turn of the twentieth-century, French leisure-class *filles à marier* were given the opportunity to reward, punish, correct and practice the different postures and gestures that they, themselves, were in the process of mastering.

According to Hugues Leroux and Louise d'Alq, a moral and respectable upbringing should not be directed at materialistic accumulations of wealth. Instead, mothers must raise moral, polite, and humble daughters who will uphold French *politesse* in their own households. The true, well-mannered reader must master all of the rules of physical deference—flashy, ostentatious jewels, clothing, carriages and salons, then, count for very little.

Another equally pressing concern of Louise d'Alq was the sexual purity of the *filles à marier* of the leisure-classes. It is no surprise that we find within these etiquette manuals lamentations of lost decency. As we have seen, polite physicality included considerations of gender. In the system of French *savoir-vivre,* men performed the gestures of deference towards women, granting them the "upper hand," as it were, in gestural exchanges. Although Louise d'Alq feels that physical training is a vital form of education for young Frenchwomen, she also worries that this training is contributing to the loss of sexual purity in polite physicality. She fears that the gestures and postures being naturalized are too posed, too fake. By teaching them to their daughters, mothers

run the risk of completely destroying a girl's naturally-occurring feelings of modesty and timidity: "c'est bien que cette éducation, cependant si nécessaire, enlève à nos jeunes filles la vraie timidité, la pudeur, la décence! Leurs manières deviennent plus aisées, moins gauches, c'est vrai, mais aussi plus libres et moins modestes" (D'Alq, *Nouveau Savoir-vivre,* 182). D'Alq develops the importance of decency and modesty throughout her works, though she seems to shy away from her ambiguous feelings about whether or not training young women to physically perform gestures of French *politesse* is beneficial or detrimental to the girl's morality. She does, however, require that young women at least make an effort to project an exterior that communicates sexual purity to onlookers.

In a long list of *faux pas,* D'Alq highlights specific gestural exchanges that must be finely tuned if a girl is to remain in control of her reputation. Sitting, standing, shaking hands, walking—all actions done in the presence of a man who is not in her immediate family (this included cousins, who were seen as potential threats to her sexual reputation) needed to be tightly controlled. For example, "Une femme, qu'elle soit dans un endroit public ou dans son salon, ne se lèvera pas pour accueillir un homme […] Engager un homme à s'asseoir auprès de soi dans une promenade publique, ou bien à prolonger sa visite dans un salon, c'est lui faire une avance, c'est lui témoigner le désir de jouir plus longtemps de sa société" (216). In a similar vein, D'Alq reminds her reader: "En visite, une femme fera attention de ne pas sortir en même temps qu'un visiteur, afin de ne pas donner prise à la médisance" (83). Handshakes, too, were to be carefully regulated in their execution. As we saw above, women offered the backs of their hands to men—but no other movements must be made after that point. Once a woman offered her hand, it was up to the man to take it and to lightly brush his lips against the back.

D'Alq explains: "Une jeune fille ou une jeune femme ne doit pas presser la main d'un jeune homme" (128). Should a woman grip a man's hand while he was kissing hers, both would understand it as a sexual invitation. Squeezing the hand of a male intergestulator was seen as a non-verbal form of flirtation, and onlookers were liable to get the wrong idea. If a young woman was to be taken seriously—that is, if she was to be deemed respectable by her social peers—outward appearances of modesty and prudence when in the company of the opposite sex were absolutely mandatory.

VIII. *Francité faite corps*

As we have seen here, in turn of the twentieth century France, polite physicality was primarily concerned with gestural demonstrations of deference and respect. The ideals inscribed on the *fille à marier*'s body——deference, self-sacrifice, and mutual respect—acted as a unifying cultural form of French patriotic character in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. One could take a sort of patriotic honor in having acquired a firm education in French *savoir-vivre* and polite physicality. The shared structures of physical deference expressed by the moving bodies of the French expressed a common set of values. Following shared codes of conduct was a way for people to practice their Frenchness in everyday life, joining with their fellows across class lines and showing that very old, traditional, and at times Ancien Régime manners still held cultural weight in late nineteenth-century France.

Distinguishing French *savoir-vivre* from that of foreign communities, Louise d'Alq dedicates an entire chapter of her *Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884) to what

she calls “Le Savoir-vivre cosmopolite.” Directed at those readers who were apt to travel abroad at the end of the nineteenth century, d’Alq delineates polite physicalities in England, the United States, Germany, Sweden, Russia, Italy, Spain, Poland, Austria, China, Turkey, and Belgium. In the introduction to her chapter, d’Alq explains differences in English and French traditions when entering a dining room:

> Un Anglais donnant le bras à une femme pour passer dans la salle à manger, la fait entrer la première, tandis que nous avons adopté l’usage contraire, ne serait-ce pas par la juste raison qu’un cavalier doit être toujours prêt à écarter tout obstacle imprévu. Chez nos voisins, c’est la prééminence qui décide la question. Le droit de préséance, obéissant à des règles de hiérarchie inflexible, règne dans tous les rangs de la société anglaise ; ce n’est pas la femme qu’on laisse passer la première, mais le titre qu’elle porte. (D’Alq, 191)

Here, D’Alq highlights the fact that in each culture, the body moves in contextualized fashions proper to national tradition. Englishmen, for example, ask ladies to enter first, showing respect by waiting for them to cross through the doors of the dining room. In the French tradition, however, in accordance with a long-standing *chevaleresque* custom that men enter a room first to scout for potential danger, the men precede the women. As D’Alq demonstrates for her reader, people from Sweden and Finland rub noses instead of shanking hands when greeting acquaintances, and “en Orient les juifs témoignaient de leur désespoir à la mort d’un des leurs en déchirant leurs vêtements, et que la longueur de la déchirure dénonçait l’intensité de leurs regrets" (188). The French, therefore, had a unique code of conduct called *politesse,* and this code was recognizable, promotable, and

learnable. Promulgating French customs, therefore, involved the training of the French body in the French tradition.

In her 1864 manual, *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes,* Mathilde Bourdon explains that this French form of physicality is, in fact, part and parcel of *being* French—not just Catholic, not just European, not just "civilized"—but *civilisé.* Bourdon calls upon the famous words of Madame de Maintenon—second wife to Louis XIV and founder of the school for impoverished noble girls, the Maison royale de Saint-Louis—to reinforce the long-standing, French character of *savoir-vivre*:

> Il faut se contraindre pour ne pas faire souffrir les autres ; il faut se taire quand on voudrait parler ; il faut parler quand on voudrait se taire ; il faut s'accommoder aux goûts des autres, et, en un mot, tout ce qu'on vous dit des égards, de la politesse, du savoir-vivre, de l'occupation des autres, tout cela *en bon français* est de savoir se contraindre. (Bourdon, 79-80, original emphasis)

The narrator provides an exceptional lack of identifying features (via Maintenon) in the above passage. Here, Madame de Maintenon uses the most generalizing subjects possible to reinforce the fact that *politesse* is French—not just aristocratic or bourgeois, not just Catholic or just secular, but *of France* as a unified nation. The impersonal subject pronoun "il" is paired up with the verb "falloir" to demonstrate the necessity of this physical training, and is then directly followed by the impersonal pronoun "se" to reinforce the universality of these prescriptions. These actions are to be directed back at the body—the physical "se"—and constitute a foundational part of a collective, traditional, French system of manners.

Politesse is something that should be learned and practiced by French people. One's economic position held in French society is not the sole measure of class, elegance and poise. Rather, the ability to recognize and react to different circumstances—the embodied knowledge acquired over years of ritualized repetition of gestures and postures—is the true measure of manners, *savoir-vivre,* and on a larger scale, Frenchness—or, *francité*. Physical expressions of *politesse* and *civilité*—in short, the movements of civilized French conduct— were read through the body movements of female youth and reflected a family's respectability. Catholic schoolgirls and daughters of society women alike were being trained to show respect for their elders in a way particular to France. Writers were aware of this as the nineteenth-century drew to a close—and had things to say about it. Mothers and daughters heard advice from Catholic educators, journalists, authors of etiquette manuals, and politicians alike—and all agreed that manners, and polite physicality in particular, was an important, yet non-verbal, expression of *francité*. Parents were implored from all sides to raise their children to embody these codes of conduct, but what, exactly, were these movements? What did the well-mannered way of moving through the French *fin-de-siècle* look like? The following chapter seeks to illustrate and catalogue the specific gestures and postures that leisure class *filles à marier* repeatedly performed in their daily lives.

Chapter Two: Moving Through the *fin de siècle*: Bodily Functions to *Arts d'agrément*

I. Introduction

Polite physicality in France existed as a highly stratified, yet patriotically unifying, form of education at the dawn of the twentieth century. Knowing how move was a highly complicated skill that needed to be performed quickly enough so as to appear 'natural' to onlookers. That is, postures and gestures were repeated over time in an effort to reduce the need for cognitive direction and to encourage the body to react to a great deal of information more quickly than cognitive processes would allow. In this chapter, I turn to specific examples of ritualization that were employed primarily in familial and social settings. These behaviors were at the core of an intimate familial pedagogy proffered mainly by mothers of young French *filles à marier* with the hope of imparting the embodied knowledge they would need to navigate the social waters of their day. This embodied knowledge, once habitualized, was something quite separate from the conscious, intellectual decision making process. I will move from the sedentary to the mobile throughout this chapter, starting first with the controlling of bodily functions and knee-jerk reactions, then moving on to discuss posturing, gesturing, speaking, walking, performing the feminine *arts d'agrément,* and finally what I call "homofamilial apprenticeship"—that is, the synthesis of the above movements performed before the watchful mother's eye. By looking carefully at how body posturing is a learned and practiced art, we can think about how the body itself—and not simply the sartorial

adornments so carefully described by nineteenth-century authors like Balzac, Stendhal, Hugo and Zola—was, indeed, a powerful social marker and the contested site of evolving gender roles.

The authors discussed in the previous chapter speak very highly of physical training in their prescriptions of French *politesse.* In 1896, for example, the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes describe the *enfant bien élevé* as the product of parents' attention to minute details over the course of the child's physical upbringing: "Ses parents et ses maîtres n'ont rien négligé pour qu'il ait une physionomie heureuse: ils l'ont repris chaque fois qu'il faisait une grimace ou qu'il imitait les traits de personnes peu convenables" (16). Louise d'Alq also expresses the need for parents to regulate all of their child's body movements in her book *Notes d'une mère : cours d'éducation maternelle* (1883): "l'éducation physique des enfants mérite autant d'attention que celle de leur intelligence" (59). In her book *Le Savoir-vivre dans la vie ordinaire et dans les cérémonies* (1878), Catholic social commentator Ermance Dufaux reinforces the necessity of starting this training early on in the child's development. She argues that the ritualization of specific postures and gestures works best at a young age because, at this stage, children are highly susceptible to new information, and are mighty fond of games of mimicry. Indeed, "s'il est des enseignements que l'enfant est susceptible de recevoir dès le berceau, ce sont sans contredit ceux du savoir-vivre" (25). Polite physicality was most certainly not to be overlooked if these important social markers were to become part of the child's muscle memory. This embodied knowledge would later serve as a social marker, alerting onlookers that the individual's family was of the leisure class. The inculcation of polite physicality required sufficient amounts of time spent not working, but partaking in

leisurely activities such as afternoon tea and piano lessons. These young women of the French leisure classes had hours each day to spend practicing their table manners, their conversation skills, the *arts d'agrément,* et cetera.

As Baronne Staffe explains in *Usages du monde: règles du savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891)*,* the physical training received at this age becomes engrained in the child's muscle memory, becoming naturalized, habitualized—in short, ritualized. She speaks of the different "mouvements naturels *presque inconscients*" that young French *filles à marier* are required to perform on a daily basis (279). This specific skill set is held not in the cognitive mind, rather in the body itself and is a point of interest for social historians, anthropologists, and ritual studies specialists such as Ronald L. Grimes, author of *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (1982), founder of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* and director of *Ritual Studies International*. In a 2012 article "The Ritualization of Moving and Learning," Grimes explains that embodied knowledge is not the same as intellectual knowledge. Instead:

> Embodied knowing is what in English we call 'know-how.' Know-how enables you to balance a bike or put on your clothes without having to think. Embodied knowing is what enables you to type without pronouncing words in your mind. Embodied knowing is what enables a musician to play an entire concert without ever looking at a page. (Grimes, 2012:87)

What did this embodied knowledge entail for those who were trained in accordance with these *fin de siècle* etiquette manuals? What different forms of 'know-how' existed at the

turn of the twentieth century that historians of France have yet to fully uncover? How did these women embody the unique character of the *fin de siècle*?

II. Fighting Against Fidgeting and Holding it in: Lessons on Controlling the Body in *fin de siècle* Paris

Starting with prescriptions found in late 19th century French etiquette manuals on how to control the stationary body, let us now turn to considerations of naturally occurring body movements such as sneezing, coughing, burping, and fidgeting. Being able to control the animalistic qualities of the human body was the most basic skill involved with polite physicality—a sort of *politesse* 101. In *The Civilizing Process, Vol I: The History of Manners* (1939), Norbert Elias argues that the monitoring of bodily functions constitutes a measurable, changing, and therefore historical force that can be analyzed in juxtaposition with larger societal value systems. To do so, he combs through a number of etiquette manuals dating from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Elias finds that, over time, greater control over bodily functions becomes the norm. E. Doyle McCarthy succinctly summarizes Elias's work: "Central to this transformation [of manners] were decisive changes in the feeling of shame, repugnance and embarrassment that attended a wide range of human bodily functions such as eating, spitting, nose-blowing, urinating and defecating." Polite physicality was concerned as much with concealing socially unacceptable by-products of the human animal's existence as it was with the motions packed with cultural meaning. Others must always feel at ease—often at the expense of the individual's physical comfort.

It was never too early to begin training the body. One such aspect of a child's stationary existence that concerned the authors analyzed here was the holding of the "regard"—the gaze. Children should not dart their eyes around the room, nor should they turn their heads too quickly in the street. Similarly, a child's eyes must be opened just enough to see the people around her—not so far open as to seem stunned, nor so far shut as to seem bored. The Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes confirm in their 1896 text *L'Enfant bien-élevé* that the gaze of the *enfant bien élevé* is: "habituellement calme, doux, respectueux. Il tient les yeux suffisamment ouverts pour distinguer les objets et ne pas s'exposer à des méprises" (Frères, 18). The gaze of the *enfant bien élevé* is neither shifty nor lingering, but rather a regulated in-between—a happy medium that is advocated in many other gestural contexts such as dancing, walking, laughing and speaking. As the Frères mention a few pages later in their text, the *enfant bien élevé* "ne rit pas avec éclat, sinon en de rares occasions où il ne peut s'en empêcher, et alors même il ne rit jamais, comme on dit, 'à gorge déployée'" (24). Making too much noise was certainly seen as inappropriate, but frigidity was just as unbecoming. As we have seen with the gaze, laughter was meant to occupy a middle ground, a *juste-milieu* of sound and expression that encompassed all physical movements.

Ermance Dufaux instructs her readers to eat as silently as possible, as the noises made within the oral cavity are disturbing to others. She notes: "En mangeant, ne faites jamais de bruit ni avec vos lèvres ni avec vos mâchoires, et surtout mangez avec une extrême propreté" (213). Similarly, one should never make gulping or slurping noises when drinking: "On doit boire lentement, ne pas faire de bruit avec son gosier en buvant, s'essuyer la bouche après avoir bu" (Dufaux, 216). In both cases, noise and cleanliness

seem to be the most important questions when dining—and these are both, *en bon français,* concerned with not disturbing or disgusting one's company. Polite physicality in the *fin de siècle* was first and foremost a demonstration of concern for the comfort of one's intergestulator. Exposure to reminders of the "unclean" or the "brute" nature of human embodiment was precisely what French *politesse* sought to avoid.

Baronne Staffe describes poorly raised children as constantly fidgeting with different body parts, occupying their hands with dirt, grime, and various bodily secretions that disgust the people around them. In *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891), we see that: "ces personnes cureront leurs dents, se nettoieront les oreilles, couperont leurs ongles, s'essuieront le cou en votre présence, oubliant qu'on ne peut se livrer à ces soins de sa personne que loin des regards, dans l'inviolable cabinet de toilette" (345). Separating those movements of the body that are performed for the sake of others, but certainly not in the presence of others, represented an important element of a French *fille à marier*'s upbringing.

The Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes develop this notion in great detail. In *L'Enfant bien élevé* (1896), the Frères spend entire chapters categorizing and describing in minute detail the proper way for a child to interact with his or her body. Sub-section titles include: "Maintien de la tête," "Des cheveux," "Bienséances relatives au visage, au nez, etc.," "Bienséances relatives à la bouche," and "La Physionomie" (which they define as "l'ensemble des traits du visage" (5). In the passage concerning polite physicality *vis à vis* the nose and nasal cavity, the Frères spend two and a half pages discussing this one part of the child's face. As they explain, there are numerous "règles de la bienséance relatives à l'organe de l'odorat. [L'enfant bien élevé] évite de porter les doigts aux

narines, parce que c'est répugnant et peut produire une irritation. Il est également attentif à ne point renifler, nasiller, grimacer du nez, ou plutôt à ne contracter au sujet de cet organe aucun tic, aucune habitude messéante " (13).

The rise of the leisure classes of the nineteenth century was a strong catalyst for the developing concern with polite physicality. Towards the end of the *grand siècle,* members of the leisure classes demonstrated the new and numerous stratifications within the bourgeoisie itself, and their efforts were performed at the site of the body in gestural exchanges. In this way, concealment of functions and secretions that reminded the intergestulator of the human body's animality became a part of the *vie quotidienne* of polite society.

III. Posing Politely: Postures of the *Belle Époque*

Appropriate posturing of the body occupied a large amount of space in the etiquette manuals discussed here. These etiquette experts considered posturing to be one of the most prominent markers of social status, of a proper familial education, and of a virtuous character. Baronne Staffe even recommends that parents pay attention to, and correct, the positions in which their children sleep at night. Instead of allowing the child to spread out on the bed, parents are encouraged to guide their children's limbs into a more closed, tight position. This is, according to Staffe, an excellent way to train the body so that a stiff, straight posture will, over time, come to feel "natural." If ritualized—that is, repeated on a daily (or, rather, nightly) basis—the children's postures will reflect a proper, physical education: "Il vaudrait mieux recommander [aux enfants] de tenir les

coudes au corps, quand ils marchent et qu'ils sont au repos. Ce mouvement redresse naturellement et exclue toute raideur, quand on en fait une habitude d'enfance" (110). The alignment of the spine and limbs, therefore, should be a concern whether the child is mobile or at rest. The Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes recommend that children stretch out in a straight line, leaning a bit to the side: "Sois également attentive à ta tenue quand tu te couches pour le repos de la nuit. Étends-toi tout de ton long, en inclinant un peu sur le côté droit, car c'est la position la plus convenable et qui favorise le mieux le sommeil " (8). Posture can—and should—be trained at night, according to Staffe and the Frères, by keeping the resting body in a straight position.

Staffe also expresses the need for mothers to correct the way her children sit and stand during their waking hours. As she confirms in *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891), "Les mères ont raison de dire à leurs enfants: "Tenez-vous bien, tenez-vous droits." L'attitude affaissée, indice de la nonchalance, du laisser-aller, finirait par les conduire à l'oubli de toute dignité et à la paresse. *L'habitude de se redresser,* lorsqu'on s'est laissé aller involontairement à une pose abandonnée, amène tout doucement à prendre un certain *empire sur soi-même*" (109, emphasis mine). It is important to recall, however, that polite physicality is most definitely not rigid, stiff, or cold. It is certainly not the total absence of gesturing or facial expressions; instead, it is the precise and detailed skill of recognizing the level of propriety involved in an infinite number of unique circumstances. As Staffe explains, "L'idéal du maintien, pour certaines personnes, c'est le corps droit, sans inflexion d'aucune sorte, l'absence complète du geste, l'impassibilité olympienne ou marmoréenne du visage. Les gens véritablement bien élevés le comprennent autrement" (105). Julia Daudet, in her 1892

memoire, *L'Enfance d'une parisienne*, recognizes this ambiguity and highlights the difficulty of finding the coveted "happy medium" in gestural exchanges. She admits that the posturing of the *fille à marier'*s body can communicate a certain flavor of narcissism, noting that the girl seems to "dire à chaque instant par sa pose: Regardez-moi, je suis belle!" but Daudet also maintains that this can be done *politely* (256). So long as the body is postured "tacitement avec la virginale effronterie d'une demoiselle bien élevée," self-confidence remains a desirable quality in a respectable young woman (256).

Mathilde Bourdon deems necessary an intricate balance between gestural rigidness and laxity. It is the task of the *fille à marier* to find and execute the *juste milieu* specific to her circumstances: "Une personne modeste évitera également la raideur orgueilleuse et la molle négligence. Son attitude sera simple et *naturelle*" (Bourdon, 79, emphasis mine). Well-raised girls knew how to execute polite physicality, putting equal amounts of unseen effort into avoiding "prideful rigidity" and "weak negligence." However, as these authors repeat time and time again, they should certainly not have to *think* cognitively about their body movements. If the prescriptions had, indeed, been acted out in daily life, they would have been naturalized and internalized. One of the fundamental goals of the authors analyzed in this chapter was to encourage a system of physical training for girls and boys over the course of their childhood that would render the postures and gestures advocated therein a reactive function of the body's muscle memory. To avoid bodily movements that could be seen as "gauches," French *filles à marier* had to execute their gestures without pause. It was crucial for them to be capable of instantaneously reacting with their bodies properly to constantly changing social circumstances.

The seated pose, in particular, carried significant weight as a visual social marker of the leisure class. Young women of the French elite in Third Republic did not cross their legs at the knee. Their knees were most certainly kept together, though this posture was most commonly maintained by crossing the ankles. As Mathilde Bourdon demonstrates in *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864), the well-raised Frenchwoman "ne croisera pas les jambes, et ses pieds ne seront pas, comme ceux des enfants, dans un mouvement perpétuel" (179). By crossing their feet at the ankle, women of the Third Republic were able to sustain a posture that was calm, composed, virtuous, and stationary.

In 1947, American film producers Edward Kingsley and Arthur Mayer created a full-length film out of snippets of recordings of Parisian life dating from 1900 to about 1914. The documentary, entitled "*Paris 1900: A Re-creation of La Belle Époque*" includes footage of one of the salon *visites* described so thoroughly by the authors of etiquette manuals cited in this chapter. When the newly arrived guest enters the room, we see that the young woman in the left of the screen stands up and cedes her seat to the newcomer. Just after the new guest sits down, we are witness to a slight self-correction when the woman glances at the camera and remembers that her poses are being recorded. At 9:05 we see this woman sit down and immediately cross her legs at the knee—not at the ankle, which was considered representative of a proper physical education. At 9:10 she glances to her right, sees the camera, recognizes the impropriety of her posture, and corrects herself by uncrossing her legs at the knee and bringing her ankles together, covering her mistake with a stole. It takes her about a half a second to self-correct, but to the well-trained eye of Mathilde Bourdon's audience who are aware that the proper

Frenchwoman “ne croisera pas les jambes,” this woman’s physicality would seem "gauche" indeed (79). As the film’s narrator makes explicit: “If we are among intimate friends, we can let ourselves go a little—without going so far as to cross our legs in public” Paris 1900, 9:03-9:10).

In the film footage of turn-of-the-twentieth-century France in Paris 1900, we also see that these women tended to keep their elbows bent and their wrists slack. This posture helped to communicate their economic status, as bent wrists and extended elbows were only possible for those not carrying packages or holding onto any children. Specific accessories were habitually employed to encourage this position, including muffs (seen in the above film footage), parasols and éventails (see figure 1). Baronne Staffe states that "En hiver [la femme bien-élevée] a le manchon, en été l’ombrelle; voilà de quoi lui ‘donner une contenance’" (107). These objects served as pedagogical realia in the kinesthetic (or “hands-on”) learning process, giving the body physical cues and redressing the elbows and wrists back to their proper, light and graceful positions. Indeed, "Pour une femme, les bras seront repliés à hauteur de la ceinture, mouvement voulu pour porter l’ombrelle, toutes les menues choses dont elle est toujours embarrassée" (108). The image below illustrates the unique manner in which bourgeois women were trained to hold their arms. The men in this photograph of the 1900 Exposition Universelle held their arms more or less straight or linked behind the back, sometimes moved with the aid of a walking stick or an umbrella (not to be confused with an ‘ombrelle’—parasol). The


Figure 1. Exposition Universelle de Paris, 1900. Pont Alexandre III.

women, on the other hand, keep their elbows slightly bent and facing outward, their inner-elbows pointing straight ahead.

In figure 2, we see a group of upper class Frenchwomen attending the races at Auteuil in 1911. The women in the photograph were all employing a polite physicality that communicated a certain level of education, upbringing, and therefore social status. However, unlike the postures employed in figure 1 below, the women in figure 2 were not using any of the aforementioned kinesthetic realia. In fact, two of the three women pictured below were carrying small purses that weighed down their right arms. However, they still managed to hold their arms bent slightly at the elbows. Their necks were straight up, their shoulders rolled back, and they kept their legs placed relatively close together.

All of these minute considerations of posture exemplify the physical, ritual and embodied knowledge that was the somatic by-product of years spent perfecting the skills of grace and poise at home and *en société*.

For girls growing up in households in which the prescriptions of authors like d'Alq, Staffe and Dufaux were closely followed, polite posturing consisted of keeping their knees together (but not crossed), bending the arm ever so slightly at the elbow, keeping the wrists slack, and above all finding the *juste milieu* between rigidity and *laisser-aller.*

Figure 2. Paris, Auteuil Races, 1911.

What, then, did the posture of a working class or a not-so-virtuous woman look like? How did it differ from that of upper class women? How were different physicalities adopted and spread, crossing class lines along the way? These questions pertaining to change or persistence of female physicalities over time remain fundamentally linked to the concept of embodied knowledge that is itself a by-product of ritualization. It is my view that both ritual (the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine*, for example) and ritualization (daily body movements) have the capacity to undergo—and sometimes even create—changes that affect historical physicalities.

IV. Good Girl Gestures: "Knowing" Her Place

Turning now to more dynamic body movements, I will briefly introduce some of the gestures prescribed by the authors examined in this chapter, introducing a few specific examples that demonstrate the highly detailed embodied knowledge that young *filles à marier* displayed as they navigated the new social climate in *Belle Époque* France. I highlight selected gestures here in order to prepare my reader to think critically about their performances and subversions as seen at the *bal blanc* and at the *fête de la Sainte Catherine.*

Louise d'Alq in her 1874 *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* cites Luke chapter fourteen, verse eleven to remind her reader that "*Celui qui s'abaisse, sera élevé*" (49). Physical demonstrations of deference were most certainly not limited to the lower classes. Instead, deference was an attitude to be adopted by everyone in one set of circumstances or another. French *politesse* was a groomed skill—developed over time

by the ritualized repetition of signifying acts—that was infinitely more concerned with "reading and responding" to one's status within a given group of people than it was with being on the receiving end of physical signs of deference.

This notion of "reading and responding" within the intergestural exchange remained an essential factor for Louise d'Alq when writing the updated *Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* ten years later, in 1884. In a quip geared towards a woman who remains unnamed in the text itself, D'Alq narrates an anecdote about the laughable lady who thought herself a master of *politesse,* but who was, in fact, a master of nothing but mere mimicry:

> J'entendais, un jour, une femme qui avait beaucoup de motifs pour se croire un personnage, dire qu'elle avait le talent de rendre *exactement* le même salut qu'on lui faisait ; c'est-à-dire on lui faisait une inclination de tête, elle rendait une inclination ; si c'était une révérence, c'était une révérence qu'on avait d'elle. […] mais il ne faut pas *copier* le salut en lui-même, et parce qu'une personne sera vulgaire ou ignorera les usages, faire comme elle. (D'Alq, 127)

It was not the task of the French *fille à marier* to simply observe and repeat in a scholastic manner. Were this the only task involved with learning polite physicality, then mere observational learning (that is, rote learning by simply watching others) would be adequate. Instead, as we have seen here, kinesthetic learning—learning by doing, learning via repeated executions of contextualized acts, learning by categorizing proprioceptive stimuli (that is, stimuli pertaining to the awareness of body postures and

movements) —is necessary if one is to fully master the embodied knowledge laid forth by the likes of Louise d'Alq. Being truly polite required discernment, decoding and recoding tact.

This embodied skill played a vital role in determining which outward expressions of emotion were appropriate to the present set of circumstances. One's focus need not solely be on hiding emotions, gut reactions or exclamations, but rather should focus on "harmonizing" these movements with the situation. In *Usages du monde: règles du savoir-vivre dans la société moderne,* (1891) Baronne Staffe explains that "un mouvement *vrai* de la main, du buste, de la tête, n'ont rien qui motive une interdiction, lorsqu'ils sont *naturels,* lorsqu'ils *s'harmonisent* au discours, à l'incident, à l'événement" (106, emphasis in original text). Indeed, the rules for polite physicality delineated in these etiquette manuals "ne prescrivent qu'une seule chose: ne pas gesticuler à tout propos et hors de propos" (105). A finely tuned understanding of social context is of the utmost importance to *savoir-vivre* and *politesse.*

As if the critical reading of an intergestulator's social position were not enough information to coordinate, these etiquette manuals were continuously updated, republished and refined (for example, the 1891 copy of Staffe's *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* cited in this dissertation is the book's 24th edition). Certain gestures changed minutely, yet held the same meaning. Others were seen as 'passé.' The curtsey, for example, occupied an ambiguous middle ground at the turn of the twentieth century in Parisian upper-class society. Some saw it as utterly outdated and, therefore, inappropriate and awkward. Others lamented the loss of the curtsey and praised the 'vraies dames' who still instinctively curtsied out of pure habit.

Still others thought that this gesture remained appropriate, as long as it was limited to circumstances of ceremonial ritual.

Let us consider Louise d'Alq's detailed illustration of the properly executed curtsey. In her description, the curtsey of the *fin de siècle* was most certainly not the exaggerated bow seen in little girls who point their knees outward, cross their ankles, grab hold of their skirts and bend all the way down. Instead, the curtsey was a more slight and delicate movement:

> Le salut le plus gracieux pour une femme ou une fille, assise ou debout, et qu'il est facile de modifier suivant le degré cordial qu'on veut lui accorder, est de présenter le buste en avant, en effaçant les épaules et redressant la tête. On l'accompagne généralement, lorsqu'on est debout, d'un mouvement des jambes que l'on apprend aux cours de danse, en même temps que de la génuflexion indispensable à une révérence bien faite. (Louise d'Alq, *NSV,* 131-32)

The postures of the women at the 1911 Auteuil races shown in figure 2 illustrate the prescription to "present the bust straight forward, erasing the shoulders and straightening the head." It is also worth noting that proper upper-class women executed the curtsey with the motion originating from the knees, not from the waist. No matter the décolletage, bending over and baring one's bosom was not desired: "l'inclination du corps en avant est roturière et peu gracieuse" (D'Alq, *Nouveau savoir-vivre universel,* 131). No longer used in everyday gestural exchanges, the dramatically performed curtsey was losing popularity at the end of the nineteenth century. On its way out, the curtsey passed into the realm of the ceremonial ritual, signaling the shift of this gesture

from the ordinary to the extraordinary, its meaning heightened at the moment of ritual. D'Alq reveals that "pour les femmes, la révérence est passée de mode dans les relations *ordinaires* du monde […] [elle] est restée le salut de gala; mais ce n'est plus une révérence courte, guindée, sautillante, friponne, c'est la grande révérence du menuet" (131). Emile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1878) defines the adjectival phrase "de gala" as that which "se dit des fêtes, des réjouissances des particuliers" and as "un repas splendide" (1,817). At the turn of the twentieth century, the curtsey has moved out of the realm of the 'ordinaire' and into the realm of the 'gala.'

Louise d'Alq argues in her prescriptive texts that the head-nod is conspicuous and overly personal. It was form of laziness and implied a lack of respect for others. Others considered the head-nod so familiar a gesture as to assume a sexual relationship between two intergestulators of the opposite sex. Whatever the case may be, signaling to others with a slight curve of the neck was a boorish external sign of a poor upbringing. Indeed, "Le signe de tête est le type de la vulgarité; une personne distinguée ne le fait même pas vis-à-vis de sa subordonnée" (D'Alq, 131). The head-nod was too slight, too difficult to analyze to be considered appropriate. The audience needed to be aware of intentions at all times, and slight head movements between two people were identifiable only with great difficulty, leaving observers endless opportunities for speculation.

As we have seen, offering the back of the hand was the proper way for a Frenchwoman to execute a handshake. D'Alq notes in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884), once the decision had been made that such a public demonstration of familiarity was indeed appropriate, the handshake was to be executed confidently, amicably and affectionately: "Lorsqu'on est assez familier pour se toucher la main, c'est qu'on éprouve

suffisamment d'amitié l'un pour l'autre pour le faire avec cordialité" (128). However, there was a proper way to execute the handshake in the presence of men, and yet another method of action in exclusively feminine company.

There existed in the upper echelons of female French society a specific type of handshake between society women. As Louise d'Alq demonstrates in *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874): "c'est toujours la main gauche que l'on offre; c'est bien à tort que beaucoup de personnes pensent qu'il est préférable de donner la droite" (98). Returning to the video of the female intergestural exchange set in the Parisian salon in the film Paris 1900, we witness, at 8:50, the newly-arrived guest offer her hostess her left hand, providing visual evidence that this particular handshake, prescribed by d'Alq was, indeed, a recognized form of polite physicality in late nineteenth-century France. As the film's narrator confirms: "It is up to date to offer the left hand to a female acquaintance who offers you her right. This is, of course, something a lady should never do in the presence of a gentleman" (8:54-9:02).

Figure 3 below provides a snapshot of women performing the handshake—this time, however, in the presence of men. Here, it is simply the right hand that is both extended and accepted in the exchange. Women could lead each other around the room while locking forearms, as we can see at center-left of figure 3, but the handshake itself was 'reset,' if you will, to its most generalized variety (as seen in the exchange between the two women in the right half of the frame).

Upon completion of the curtsey or the handshake, those present must consider who should sit where, who should sit first, or if anyone should sit at all. Clearly, those with a higher social station should be seated first, following the main rule of French

politesse: make the other as comfortable as possible, employing methods of self-effacement if necessary. As d'Alq clearly states in *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874): "Un inférieur ne s'assiéra pas devant son supérieur avant que celui-ci ne l'y engage fortement" (45-46).

Figure 3. Paris, 19-? Photographer unknown.

It was most certainly not the man of the house who dictated seating arrangements. Although he sat at the head of the table, it was the *maîtresse de la maison* who instructed him to sit there—and when. Upon the entrance of the guests, all persons present stood to welcome the new arrivals. In *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884), D'Alq reminds her readers that "Il ne convient pas de s'asseoir avant que son visiteur ne soit assis lui-même" (311). From the guest's perspective, too, it was the woman of the house—not the man—who was the director of affairs: "En entrant dans un salon, vous saluerez *la*

maîtresse de la maison, vous vous assiérez sur le siège qu'elle vous indique" (Bourdon, *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes,* 58). Today, the French custom of detailing in advance a proper "plan de table" represents a remnant of past rituals. As a sort of ritual legacy, approaching the dinner table in a French home today is reminiscent of the scene described by Bourdon—heads still turn to the "maîtresse de la maison" as guests wait patiently to be told where to sit. Once the visit was under way, however, the power to stand up and leave shifted back to the hands of the guests. Only after an appropriate amount of time had passed (that is, in relation to the type of visit in which one participated) could the guest make his or her apologies and begin the ritual movements of ending the social encounter. The time allotted to different types of rendezvous varied greatly—from short chats "[qui] ne doivent jamais être longues; un quart d'heure à vingt minutes [étant] une durée moyenne" (D'Alq, *Nouveau savoir-vivre*, 121) to multi-course diner parties to *soirées dansantes* that could very well last until sunrise. No matter how long the encounter, though, the guest "juge devoir mettre un terme à sa visite; l'hôte, au contraire, reste assis, ne paraît se décider que difficilement à se lever, afin d'essayer de retenir son visiteur. Il se lève, comme à regret, pour l'accompagner" (311). This is certainly not to say that the hosts were confined to their seats during a *soirée dansante* or a ball, rather they were bound to the rule that requires them to appear (with the help of their posturing and gesturing, of course) hospitable, welcoming, and to derive perceivable pleasure from their guests' company. Either way, the gesture of getting up and signalling to the host that the visit had come to an end was one that had to be learned over time—repetitively, actively and continuously.

V. A Total-Body Task: Figuring Out the Physical Act of Speaking

"Laissez à votre bouche sa forme naturelle. Tenez-la habituellement fermée, sans pincer les lèvres ni serrer les dents; veillez à en pas l'avoir ouverte ou béante, ce qui vous donnerai un air niais" (Frères, 15). In speaking, as in posturing and gesturing, turn-of-the-century *savoir-vivre* was an eternal quest for the *juste milieu.* The jaw was neither clenched nor gaping, but rather calmly closed. Once the signal had been given by circumstance and invitation, the verbal act became yet another balancing act—the sound of one's voice should come through clearly, neither too loudly nor too softly. As the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes explain, "[l'enfant bien-élevé] desserre assez les dents pour ne point gêner la prononciation; il évite de parler du gosier et de nasiller; il ne fait point non plus ce qu'on appelle petite bouche, et qui n'est que grimace et fatuité" (Frères, 21). To speak properly, the *enfant bien–élevé* had to control his or her voice from the diaphragm (a common warm-up exercise for vocal training in both soloists and choral ensembles) to ensure that sound came through at the forehead and not the throat (gosier) or the nasal cavity.

Facial expressions clearly denoted the level of interest of a listener, as did fidgeting and yawning. Ermance Dufaux suggests in *Le Savoir-vivre dans la vie ordinaire et dans les cérémonies* (1893): "Regardez avec calme la personne qui parle, puis répondez. Ayez cette expression légèrement méditative, qui dénote une attention impartiale et réfléchie. Sans avoir ni bougé, ni parlé, vous compterez déjà pour un auditeur intelligent et sûr de soi" (116). As with all things *politesse,* self-effacement and complete concern for the other's comfort was the primary goal. Indeed, learning to "hold

one's tongue," to not interrupt, and to always visually demonstrate an interest in the other's anecdote constituted key lessons in sociability in the nineteenth-century household. Baronne Staffe describes the ideal young woman and her physicality: "Elle ne bâille pas en écoutant un interlocuteur ennuyeux; elle a la patience d'entendre deux fois la même anecdote, de sourire deux fois au même bon mot, d'accorder son attention aux récits les plus prosaïques" (273). In brief, the physical act of speaking followed the same requirements as any other mode of polite physical expression—always pay attention to the moods and desires of the other person, and conform your physicality to meet those needs. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that fidgeting during a conversation was regarded as indicative of a person's poor level of upbringing: "On doit aussi se corriger soigneusement de la mauvaise habitude, si on l'a, de toucher en causant, à ce que tombe sous la main." (D'Alq, *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel*, 207-208). Louise d'Alq was not alone in this opinion. Mathilde Bourdon also warns against nervously gesticulating while speaking. In *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864), she cautions female readers: "ne faites pas de gestes en parlant, et surtout ne touchez ni la main, ni le bras de ceux avec qui vous causez, ne vous regardez pas plus dans les glaces, ne touchez ni à vos cheveux, ni à vos vêtements; ce sont là de mauvaises habitudes qui agacent les personnes nerveuses" (75). Both D'Alq and Bourdon regard fidgeting as a habit—that is, something that has become engrained in a person's day-to-day ritual to the point that these movements are no longer cognitively recognized upon execution. However, both writers are confident that by breaking one habit and replacing it with another—namely, focusing on holding the hands still when being spoken to—a *fille à marier* can adjust her own embodiment so that it better reflects her received education on manners and respect.

Ermance Dufaux and Baronne Staffe also develop the idea that gesticulation needs to be both regulated and habitualized, though these two writers offer a more nuanced and practical viewpoint than D'Alq and Bourdon. Still, in their prescriptive writings, the interminable search for the *juste milieu* continued to permeate the physical act of conversation. A woman should certainly not allow herself to be seen as rigid, cold, or unmoving, but neither should she allow herself the *laisser-aller* that could result in an erratic display of inappropriate gesticulation. Dufaux warns: "Ne gesticulez point en parlant; tout au plus la main doit-elle accompagner la parole, de quelques mouvements discrets, —juste ce qu'il faut pour ne pas avoir, en s'exprimant, l'air d'un ventriloque" (117). Luckily, though, mothers have the opportunity to correct this behavior early on in their daughters' development. Dufaux argues that it is possible to sculpt the daughter's physicality so that she comes to instinctively embody the level of upbringing appropriate to her own social station (or the social station to which her mother hopes her daughter will ascend). These mothers, along with their daughters, worked tirelessly to train their bodies so that their movements would distinguish them from working-class girls. Baronne Staffe explains:

> Seulement l'habitude que l'on aura contractée, dès l'enfance, de régler son geste, c'est-à-dire de ne pas agiter les bras, de ne pas remuer les jambes ni branler le chef comme un pantin, dont on tire les fils, cette habitude nous donnera un geste sobre, en accord avec le discours que nous tiendrons et sa mesure le préservera de toute vulgarité ou exagération. (Staffe, 105)

The way they moved was every bit as important a social marker as the clothes they wore or the way their *salon* was furnished. This particular type of distinction could not be bought—it had to be acquired over years of practice.

For these writers, inculcating these codified systems of physical communication needed to be a primary goal of an upper-class young person's social education at the turn of the twentieth century. French *savoir-vivre*—be it linked to spoken words or gestural exchanges—was first and foremost concerned with that which was *en accord avec, approprié à, convenu à*—in short, appropriate to a particular situation. *Savoir-vivre* in the *fin-de-siècle* was the understanding and implementation of skills in a context that constantly shifted, mutated, and took form around the actions and reactions of the bodies involved in the exchange. To keep up, the *fille à marier* had to keep a plethora of considerations in the foreground—Who held the superior social station? Which person was the eldest? Who was the guest? Who was the host? What were the social and political affiliations of her interlocutors? What was being discussed? The cognitive 'solving' of each of these problems simply did not suffice—or, at least, not if her goal was to demonstrate the *natural* quality of her embodied knowledge. Therefore, without proper physical training, a leisure class *fille à marier* always risked exposing herself as *mal élevée,* and therefore lacking respectability of character.

VI. How to Slice a Pear: Tales from the Dinner Tables of the Third Republic

In polite society, the dinner table served both as a classroom in which kinesthetic and proprioceptive learning took place, as well as a stage upon which these lessons were

performed before dinner guests. Synthesizing the multitude of physical movements learned in familial settings, eating dinner was both a daily ritual and a ceremonial ritual, depending on persons present. Physical demonstrations of self-sacrifice, deference, and concern for the comfort of fellow diners all came into play:

> Rien ne semble plus simple que l'action de manger, et pourtant, comme toutes les autres, elle exige quelques petites vertus et beaucoup de savoir-vivre. Tempérance, abnégation de ses goûts et de ses désirs, oubli de soi pour les autres, voilà les vertus qu'on peut pratiquer à table. (Bourdon, 48)

As we saw in chapter one, the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes argue in *L'Enfant bien-élevé* that French *politesse* was fundamentally linked to Catholic values of self-control and caring for others. Being capable of physically and, more importantly, 'naturally' navigating the dining room in the presence of company exemplified a child's upbringing. That is to say, ritualization (belonging to the realm of the everyday, the ordinary) at the family dinner table was eventually performed before the guest in the historically contextualized upper-class dinner party (the 'big day,' the extraordinary) of *fin-de-siècle* France. The Frères insist upon this point when describing well-raised children, stressing that the parents of the *enfants bien-élevés* pay close attention to their table manners growing up. Indeed, the reason that the *enfants* can be considered *bien-élevés* is precisely because efforts were made at home to mold the children's physicality: "Leurs parents les ont habitués à manger avec propreté et bienséance même étant seuls, et c'est une des causes pour lesquelles ils ne sont ni gauches ni inquiets quand ils mangent en compagnie" (38). This was no simple task, however, as the authors cited here all point out. Elements

of polite table manners included the way (and place and time) one sat down, how one folded a napkin, used utensils, or drank from a glass.

Pulling just a few examples from these etiquette manuals, we are able to see exactly how minute these details were, as well as the sheer quantity of factors to take into consideration when seated at the dinner table. Indeed, as Mathilde Bourdon points out in *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864), "Ce sont là de bien minimes observances, mais le savoir-vivre et la politesse se composent d'une foule d'*infiniment petits*, dont l'habitude rend la pratique facile et agréable" (50, emphasis in original text). There was a proper way to cut meat, to consume bread, and to serve salt. The rules of polite table etiquette were so extensive as to even specify the appropriate way of cutting one's pear: "On ne pèle pas une poire en spirale, c'est mauvais genre, on la coupe longitudinalement en quatre et l'on pèle ensuite les quartiers à mesure qu'on les mange" (213).

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, controlling and concealing bodily functions remained a core concern of polite physicality. Loss of control of any bodily function—be it observed by sight, sound, or smell—threatened to disgust the other diners, thus breaking the most fundamental rule of *politesse*: always make those around you feel comfortable. Indeed, "on doit boire lentement, ne pas faire de bruit avec son gosier en buvant, s'essuyer la bouche après avoir bu" (Dufaux, 216). Similarly, noise made by chewing and swallowing was considered undesirable: "En mangeant, ne faites jamais de bruit ni avec vos lèvres ni avec vos mâchoires, et surtout mangez avec une extrême propreté" (213). And of course, if any physical urges should come to the surface, excusing oneself was the only feasible escape: "Si vous avez le hoquet éclipsez-

vous un moment et ne revenez à table que lorsqu'il est passé" (214). Similarly, it was considered highly unseemly to over-eat in the presence of others. Baronne Staffe and the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes use different approaches when presenting the importance of eating only while others are doing so. Whereas Baronne Staffe uses a literary reference to support her point, the Frères cite biblical references. In *L'Enfant bien élevé* (1896), the Frères point to a rule in Ecclesiastes, chapter twenty-one, verse twenty: "*Cessez le premier de manger*" (38). This suggestion is also given by Baronne Staffe, albeit separated from its biblical context and connected to Rabelais's sixteenth-century literary character: "À table, elle ne doit pas manger comme Gargantua, ce n'est pas joli et cela nuirait surtout à sa santé" (277). According to Ermance Dufaux and the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, eating utensils were to be held in the right hand at all times with the sole exception of cutting meat, at which time the fork alone can be held with the left hand as one cuts the meat with a knife in the right. Dufaux states that:

> C'est toujours de la main droite que l'on doit tenir sa cuillère, sa fourchette et son couteau, excepté quand on a des viandes à couper. Alors, mais seulement alors, il faut prendre sa fourchette de la main gauche et le coupeau de la main droite, puis reprendre la fourchette de la main droite pour porter les morceaux à la bouche. (Dufaux, 215)

In describing the *enfant bien élevé,* the Frères recommend almost the exact same procedure, although they allow their ideal student to keep his fork in his right hand as he transports the cut of meat to his mouth:

> Il tient de la main droite sa cuiller et ses autres ustensiles. Lorsqu'il a à découper de la viande dans son assiette, il se sert de la main gauche pour tenir sa fourchette et aussi pour porter les morceaux à la bouche, à moins que ce ne soit pas d'usage dans la famille qui l'a invité. (Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, 36)

Polite physicality is concerned as much with reading and responding to observations and shifting contexts as it is with any one rule or way of acting—should the occasion arise in which all of the persons seated at the dinner table execute a gesture differently, a "When in Rome" mentality becomes essential.

In general, eating was to follow the values of self-effacement and deference common to the other expressions of polite physicality discussed above. At the dinner table, however, deference was shown not merely through gestures, but also through the quality of a slice of meat, by the first glass from a bottle of wine, or the first choice of fresh fruits after the main course. Indeed, to be a polite diner, one must never *take* anything—one *accepts* what is offered. As Dufaux explains in her *Savoir-vivre dans la vie ordinaire et dans les cérémonies civiles et religieuse* (1883) in the chapter entitled "La table": "On ne tend jamais son assiette pour être servi le premier" (211). Instead, it is up to the host family (that is, of course, the *maîtresse de maison* in particular) to decide who sits where, which cut of meat goes to whom—in short, it is her responsibility to hierarchize their guest list, and to serve each course accordingly.

Dinner itself, along with other social situations involving the consumption of food and beverages, provide the perfect setting for a synthesized demonstration of embodied knowledge. Controlling one's bodily functions, properly using one's utensils, consuming

food appropriately and following the rules of alimentary deference were all performed simultaneously, in daily ritual and ceremonial ritual alike.

VII. Walking Through the *fin de siècle*—Ambulatory Practices of Proper Young Ladies

Baronne Staffe applauds the efforts of those few mothers who truly understand the value of kinesthetic (learning by moving) and proprioceptive (learning by feeling) training. She declares that: "Une jeune fille qui ne fait qu'étudier ses livres […], pour qui tout est leçon et enseignement didactique, ne sait pas marcher […] avec grâce" (279). In order to develop the art of walking, one must stop studying, stop thinking and just *do.* Staffe calls time and again for the development of the *fille à marier*'s embodied knowledge and repeatedly confirms that kinesthetic and proprioceptive learning are both essential to this process. Walking politely was not simply putting one foot in front of the other to get from point A to point B. Keeping the sound of one's heels muted, keeping one's elbows bent and wrists limp, holding the gaze forward and not turning the head to glance at passers-by all constituted embodied skills that were symphonized while walking through the streets of *Belle Époque* France.

Louise d'Alq gives a detailed description of proper walking etiquette in her *Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884). Generally speaking, walking involves the same quest for the *juste milieu* as any other physical performance of French *politesse:*

> On reconnaît facilement dans la rue une personne bien élevée, polie et distinguée. Qu'elle marche vite ou lentement, selon qu'elle est pressée ou qu'elle se promène,

> son pas est toujours égal, mesuré. Elle ne court pas des bordées de droite et de gauche sur le trottoir ou au milieu de la rue. Sa démarche est assurée, elle marche *droit,* sans se retourner, s'arrêtant à peine devant un magasin, tenant généralement le côté droit du chemin, ne regardant ni en l'air, ni par terre, mais à quelques pas devant elle. (D'Alq, 209)

The directions are consistently ambiguous, and required a "feel" for the *juste-milieu* that was developed over time. Walk neither slowly nor quickly, don't pass from one side of the walkway to the other, and keep your gaze at a level that is neither too low nor too high. Figure 4 provides an illustration of woman who is, indeed, following the prescriptions for walking given by d'Alq and Staffe. This woman is making use of a parasol to keep her elbows bent and her wrists limp. The only ruffle in her dress is at the base next to her foot, indicating that: a) she was moving quickly enough to cause the camera to capture a blurred image, and b) she was moving slowly enough so that the fabric of her skirts did not show any diagonal folds created by the forward movement of her body. Finally, we see that the woman's gaze is neither up in the air, nor down on the ground, rather fixed a few steps ahead of her, just as prescribed by d'Alq ("ne regardant ni en l'air, ni par terre, mais à quelques pas devant elle" (209).

Figure 4. Paris, 1889, Petit Palais.

Of course, walking in public was a restricted activity for bourgeois or aristocratic girls of the Third Republic. The young *fille à marier* was to be accompanied at all times, either by an older female family member, a 'gouvernante,' or a male family member who is both older and married. Even then, there are only certain occasions during which it was appropriate for a young French lady to be out in the streets. As D'Alq explains in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884), "accompagnée d'une femme de chambre, ou de sa gouvernante, elle ne fait que des courses obligés et des promenades de santé, pour lesquelles elle choisit des endroits peu fréquentés et où elle se rend en costume très simple" (220). It should come as no surprise that for young women of the French Third Republic walking was such a regulated affair. As we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation in the section pinpointing the moral judgments put forth by Louise d'Alq and Hugues Leroux, the *fille à marier* was nothing without her virtue and perceived sexual innocence. Indeed, without a pure and moral reputation, the *fille à marier* was reduced to

a *fille*—no longer *à marier*, the girl becomes molded into the same linguistic cast as the harlot.

VIII. Homofamilial Apprenticeship: Mothers, Daughters, Masters, Students

As we have seen in this discussion, polite physicality was practiced in a familial setting, on a daily basis, and often within the family home itself. There existed in turn-of-the-century France a unique form of homofamilial apprenticeship in which a *fille à marier* would accompany her mother on her social visits. She would also aid her in receiving guests at home, following her around and tending to the needs of her houseguests. This training was done to familiarize the daughter with the various tasks associated with keeping polite company.

In her 1874 *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* Louise d'Alq explains that "on appelle aller dans le monde accompagner sa mère dans ses visites, l'aider à recevoir chez elle et aller au bal" (97). Later, in *Notes d'une mère* (1881), she terms this same mother-daughter apprenticeship a "stage" (which, in French, means internship, or on-the-job training). Speaking directly to a fictional mother identified in the text simply as "ma chère amie," D'Alq's narrator sings the praises of a certain "Mme X," a woman who is elegant, poised, graceful—in short, *bien élevée*: "Moi, qui ai suivi Mme X, pas à pas, pendant son stage dans le monde, je puis vous dire qu'elle était réputée pour aider admirablement sa mère à recevoir" (7). Mme X, along with countless other upper class young ladies, had executed ritualized movements that were often centered around the "table à thé" and observed closely by the watchful eye of her mother. Years before

her *bal blanc*, the French *fille à marier* practiced her polite physicality in the company of her mother and of society women.

Being a hostess combined a number of skills, including the ability to identify the rank of those present, knowing how to gauge her guests' needs and level of comfort, being able to balance cream in one hand, sugar and cookies in the other, and the ability to execute the above tasks with poise and grace. In *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864), Mathilde Bourdon confirms that ""la table à thé: souvent ce soin est confié aux jeunes filles" (59). She then continues to provide her reader with an outline of the various tasks the young hostess should master:

> Vous savez, je suppose, qu'après avoir rempli la théière et laissé infuser le thé, la jeune personne présente à chaque dame, qui ne quitte pas sa place, une tasse remplie, le sucrier et le pot de même; après cela, elle fait circuler les gâteaux; elle veille avec attention à ce que chaque personne soit servie selon ses goûts et à ce que le thé reste bon et qu'il puisse suffire à la consommation des convives. (Bourdon, 59-60)

For the well-informed reader of the *fin de siècle*, the suggestion to "[veiller] à ce que chaque personne soit servie selon ses goûts" is very much in line with the fundamental lessons of *savoir-vivre* that stress the need to pay close attention to the comfort level of one's intergestualtor—especially when that person is a houseguest. Similarly, it is of vital importance to be able to recognize that each person is different, that simply applying a formula across the board misses the point of *politesse*—that is, making sure that care is given to identifying and accommodating the individual particularities of each person with

whom one interacts. This shows the guests that they are worthy of special consideration, that they are understood, appreciated, and respected.

The skillful execution of this particular form of mother-daughter apprenticeship required that the young woman develop her sense of balance. She moves through the salon slowly so as not to spill hot tea on her guests. She then circulates with a container of cream—the spilling of which would be no less disastrous for her performance. Teatime belonged solely to the quasi-public demonstration of the young girl's polite physicality. As Louise d'Alq demonstrates in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884), this was certainly no simple task. It was a highly-orchestrated ensemble of postures, gestures and grace:

> La mère remplit la tasse (jusqu'à un demi-travers de doigt du bord) ; préalablement, elle a mis un morceau de sucre dans chaque tasse, puis la jeune fille prend la tasse et la soucoupe sur une petite assiette, le pot à crème de la main droite, et va l'offrir de la main gauche, commençant par les dames âgées, en demandant : —Puis-je vous offrir un nuage de crème ? (D'Alq, 193-94)

A young woman who had not already developed a sense of mastery over her body, who fidgets, who darts her eyes around the room, or who has no regard for the social station, age or sex of her intergestulator, would fail completely at this performance. A young woman who walked too quickly, whose arms hung at her side, or who still had to cognitively think about her body movements would seem ridiculous trying to serve tea to respectable haute-bourgeois or aristocratic "dames âgées." Only a young woman who had received extensive physical training on a daily basis and over a long period of time and

on a daily basis would have the embodied knowledge necessary for this advanced type of performance.

As D'Alq reminds her reader in *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874), "on appelle aller dans le monde accompagner sa mère dans ses visites, l'aider à recevoir chez elle et aller au bal" (d'Alq, *SV*, 97). We have already seen that participation in upper class *visites* involved a detailed and complicated assortment of postures and gestures. Attending a ball—a privilege reserved for girls who had celebrated their fifteenth birthdays—necessitated all of the aspects of polite physicality described above and added to it two complicated art forms: dance and music. These two art forms are especially fitting to this discussion of embodied knowledge because each involve learning via repetitive body movements as well as the memorization—that is, internalization—of this embodied knowledge so that each performance appeared as 'natural,' as un-staged as possible.

Skillfully dancing the 'quadrille' required the regulation of tempo. Just as with walking, the young woman had to dance neither too slowly nor to quickly, rather "avec la langueur convenable." She also needed to keep a close watch on her posture as she went through the movements of the 'quadrille' whose movements are balanced, fluid, and graceful. In *L'Enfance d'une parisienne* (1883), Julia Daudet recalls the great efforts put forth by mothers and daughters in dance classes, recalling that as a young girl, grace and poise were most certainly not natural to her yet. The flurry of young girls trying to learn dance steps was, indeed, quite chaotic: "C'étaient à chaque instant des nattes dénouées, des frisures déroulées, car les petites filles qui n'ont pas encore l'habitude d'être coquettes ne gardent pas longtemps l'équilibre de leur parure" (Daudet, 45). Dance

lessons were a time of bewilderment and of clumsiness. Listening for verbal cues to correct their posture, young girls twirled around in a cacophony of confusion: "Ici, on entendait bien quelquefois: « Arrête-toi…Tiens la tête droite… » Mais on passait si vite que les voix des mères se perdaient dans le tourbillon et le petit coup d'éventail des jupes qui s'élargissaient en tournant" (45). Preparations for future balls and *soirées dansantes* set to music all of the previous aspects of polite physicality discussed above.

This leaves us with the performance of music itself. Posture, humility and 'natural' grace all come together once the *fille à marier* sits down at the piano bench and removes her white gloves. In her 1884 etiquette manual, Louise d'Alq explains that knowing how to read music and strike piano keys was next to worthless when compared to the value of learning a piece of music by heart. Besides, showing up to a soirée with a stack of music was a sign of narcissism, revealing to those present that one simply had assumed that people would want to hear them play: "Pour faire de la musique dans le monde, il faut, premièrement, jouer par cœur; ceci est essentiel, d'abord parce qu'on joue toujours mieux, ensuite parce qu'il est ridicule de porter avec soi sa musique, ce qui a un air trop apprêté" (144). The main goal of a musical performance was to leave the audience with the impression that: a) the musician was unprepared for the request, b) the musician is humbled by the request, and c) the musician—being *naturally* talented—can execute the task at the drop of a hat, for she clearly has an entire repertoire that she is ready perform at any time.

A musician must also know how to balance her "airs"—that is, she must always appear flattered and humble, yet self-confident at the same time. First, if she was asked to play or to sing, she must accept straight away. Showing too much humbleness verged

on egotism, implying that the *fille à marier* relished in hearing her own praises. Similarly, one should *never* monopolize the piano bench. To do so would be to align oneself with professional actresses and dancers who were 'on display.' Mathilde Bourdon suggests that, "si vous êtes musicienne et que l'on vous prie de jouer ou de chanter, ne vous faites pas prier, jouez simplement, mais ayez soin de ne pas accaparer à vous seule le piano ou la harpe" (59). A young woman who fancied herself a star of polite society was clearly under the illusion that being a 'star' was a good thing. Instead, as Bourdon, D'Alq and Dufaux have shown, modesty in all things was the *only* worthy goal for a polite young Frenchwoman.

However, once in the spotlight, humility was no longer an option. If the girl was too nervous or too self-conscious, she risked fumbling the keys. The French *fille à marier* also needed to learn how to carry on her performance no matter what. Normally, during a rehearsal, mistakes are corrected by repeating a few measures separately. Once the difficult sections are remedied, the student then 'takes it from the top,' finishing the rest of the piece. Should the situation arise where the pianist makes an error, it was crucial for her continue with the piece, drawing attention away from the mistake in hopes that it might go unnoticed: "Une des conditions capitales pour jouer dans le monde, est de ne point s'arrêter si l'on fait une faute. Il faut savoir passer outre, sauter un trait, une reprise, au besoin, mais aller toujours" (D'Alq, *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel*, 145).

These *arts d'agrément* incorporated posture, poise, humility and confidence in a quasi-public setting. The *fille à marier* prepared for her future in front of an audience of her superiors and peers, performing a recital that physically demonstrated her mastery of polite French physicality. In dance as in music, the most fundamental talent that one

could acquire was the appearance of ease. To attain this lofty goal, bodily movements and general comportments needed to be in line with ideals associated with the image of the well-raised, virtuous young Frenchwoman. Performances needed to maintain the coveted *juste-milieu* between self-effacing humility and self-aggrandizing egotism. Indeed, as D'Alq quips, "La musique est […] un talent de société" (142) like any other. The enactment of habitualized movements at the moment of ritual performance involved an embodied, though not necessarily cognitive, awareness that we, as scholars, would do well to consider in our analysis of historical physicalities.

IX. Conclusions

Ritual is the keystone of the human animal's ability to conceptualize time, purpose and meaning. Some rituals are performed so often that we cease to find them remarkable. Others occur so rarely that their importance is aggrandized to the point that their fundamental connection to our daily lives becomes unintelligible. I argue that the separation between the everyday and the 'big day' is rather ambiguous and fluid. Drawing a dividing line between ordinary daily rituals and extraordinary ceremonial rituals suggests that the latter is more valuable to our understanding the passage of time. Instead, I propose that the extraordinary is precisely that: *extra*—more, superfluous, further, added—*ordinary*. It is the norm—*ce qui se fait*—only more of it.

It would seem that ceremonial rituals are particularly significant because they mark the 'defining moments' in a human being's lifespan—the passage from childhood to adulthood, from being single to being married, or from being someone's child to

someone's parent. However, as we have seen here, ritualization occurs everyday and is an essential and inescapable part of one's path through these stages of life. Indeed, when the upper-class *fille à marier* served hot tea in her mother's salon she was preparing for adulthood. Every day, while she was learning to hold herself with poise, to walk with grace and to dance with skill, she was preparing for her *bal blanc,* training for the 'big day' when she would demonstrate her mastery of polite French physicality before potential suitors.

In this chapter, we have seen that polite physicality in the Third Republic was first and foremost a form of knowledge acquired at the site of the body. Demonstrations of deference were done based on visual analyses of intergestulators' social station, age and sex. All movements needed to be done quickly enough so as to appear natural to onlookers. That is, one could not pause to cognitively think between movements. Rather, these actions needed to be executed instantaneously, showing others that they had been performed so many times in the past that they now were part of the make-up of the intergestulator's embodied knowledge. This skill was advocated by Republican politicians like Hugues Leroux, by Catholic social commentators like the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes and Ermance Dufaux, and especially by famous female authors who exclusively treated the subjects of *politesse* and *savoir-vivre* such as Louise d'Alq and Baronne Staffe. As such, we can deduce that polite physicality—albeit strongly connected to class distinction—also served as a unifying force to unite Michelet's "deux France"—that is, the France of the *Ancien Régime* and Catholicism, and the Republican, secular France of the post-Revolutionary century. Citizens who were representative of both "camps" agreed upon the importance of physical demonstrations of deference. All

believed that *civilité* and *politesse* were such fundamental aspects of French national identity as to warrant detailed treatment in prescriptive texts. Indeed, one is inclined to ask if this training might not also be considered as an early form of Republican civic education. The characteristically French way of acting out civility encompassed the movements of the everyday lives of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen during the *Belle Époque*, making *francité* very much a part of the citizen's body. In the final two chapters of this dissertation, I will ask how this embodied knowledge—this *francité faite corps*—was put to use on the 'big days'—specifically, at the *bal blanc* and the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine*—to reproduce or to subvert the social values behind the gestures.

Chapter Three: Performance and Decorum Inside the *Bal blanc*

I. Introduction

Confident in the embodied knowledge that had been instilled throughout the years of her homofamilial apprenticeship, the young woman walks gracefully into the salon, greeting onlookers with her most refined expressions of polite physicality. The temperature is slightly higher than usual, and the air holds light odors of candle wax, daisies and orange blossom water. Wearing a white dress with no more than a simple string of pearls, the girl passes through the threshold from "jeune fille" to "fille à marier." The color white is the most pronounced and important color on this day, and chances are this is neither the first nor the last time she will wear it. As the vicomtesse Nacla proclaims in her 1897 text *Il ! Le choisir, le garder*, "Elle l'a porté, ce blanc chaste et poétique, le jour de sa première communion ; et elle le portera pour venir, au pied des autels, unir sa vie à celui qu'elle épousera. Il semble que ce soit pour elle une sorte d'uniforme, tant qu'elle est jeune fille » (Nacla in Martin-Fugier, 21). The *bal blanc* helps define womanhood for its young participants, and marks the middle ground between chaste, young innocence and virtuous, conjugal womanhood, between a girl's first communion and her marriage before God, constituting a sort of "rite of passage" between "rites of passage."

The French *bal blanc*, or "debutante ball," originated in court society as rite of passage solely for the daughters of the aristocracy. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the ball evolved into a ceremonial event of the leisure (that is, non-working) classes at which parents showcased their daughters and officially introduced to the girls

to their social peers. Finding appropriate matches for the female hostesses and attendees of marriageable age—the *filles à marier* of the event—was, indeed, one of the primary goals of these ceremonial occasions. However, the gatherings also provided a public stage for these young women to prove that they possessed the requisite elegance of their social milieu. Guests and hosts alike were required to verify that they belonged there, as neither wealth nor title counted as sufficient markers of status in France at the turn of the twentieth-century. The ritualized gestures of the *fille à marier'*s upbringing were vital to this performance, as they represented a significant portion of her home education in the arts of social manners and etiquette.

With the demise of court society, a mix of old and new money made up the elite classes of the day. Families with only a generation or two of prominence were required to prove that they had fully understood, incorporated, and then raised their children to follow the same lifestyles of leisure as their social peers. This involved adopting and promoting a system of values that placed heavy emphasis on familial reputation. Following the rules of etiquette set forth by cultural authorities like Louise d'Alq and Baronne Staffe ensured a family's standing in the leisure classes. After years spent attending to the proper education of their daughters—both in formal classrooms and in the families' living rooms—parents nervously presented their daughters to society at this leisure class confirmation ceremony. These closed rituals were traditional, prescriptive, and detailed. They marked the young hostesses, and, in turn, their families, as certified members of the French elite or, alternatively, unmasked them as posers who did not yet possess the innate qualities of the upper classes. French sociologist Edmond Goblot (1858-1935) describes the newly-arrived members of the non-working classes who have

acquired wealth, but who still lack manners, in his 1925 essay *La barrière et le niveau: étude sociologique sur la bourgeoisie française moderne*: "Ce sont ceux qui, entrés dans la classe bourgeoisie par leur fortune ou par leur profession, n'y semblent pas à leur place. Ils en ont pris ce qu'ils ont su discerner des caractères superficiels ; ce qui est profond ou subtil leur échappe : leur premier état transparaît" (Goblot, 7). These newcomers "seem out of place" amongst their new social peers. The precise nature of this awkwardness is difficult for the sociologist to pinpoint, leaving him to create an ambiguous binary opposition between the "superficial characteristics" of the leisure classes (presumably, the visible, purchasable markers of wealth) and "that which is profound or subtle." Here, I suggest that one of the "profound or subtle" features of the leisure classes was the requisite literacy in social codes of *politesse*, and the physical posturing and gesturing of the body that flowed from this social education.

The early-twentieth-century depictions of the *bal blanc* seen in this chapter reflect an aristocratic, Ancien Régime ceremonial ritual being performed by a new mixture of families in a new social world. The ball itself had changed very little from its early performances in court society, aside from the less extravagant dress code and more muted gestures that were reflective of its participants' collective distaste for decadence. However, the social make-up of the crowd at the *bal blanc* had changed, commingling various segments of the leisure classes in a mutual performance of sameness. The ritual served an individual function for the young *fille à marier* seeking to establish herself, and a wider, collective function for the leisure classes of the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries to perform a collective narrative that unified its disparate elements. Both the *filles à marier* and their families, who were no longer automatically admitted

into the French elite by lineage, had to prove their membership in other ways. They needed to show that they had mastered the rules and regulations of respectability, and one of the ways they accomplished this was by performing the gestures and postures learned over the course of their childhood in front of a jury of their social peers at the *bal blanc*.

II. Clarifying Social Class Through Ceremony

This chapter focuses on a social group that often defies clear-cut definitions. Historians and sociologists have long debated the definition and boundaries of the bourgeoisie. Scholars Sara Maza and Béatrix Le Wita have argued that the term "bourgeoisie" is so ambiguous as to be nearly incomprehensible if confined to any one definition—be it in terms of economic status, familial heritage, shared fashion sense, etc. In her 2005 book, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850,* Sara Maza proposes that the French bourgeoisie from 1750 to 1850 did not actually exist. Instead, an "imaginary and much reviled bourgeoisie loomed large in [late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century] French culture because its purpose was to define by contrast the nation's real, if often implicit, social ideals: anti-materialism, civic service, a transcendent state, and an undivided people" (13). For Maza, the bourgeoisie at this time was part of society's imagination and embodied such despicable traits as capitalism, materialism and individualism.

Béatrix Le Wita also sees confining definitions of the French bourgeois class as problematic. The ethnographer rejects the primacy of economic status in her characterization of the bourgeoisie in favor of a one centered instead on questions of

shared values and habits. In her ethnographical study *French Bourgeois Culture* (1988), in which she uses Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* to explore the world of the French elite in the twentieth-century, Le Wita defines the bourgeoisie as those who possess "an attention to detail, a certain self-possession or controlled introspection, and what amounts to a ritualization of everyday practices (5). Here, Le Wita's culture-centered definition of the bourgeoisie provides a framework that invites us to consider the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century leisure classes in terms of what values they shared, and how these commonalities were expressed in movement. Indeed, as old names blended with new money, old-style class lines were being blurred and barriers erased at the dawn of the new century. The French elite of the Belle Époque shared a codified value system—that of *savoir-vivre*—that was expressed and read at the sight of the body. The *bal blanc*, then, provided this segmented social milieu with a time and a place to come together and perform common gestures and postures of *politesse* that united its distinct fragments. For the *filles à marier,* the rite acted as a graduation ceremony, marking the completion of their familial and social education, and introducing them into the adult world of "la bonne société." For all in attendance, the *bal Blanc* served as a venue for multi-directional, mutual confirmation of a shared value system.

As both Maza and Le Wita argue, it is problematic to define the French elite by speaking about them in any definable or even identifiable essence. A clearer picture of this social milieu is much more easily accessed through analyses of their shared codes of conduct—that is, by looking at what they did, what they expected their peers to do, and what values these habits communicated.

The *bal blanc* exemplifies what Ronald L. Grimes calls 'decorum ritual' in his 1995 book *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. For Grimes, the decorum class of rituals is in place precisely to explicate shared expectations of conduct. It includes ceremonies during which participants perform rules of etiquette for each other:

> Decorum ordinarily carries a lightweight cultural 'ought' with it. One 'ought to behave,' that is, act decorously, and the sanctions for breaking rules of decorum are usually light. The result of a violation is that I am ignored, snubbed, gossiped about, or frowned at. (Grimes, 46)

By paying close attention to the "relationship between performer and audience-observer" at the *bal blanc* and physical displays of these "oughts" we are able to ask what—and for whom—these are girls performing (91). What does the *bal blanc* audience—composed exclusively of parents, siblings and potential suitors —tell us about the ways in which the participants objectified themselves? Analyzing the prescriptive movements of the ceremony as described by etiquette authors such as Louise d'Alq and Mathilde Bourdon enables us to unveil the standards of etiquette that were enforced at the *bal blanc* and visualize how these standards were expressed physically.

To use Simone de Beauvoir's infamous argument within the context of this particular discussion, "on ne nait pas bourgeois, on le devient"—one is not born, but rather becomes bourgeois. Over the course of the nineteenth century, "'breeding' is replaced by 'civilization.' […] these 'legitimately' ancient families no longer necessarily occupy the seats of power. They are left with their quality of being civilized" (Le Wita, 1). The *bal blanc* provided a time and a place for members of different factions of the

leisure classes to collectively demonstrate this quality. The exclusive ceremony served as a backdrop in front of which the modern, turn-of-the-century, by which the French elite physically and collectively expressed themselves. Together, old aristocratic and newer bourgeois families performed an Ancien Régime ritual, creating a modern way of conceiving elite status—one that had far less to do with blood ties and ostentatious displays of grandeur as it did with an attention to the minute details involved with manners, respectability, and French *politesse.*

II. English Roots of the *bal blanc*

The *bal blanc* began in the sixteenth century as an English tradition. Queen Elizabeth Tudor used a French word (*débutante*, or "beginner") to define its function (that is, to begin adult social life in court society). In her study on the debutant ball *The Consumption of Insignificant Rituals: A Look at Debutante Balls*, Jennifer Edson Escalas notes that "The word debutante was adopted into English from French during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in England in the second half of the 16th century, when she began the custom of formally presenting eligible young women at court" (709). In the last half of the nineteenth-century, "Queen Victoria gave the ceremony its present form with girls dressed in white and the official bow called a "curtsey" (709). In England as well as in France, young women were being prepared to demonstrate their mastery of a specific skills set that firmly roots them within a specific social milieu. Both used the debutante ball ritual as a venue for the shift from childhood to the age of courtship and, later, marriage. In nineteenth century England, there seems to have existed only two ways for a

non-aristocratic woman to penetrate the world of the landed gentry: first, a male member of the aristocracy could introduce her. Clearly this method carried with it infractions of social and sexual decorum. The other path would be to impress a wealthy dowager or widow in hopes that she will provide the necessary social connections. In *Belle Époque* France, however, the *bal blanc* was not linked to an actual, contemporary court culture. People could, in theory, enter the leisure classes with the proper education, connections, etc. At the end of the nineteenth century, the French *bal blanc,* unlike the English debutante ball, was no longer centered solely on questions of nobility and monarchy. At these French occasions, emphasis was placed, above all else, on expressing an appropriate level *savoir-vivre,* on demonstrating the qualities of being *bien élevé* and *civilisé*.

III. Dressing for the *juste milieu*

At this ceremonial ritual, young women decorated and moved their bodies to demonstrate their membership in the elite classes. A female *bal blanc* participant certainly wore markers of class at the turn of the century—jewels, fans and hairpieces are mentioned—but simpler, unpretentious versions of these accessories. Families of private means but not of old names mixed with those who had little money but a rich family history, showing with their bodies that they were, in fact, members of a single group—one that embraces *savoir-vivre, politesse,* and *civilité*; a group for whom certain dress codes, gestures, postures and ways of speaking should simply go without saying. The participants of the *bal blanc* took this time to dance both with and for each other, acting

out the social and physical education that they shared in common, demonstrating for each other that this knowledge is no longer at the cognitive, but rather at the embodied level. Their actions and movements—in short, their performances of *politesse*—demonstrated a collective appreciation for traditional codes of conduct and a common distaste for infractions against this code. In *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874), D'Alq touches on this shared valorization of manners, and warns against visual cues that would alert on-lookers to a lack of decorum:

> Le savoir-vivre, qui apprend aussi bien l'élégance et la distinction que la politesse et les usages, veut qu'on ne laisse au bal, pas plus une fleur de sa coiffure, un lambeau de sa robe, qu'une parcelle de son cœur. Une personne adroite et sensée en sort aussi fraîche qu'elle y est entrée. (D'Alq, 104)

The reasoning behind this logic is simple: the movements one performs at these functions should be graceful, smooth and simple. As D'Alq explains, "Il est certain que les coiffures qui tombent, les corsages qui craquent, etc. dénotent des mouvements violents, des danses échevelées, un manque de soin et de réserve évident" (104). The simple hairstyles, the understated corsages, and the modest white dresses and gloves had the potential to reflect the proper use or misuse of the *fille à marier*'s embodied knowledge.

Louise d'Alq takes note of the changing accessories present at the *bal blanc* in her 1874 etiquette manual *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie,* and again a decade later in her 1884 book *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre.* She observes a simplification of dress and an overt distaste towards luxury and pretention and a rejection of "obvious" signifiers of wealth. The participants of the *bal blanc* all performed the same task when

they adopted a uniform, recognizable, codified set of postures, gestures and movements. Polite physicality at these ritualized, ceremonial events was the most basic fail-safe way of ascertaining a person's belonging within the group. By denying the ostentatiousness and decadence and embracing a more simple style of movement and dress, the participants were demonstrating their appreciation for a more refined, understated style. Within Louise d'Alq's descriptions of the appropriate, contemporary dress code of the *bal blanc*, we see that Maza's late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century French social imaginary of the bourgeois (i.e., showy, money-hungry pretentious braggers) is precisely the image that attendees are trying to avoid at these events. As D'Alq points out in *Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874), the accessories worn by her grandmother towards the beginning of the nineteenth century have become outdated: "Du bouquet, du flacon, du mouchoir et de l'éventail, voire même de la bourse de jeu, on n'a plus guère conservé que l'éventail, et tout au plus le mouchoir; encore le dissimule-t-on dans la main le plus possible, au lieu de le tenir avec affection par le milieu, comme jadis" (D'Alq, 105). Gone are the days of the hand-held fan, the perfume vial, the bouquet of flowers, money pouches and handkerchiefs at the time d'Alq pens these observations. By the turn of the twentieth-century, at the most, a girl could carry one handkerchief, and even then, she must not make a show of it. Instead, she should try her best to keep the cloth hidden away in the palm of her hand, unlike, the former custom in which the cloth was boldly displayed spilling out of each side of the hand as in the past. These ornamental items had become "too much" within the simplistic fashion code of the Belle Époque, showing a preference for a refined, detailed, yet simple dress code and a general distaste for the ostentatiousness and decadence associated with tacky newcomers.

Even the floral bouquet, often associated with innocence and sexual virtue, had become pretentious and unnecessary. In 1874, D'Alq proclaims that "le bouquet est plein de prétention"(105). By the time she pens her next edition, *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre* in 1884, even the handkerchief had fallen by the wayside out of a preference for simplicity and the *juste-milieu*—the balanced, simplistic, yet nuanced middle ground between "too much" and "not enough." Within the chronology of Louise d'Alq's observations on the presence and absence of certain women's accessories, we can see that the handkerchief was once displayed openly, then hidden as thoroughly as possible, and has vanished from the scene of the *bal blanc* by 1884. This shift indicates the leisure classes' collective valorization of understated elegance, of more subtle, detailed visual cues that better expressed the individual's familial and social education. Instead of using flashy accessories to signify their belonging, the elite classes at the *bal blanc* relied on their performances *savoir-vivre* to confirm their shared standards.

Authors of the late nineteenth-century etiquette manuals penned numerous pages warning readers against appearing too showy, tacky, or overdressed. Modest white gowns were worn with little jewelry (diamonds were specifically forbidden) and a few flowers in the hair. French historian Anne Martin-Fugier gives a portrait of the *fille à marier* at the *bal blanc* in her 1983 book *La Bourgeoise: Femme au temps de Paul Bourget* that emphasizes modesty and a distaste for luxury items:

> Elle ne porte pas d'autre bijou qu'un rang de perles […] Elle n'a pas droit, en revanche, à l'éventail de plume qui se garde à la main, mais seulement à une fantaisie de gaze. Pas non plus d'aigrettes ou de bijoux dans les cheveux. (Martin-Fugier, 21)

This description of the proper ball attire allows for a few visual cues of wealth and status, though the extra step must be taken to make certain that the style is muted and understated. As d'Alq explains in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel,* "Une fille qui ferait son entrée dans le monde en robe rose couverte de fleurs et de rubans, les bras et le cou chargés d'or, la tête levée, le regard hardi, serait une anomalie" (6). One most certainly did not want to be "une anomalie" at these functions—quite the contrary. The point of this ritual was to physically demonstrate the girl's belonging to this newly formed group. The *bal blanc* was an occasion for young women to show others how they were raised, what they had learned, and whether or not this embodied knowledge had become second nature.

The *fille à marier* wore jewelry—but only a simple string of pearls. She carried a fan in her hand, but a simple one made of white lace (see figure 1 below). As Martin-Fugier points out, she is restricted from putting accessories in her hair "Pas non plus d'aigrettes ou de bijoux dans les cheveux" (21). Long, silk white gloves were mandatory at these occasions. They covered the hands, protecting them against any *saletés* reserved for the help, as well as the forearm, if for no other reason than to embellish the ensemble. Much like the jewelry and the hand-held lace fans, the white gloves at the *bal blanc* were understated and simple.

Louise d'Alq points out in *Nouveau Savoir-vivre* (1884) that "Une jeune fille, engagée à faire de la musique, ne retire ses gants que lorsqu'elle est assise au piano. Elle peut les déposer sur l'instrument. Elle les remet lorsqu'elle est de retour à sa place. On n'ôte pas ses gants pour chanter" (125). By taking into consideration all of the other actions she executes at the *bal blanc* away from the piano bench, and therefore with

gloved hands, we have an idea of the physical training necessary for a successful performance. The *fille à marier* at the *bal blanc* was expected to eat and drink the various refreshments provided, dance with potential suitors, and carry on conversations with guests.

Figure 1. Long white gloves with string of pearls.

Years of physical training done in a familial setting instilled in these young women the embodied knowledge necessary to consume food and drink without staining a pair of long white gloves. Indeed, it would have been rather unbecoming for one of these young women to greet their guests with crumbs on her gloves or dress.

The white gloves also provided a barrier of fabric between the hands of the dancers. These young men and women did not touch skin-on-skin throughout the entirety of the function; rather their bodies only met at places covered with fabric. As d'Alq

points out in 1874 “Au bal, un cavalier ni une jeune fille ne doivent quitter leurs gants, et encore moins danser dégantés" (105), and again in 1884 "Sous aucun prétexte, on ne dansera déganté, même d’un main, qu’on appartienne au sexe féminin ou masculin" (125-126). The young dancers should only be making contact at three points—right hands touching, the man’s left hand on the middle of the woman’s back, and the woman’s left hand resting on the man’s right shoulder—and each of these points has two layers of fabric separating the dancers’ skin.

The dress code at the early-twentieth-century *bal blanc* reflected the shared values of the French elite classes at the time—specifically, the idea that the true marker of character was far more subtle, natural, innate—*ce qui va sans dire*. Instead of simply wearing one’s wealth at these events, efforts were made to tone down displays of jewelry and to demonstrate (*démontrer*) their familial upbringing and not simply show (*montrer*) their financial situation. The *bal blanc* was an exclusive ceremony that served to visually separate the newcomers from those families who had been established for some time. The accounts of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century French elite culture collected by Eric Mension-Rigau in *Aristocrates et grands bourgeois: Education, traditions, valeurs* (1994), show that the elite classes collectively believed that manners were transmitted by family members, and that this was done in an almost imperceptible way. As Mension-Rigau points out, “dans les témoignages domine l’idée que la politesse n’existe que si elle est un héritage transmis familialement, de génération en génération, depuis des origines lointaines" (271). The codes of conduct that are the object of this study contained an unspoken family history that were absorbed through observation and practice over many years in childhood, from generation to generation. The particular styles of comportment

performed at the *bal blanc* were the product of strong bonds cultivated between mothers and daughters over many years.

IV. Homofamilial Bonds on Display at the *Bal blanc*

Mothers were highly active participants in the social lives of their daughters. Their ever-watchful eyes were essential to the production and reproduction of this milieu's value system: "Car elles sont là, les mères […] veillant à la bonne tenue et à la décence générale" (22). These balls, although explicitly thrown for the young women, were also events at which mothers of polite society put on performances of their own. Acting as the overseeing master of ceremonies, mothers played key roles at the *bal blanc,* just as they did in their daughters' daily social activities.

For the individual young Frenchwoman who had yet to marry, economic stability, the family's reputation, and her mother's approval were all at stake at the *bal blanc*. A strong sense of familial duty was formed over the course of the girl's childhood and adolescence. Many of the girls from the non-working classes learned that securing an appropriate, reputable marriage match was the most important task of their young adult lives. In the section of his research findings for *Pot Bouille* in *Carnet d'enquêtes,* Emile Zola notes that, for families wishing to remain a part of the non-working classes, the success or failure to find a husband for their daughter determined the family's financial stability. A suitable marriage was equal to a suitable future: "Le choix du mari, une position […] C'est sûr, plus que le commerce" (134). Securing a position in the leisure classes was an important affair for families who risked falling back into the working

classes, and, as Zola makes clear, the surest way for a family to guarantee its financial and social future was to make a beneficial marriage match.

Protecting and maintaining her family's reputation—and more specifically, that of her mother—was a very important part of a daughter's duties. In turn, the comportment of daughters often reflected the successes or failures of their mothers. In her study on the nineteenth-century upper-class women of the Nord, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (1981), Bonnie Smith notes that the reputable character of the *maîtresse de maison* was through many different codified structures. One such semiotic code existed, according to Smith, in the purchase and use of cultural artifacts—in particular, home furnishings in late-nineteenth-century France. She explains that: "it was the bourgeois woman herself, the *maîtresse de maison,* who acquired a reputation or definition from her household" (66). The furniture of a family's salon reflected the strong influence of the female homemaker. Here, I argue that the ways in which the young, unmarried daughters of the leisure classes moved their bodies at the *bal blanc* also communicated to the outside world, in a highly codified and, at times, non-cognitive fashion, the type of moral education on manners that she had received from her mother, and hence, her mother's reputation. Certainly the *filles à marier* were not the only ones whose reputation was on the line at these closed, elite functions. While the young women used their bodies to show that they were upper-level students of polite physicality at the *bal blanc,* the mothers had to sit on the side lines, hoping against hope that the years of effort they put into educating their daughters would be enough to show all those present that she was a worthy transmitter of their common value system. Daughters demonstrated their capacity to learn a code of conduct specific

to their place in society (including its gestures and postures), and mothers demonstrated their capacity to instill manners in their children.

In the section of *Carnet d'enquêtes* (1993) dedicated to researching the characters of *Pot Bouille* (1882), Emile Zola explores the psychology of those French mothers burdened with the task of marrying off daughters. He notes their obsessive, and even violent, character: "La mère qui gifle sa fille quand elle n'arrive pas à se marier" (133). Within the novel itself, Zola's narrator follows the Josserand women—the mother Eléonore and her daughters, Berthe and Hortense—along their trials and tribulations at finding marriage matches for the girls. In the second chapter of the novel, the narrator presents a scene of frustration and desperation as the women leave a Parisian *soirée* in the Rivoli district:

> Lorsque madame Josserand, précédée de ses demoiselles, quitta la soirée de Madame Dambreville, qui habitait un quatrième, rue de Rivoli, au coin de la rue de l'Oratoire, elle referma rudement la porte de la rue, dans l'éclat brusque d'une colère qu'elle contenait depuis deux heures. Berthe, sa fille cadette, venait encore de manquer un mariage. (Zola, 43)

The ability to find marriage suitors for Berthe and Hortense was every bit as important to Eléonore as it was to the girls—perhaps even more so. Eléonore is shown throughout the narrative to be obsessed with what others think of the Josserand name, and in particular, what people are saying about her unwed daughters. She is described in a negative light that puts emphasis on the selfish motives behind her actions. Madame Josserand seems

far more focused on what her daughters' lack of marriage proposals does to her emotionally and psychologically than on how these rejections affect the girls.

Eléonore's focus remains centered on her own experience, as Zola's narrator makes clear:

> Et l'exaspération de la mère montait encore, au souvenir de tant de retours semblables, depuis trois hivers, dans l'empêtrement des toilettes, dans la crotte noire des rues et les ricanements des polissons attardés. Non, décidément, elle en avait assez, de trimballer ses demoiselles aux quatre bouts de Paris... (Zola, 44)

For Madame Josserand, a mother who needed to find a marriage match for her daughters—who was attempting to stake a claim to social respectability—the psychological burden of *qu'en dirait-on* was, at times, overwhelming. The Josserand women appear in the novel as attendees of Parisian balls, though they are not shown hosting these events. The female characters of Zola's novel are far more representative of the reviled character of the *parvenue* than of elite women such as Madame Dambreville, the hostess of the ball at which Berthe fumbled another potential marriage match. The Josserands are missing the subtleties of character and of conduct that are acquired over the life-long social and familial training within the leisure classes. The women embody the image of the *arrivistes,* of the newcomers trying to get their foot in the door described by Edmond Goblot in *La Barrière et le niveau: Étude sociologique sur la bourgeoisie française moderne* (1925). Goblot describes these *parvenus* as those who possess some fortune, but no manners. Indeed, "Une fortune rapidement acquise inspire-t-elle à [une personne] le désire de vivre bourgeoisement, son éducation s'y oppose; des manières

"communes," des "vulgarités" [la] trahissent; [elle] fait des impairs, des gaffes, des pataquès" (7). The Josserand women personify this character in *Pot Bouille*, and have been failing to fit in with their fellow attendees for the previous two years.

Louise d'Alq regretfully informs her readership in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884) that time is very much of the essence when finding fiancés for young women. The longer the girl remains on the ball scene, the more people around her will begin to ask why she has not yet been chosen by other families. It was even common for a young woman to hide how long she had been attending balls, pretending to be fresh on the scene. Young women were ashamed not to have been chosen by a young man (or, in particular his family):

> La plupart du temps les jeunes filles n'osent avouer depuis combien d'années elles fréquentent les eux ou les bals ; j'en connais qui savent parfaitement se donner un parfum de candeur près de leurs cavaliers, en prétendant en être toujours à leur *entrée dans le monde*, tellement elles sent qu'elles perdent de leur prestige en se prodiguant, et que, semblables à leur violette, elles doivent se laisser chercher. (D'Alq, 54)

The time limit was strictly set at three ball seasons: "L'usage français veut qu'elle [la jeune fille] se marie dans le courant de l'année où elle fait son entrée dans le monde. Si elle est très jeune, elle peut sortir deux hivers de suite. […] Mais si elle arrive au troisième hiver sans avoir trouvé preneur, on ne s'occupe plus guère d'elle" (D'Alq, 22). Eléonore Josserand and her daughters—Hortense, at 23 years of age and Berthe at 21—are fully aware of this fact, and are at great risk of reaching the tipping point between

desperation and flat-out failure. The reader can feel Eléonore's fury from the first moment she is introduced in the text. Finding suitors for her daughters has occupied so much of Madame Josserand's time, energy and thought that it has become simply exhausting. She has, as the narrator repeatedly remarks, been dragging her daughters to these balls for three seasons now. Not only are they being disgraced in the eyes of their social peers and betters, they are facing financial difficulty and the possibility of falling back into the working classes.

The *bal blanc* was an important rite of passage for young women, and the practical and economic factors associated with their futures would come to bear heavily on their minds. The young woman at the *bal blanc* must not waste her time dreaming up ways she could live out her personal dreams—the fact of the matter is, she only has two options: marry and be accepted, or stay single and be rejected. In 1881, Louise d'Alq lays out the state of affairs rather bluntly in *Notes d'une mère*: "La femme ne peut changer de position que par le mariage. Là est un grand écueil pour les jeunes imaginations" (51). The question of marriage, at least for the young women of polite society discussed here, was very much a question of class belonging. Indeed, "Si elle n'attrape rien à cette "pêche," la jeune bourgeoise sans dont n'a plus que deux possibilités, le demi-monde ou le travail, toutes deux l'amènent à *se déclasser"* (Martin-Fugier, 22, emphasis mine). Simply put, if the family wanted to remain in (or gain acceptance to) the elite subculture of late-nineteenth-century Paris, they needed to find a suitable marriage partner. Otherwise, their peers will not accept them—not ever. The pressure to perform was as intense as the stakes were high, rendering the embodied aspect of her knowledge all the more vital to her survival. Should the *fille à marier*—

especially the *fille de la maison*—show any hesitation with her gestures, in her dance steps, or with her placement in the salon, her family's future claims to social acceptance and economic stability were immediately placed in jeopardy.

Hostess mothers also had a plethora of responsibilities at the *bal blanc.* They were required to keep an eye on the level of decency demonstrated by their own daughters, but also had the task of making sure that each attendee felt comfortable and included. It was the duty of the hostess mother to ensure that each young person danced. Louise d'Alq puts great importance on this task in *Le Savoir-vivre dans toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874). The author clearly notes the importance of ensuring these demands are met in a subtle manner, from behind the scene:

> Il est du devoir d'une maîtresse de maison d'envoyer des danseurs à celles qui ne peuvent pas s'en procurer par leurs avantages physiques. Cela exige beaucoup de tact et de délicatesse. D'abord, on ne doit demander ce service qu'à des amis intimes ; ensuite adresser une prière et non un ordre, car c'est une corvée infligée à un cavalier. Il faut aussi prendre bien garde que la jeune personne dont on s'occupe ne s'en aperçoive, sous peine de blesser cruellement son amour-propre. (D'Alq, 104-105)

As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, *savoir-vivre* was a skill that was first and foremost concerned with making other people comfortable in social situations. The main rule of etiquette is self-effacement in the interest of ensuring that one's guests are at ease. Again, this skill reflected not only the importance of the guests, but also demonstrated that the host deserved to be a member of the group, that this person instinctively knew

what it meant to be polite and to embody the codified norms of this social milieu. Completing the task at hand—that is, of making sure that all those present at the *bal blanc* felt included and comfortable—was to confirm the common structure of social exchanges shared by the non-working classes at the turn of the twentieth-century.

The hostess mother's role at the *bal blanc* was vital to its smooth progress. The ceremony itself could not function without a director, and mothers of the French elite classes were quick to assume this role. Sitting in the most comfortable chair available, with her daughter at her side, the hostess mother took note of who was dancing, who was not, who had already danced and who had yet to be asked. Just as importantly, the hostess mother accepted or rejected the propositions of young male suitors. Baronne Staffe notes in *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891) that "Il peut arriver qu'un jeune homme s'adresse directement à une jeune fille pour lui avouer qu'il l'aime et qu'il voudrait pour femme. Si elle croit pouvoir répondre à son affection, elle porte immédiatement cette déclaration à la connaissance de sa mère" (278). Staffe makes it quite clear that young people were not socially allowed to make decisions about their romantic futures on their own. It was possible for two young people to speak of their feelings in this ceremonial setting, but etiquette mandated that any plans proposed between the two be presented *immediately* to the young girl's mother. In premising the above statement on this standard with "il peut arriver," Baronne Staffe clearly communicates to her reader that this type of behavior (that is, young people speaking freely about their affections) was not the norm. Furthermore, should this rare situation arise, the most important thing for the young woman to do was to take this information to her mother for review.

Marriage contracts often had little to do with the daughter's desires and far more to do with the mutual benefits set to be acquired by both families, including money, family prestige, or both. It was not uncommon for a young couple to have feelings for each other, but never to learn that these feelings were, in fact, mutual. In the descriptions gathered here from late nineteenth-century etiquette manuals, amorous feelings and feelings of rejection were closely guarded and rarely expressed to the object of one's affections. Even less frequently were these emotional battles discussed with social peers. As Staffe advises, "Qu'on ait accepté l'amour d'un homme ou qu'on l'ait repoussé, on ne doit pas en faire confidence à ses amies, confidence que la vanité inspirerait. En revanche, on est tenu de mettre sa mère au courant de ce qui se passe" (278). To discuss these things openly in polite society at this time would be an embarrassment. For the daughters of the leisure classes, talking about romantic feelings with their peers would be seen as impolite for many reasons, including the need to follow rules of *savoir-vivre* and the necessity of distancing any hint of sexuality from their reputations.

As a guard against humiliation, young women were to engage in small talk with their friends while waiting to be invited to dance by a male attendee. The *fille à marier* needed to appear calm about the fact that they had not yet been asked to dance, and was advised to give off an air of insouciance. This strategy was employed both as a way to save herself from embarrassment and as a way to save others from the uncomfortable task of consoling her. Louise d'Alq advises in *Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874): "Lorsqu'une jeune fille n'est pas invitée à danser, elle ne doit pas avoir l'air d'être embarrassée" (104). For the young women at the *bal blanc,* sulking in the corner, complaining to their girlfriends or scowling at their crushes from across the

room—or any other such behavior that the contemporary mind might associate with the teenaged female—was most certainly off limits. The ceremony was far more focused on demonstrating that the family as a whole belonged to this social group than it was on the young woman's personal feelings. Mothers and daughters alike were on stage at these functions, whether they were seated, standing, talking or dancing. Attendees were making visual analyses of others' adherence to shared cultural values by reading physical expressions of manners in movement. Polite physicality was a key factor in a family's ability to prove, and thus sustain, their economic and social status, and the performances of this physicality at the *bal blanc* had the power to make or break reputations.

V. Movements of Childhood and Movements of Ceremony

Many of the key lessons delineated in childhood were ceremoniously performed in front of others at the ceremonial *bal blanc.* Customs that expressed deference and respect determined what space in the room female attendees would occupy, whether or not they would be seated or remained standing, and how and when they accepted an invitation to dance. As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, seating arrangements at social functions were reflective of an individual's importance with regards to questions of age, social station and gender. Mathilde Bourdon reminds her readership in *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864) that certain rules apply when young people and adults are in mixed company. Specifically, young women must show deference to the "dames âgées" in attendance by offering them the most comfortable seats available at the event: "Ne souffrez pas qu'une femme âgée soit sur une chaise, tandis que vous avez

un fauteuil, et ne prenez pas la place du coin du feu, qui est la place d'honneur, place que la maîtresse de la maison ne cède que dans des cas forts rares" (130). Bourdon further explains that, upon entering the ball, young women were meant to sit quietly next to their mothers and wait for a young gentleman to approach them.

There was a detailed and specific manner in which a young woman was to sit waiting for an invitation. In the second chapter of this dissertation, we saw in the sections entitled "Fighting Against Fidgeting and Holding it in: Lessons on Controlling the Stationary Body in *fin-de-siècle* Paris" and "A Total-Body Task: Figuring Out the Physical Act of Speaking" that much effort was put into training the young woman's body throughout the course of her childhood to direct her gaze neither towards the floor nor up in the air when interacting with a person. As Bourdon advises, "entrée dans le salon à côté de votre mère; vous restez tranquille, posée, sans égarer vos regards, sans élever le ton de votre voix, et vous attendez qu'un *cavalier* vienne vous inviter ou réclamer la contredanse que vous lui avez promise" (65). The young women needed to keep still while seated next to their mothers. Speaking too softly or too loudly was also to be avoided. Again we see that the refined, subtle *juste-milieu* was to be observed in all of the *fille à marier*'s actions, including the position of her gaze and the tone of her voice. These skills, acquired over the entirety of her childhood and repeated so many times as to become second nature to her, were vital signs that the *fille à marier* had successfully incorporated the value system of her social peers.

The placement of the young woman next to her mother was vital to the functioning of the ball itself. D'Alq insists that "Au bal, une jeune fille doit toujours avoir son siège près ou devant celui de sa mère ou la personne qui la chaperonne, et ne

jamais s'asseoir ni s'arrêter autre part, et surtout [pas] dans une autre pièce" (103). Young women at the *bal blanc* could either sit next to her mother or in front of her, which ensured that the girl was always in sight. The pair moved around the solon together as well: "Elle ne va non plus au buffet seule avec son cavalier; sa mère doit l'accompagner" (104, see figure 2 below). Young women were generally not separated from their mothers for the duration of the ball, save from the occasional dance with a young suitor. By remaining in her mother's space, the *fille à marier* communicates her strong ties to her family. She visually demonstrates her adherence to the norm, her willingness to be constantly observed and corrected by her mother. She informs observers of her intentions to follow her mother's recommendations, which most certainly included strengthen her family's position by way of marriage ties.

Louise d'Alq explains that, once a young woman is asked to dance, "La jeune réponde: *Avec plaisir, Monsieur ;* ou si elle ne peut : *Je regrette infiniment de devoir vous refuser, Monsieur, mais je, etc.*" (101). Alongside these spoken lines, however, there was also a physical script that the *fille à marier* needed to perform instantaneously and naturally. Her execution of certain actions erased any possible doubts that she belonged at this ball, with these people. In her *Nouveau savoir-vivre universel,* D'Alq details these movements for her readers:

Figure 2. Joseph Marius Avy (1871-1939), *Souvenir d'un Soir* (19--?). Oil on canvas. Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Roubaix, France.

> Il s'incline devant elle, elle se lève aussitôt et accepte le bras droit qu'il lui offre, n'y aurait-il que deux pas à faire pour arriver à l'endroit d'où ils doivent partir pour danser ; c'est toujours avec le bras droit que le cavalier saisit sa danseuse ; c'est toujours à sa droite qu'elle se trouve au quadrille. (D'Alq, 185)

It was of the utmost importance for the young woman to place herself instinctively at the right side of her dance partner. Making a move to be at the left of the young man who had just asked her to dance would betray a poor level of upbringing and would be an embarrassing moment for mother and daughter alike.

When dancing with her *cavalier,* the young woman of the *bal blanc* continued paying attention to the level at which she held her gaze. Mathilde Bourdon advises her in *Politesse et savoir-vivre: aux jeunes personnes* (1864): "En dansant […] ne regardez pas votre danseur au visage" (65). As these young women had learned in childhood, minute details of their physical comportment were being observed and evaluated at all times. Baronne Staffe echoes this advice to her reader in *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891), stating that "La danseuse ne regarde pas son cavalier au visage, elle ne baisse pas les yeux par terre. Ni pruderie, ni hardiesse, ni fausse honte" (198). Looking a young man in the eye was considered inappropriate, staring at the ground communicated embarrassment and insecurity, and staring into space told others that she was daydreaming and uninterested her surroundings. Again, we see a general distaste within this social group for extremes of any kind—the young woman should be neither too prude, too forward, or too humble. Using her body, the *fille à marier* strived to occupy the middle ground at this ceremonial rite of passage.

It went without saying that a young girl was not to be seen flirting with male guests, but even glancing at one man or another too often, or for too long, had the power to incite whispering between on-looking guests. At the *bal blanc,* mothers of the *filles à marier* and of the potential suitors were watchful and eager to communicate their observations to others. As such, it was imperative that no visual cues betray the romantic interests of the young female participants. Bourdon strongly advises "Evitez, en un mot, tout ce qui peut attirer l'attention, tout ce qui pourrait établir quelque rapport entre un étranger et vous" (65). Even holding a man's gaze from across the room and looking him in the eye while dancing provided other guests with fodder for gossip.

Most importantly, it was strictly forbidden for a young woman to spend time with a male suitor in private. Should other guests take note of the simultaneous absence of a young couple, assumptions would quickly circulate, causing grave and permanent damage to the young woman's reputation. As Bourdon suggests, it was prudent to avoid being led away from the salon by a *cavalier*, but if that was impossible, efforts needed to be made to at least avoid making a scene. She advises: "s'il vous entretient des lieux communs du bal, répondez-lui poliment mais brièvement, sans brusquerie et sans embarras" that his actions are inappropriate, and that they must return to the common area. The *bal blanc* was a performance of upbringing, and therefore the young women needed to reflect a sense of decorum in all of their actions. Time spent backstage was suspicious and smacked of scandal. Stealing away with a young man implied a need to do things that one wouldn't want seen (such as flirting, whispering promises to meet in private at a later date, or even physical contact between the young couple). All actions done at the ball needed to be completely visible by all in attendance. D'Alq points out in

Le Savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie (1874) that “Il est du plus mauvais goût de rire et de chuchoter avec son cavalier derrière l’éventail" (105). Hiding anything from the view of others was suspicious enough—leaving the room with a male guest would have been seen as an all-out breech of social decorum.

In a similar vein, the *fille à marier* should not linger too long in a conversation with any one suitor, nor should she dance with him any more frequently than she does with others. There were rules to be followed when arranging one’s schedule of dances for the night, and young women had only two choices when deciding upon whether or not to dance with a man. She could either accept the offer (which was the expected and respectable choice), or she could refuse. Should she deny his request, however, she was expected to decline all further invitations for the remainder of the evening. The fundamental rule of *savoir-vivre* (to ensure that other people are at ease), was certainly a governing rule at the *bal blanc.* To refuse to dance with a young man who had bravely entered the space of the mother/daughter pair and put himself at their mercy would have been an infraction on the rules of *politesse*, and more offensive still to accept a future offer that same night from another young man. The *fille à marier*, more likely than not, had to dance with many suitors in whom she was not the least bit interested in order to dance with the boy who had caught her eye that night. It was important for the young woman to remember that she was being watched at all times by at least one person, and that these people were all there for the specific purpose of observing her physical demonstrations of social decorum and belonging to that group. This included accepting unwanted invitations to the dance floor. As Louise d’Alq warns in *Le savoir-vivre en toutes les circonstances de la vie* (1874)*,* "Une jeune fille qui danse est obligée d’accepter

indistinctement tous ceux qui l'invitent; si elle refusait, sous le prétexte qu'elle est fatiguée, et qu'elle acceptât cette même danse avec un autre cavalier, elle risquerait de s'attirer les plus graves désagréments" (102). The young woman must always remember not to offend anyone, and that there is always someone watching, weighing, and judging her actions.

The *filles à marier* even carried with them what was called a "carnet de bal," in which they would take note of the suitors who had invited them to dance. The young women at the *bal blanc* would carry, "dans sa ceinture ou l'entrebâillement de son corsage, un carnet de bal sur lequel elle inscrit le nom de ses danseurs" (Martin-Fugier, 21). It was considered a serious offense to neglect one suitor in favor of another. Causing tension, competition, and at times violence between two or more suitors was seen as extremely distasteful. Mathilde Bourdon provides her young female readership with a plan of attack should a mistake be made in her evening line-up of suitors:

> Si, par hasard, par oublie, par distraction, vous avez accordé à deux cavaliers la même contredanse, empressez-vous de les mettre d'accord en renonçant absolument à danser, ni avec eux, ni avec d'autres, et quittez le bal sans bruit dès que vous le pourrez. Sous ce rapport, et pour éviter ces distractions, l'usage du carnet, quoiqu'un peu prétentieux, n'est pas blâmable. (Bourdon, 67)

Causing a scene was out of the question, and completely abandoning the remainder of the evening was the only way for the girl to save face. For a young woman to perform her dance moves at the wrong time or with the wrong person showed a lack of tact, and

thereby put into question her qualifications as a member of this group. Careful scheduling was key to avoiding uncomfortable—and therefore impolite—situations.

The life-long training done in the home and in social situations prepared the young women of the French leisure classes to instinctively, physically "know" how to sit next to her mother while waiting for an invitation to dance, where to hold her gaze and for how long, and how to regulate the tone and volume of her voice. At the *bal blanc,* generations of women displayed the products of time spent between mothers and daughters. These performances communicated the morals, manners, and physical code of conduct that represented the family's collective lifestyle.

VI. Coming Together on the Dance Floor

Figure 3. Joseph-Marius Avy (1871-1939). *Bal blanc.* 1903. Oil on canvas. Paris, Musée du Petit palais.

This section introduces and analyzes four of the dances commonly performed at the *bal blanc* within the context of this chapter's larger question: Can we locate the values and the identity of the French leisure classes within the movements enacted at this ceremonial ritual? Which codified values can be visually identified and read in the movements of the dances performed by the young couples at the *bal blanc* at the turn of the twentieth-century? Taking into account that the main attraction of the ball is the dancing itself, what can analyses of its prescriptive dance moves tell us about the embodied knowledge common to this social milieu? Of the four dances to be discussed here, the "pas de quatre," the waltz, and the cotillion were reflective of the values that were held by polite society. The Tango—reported only in the January to March 1913 ball season—struck many attendees as scandalous and subversive. The dance had been introduced to Parisian nightlife by outsiders, picked up by the unruly *étudiants* of the early twentieth-century, and had infiltrated the respectable and traditional ballrooms of the elite. Outside forces threatened to disrupt the respectable character of these functions, and guests were surely stunned by their children's behavior. As Marcel Prévost laments in one of his *Billets à Françoise* published in the September 1922 edition of *La Revue de France*,

> Aux environs de 1913, parmi le malaise indéfinissable qui irritait les nerfs de tous, l'épidémie d'agitation et de divertissement descendit vers les diverses bourgeoisies, vers les groupements réputés jusque-là calmes et laborieux. Les filles des universitaires, les enfants de marie apprirent à danser le tango. (Prévost, 685)

As I demonstrate below, these dances were reflective of social values held by the non-working classes of France in the turn-of-the-century, each in their own way. The poised, respectful and courteous *fille à marier* was encouraged to join her leisure class peers on the dance floor and "[danser] le pas de quatre […], la valse, peut-être même le tango" (Martin-Fugier, 21). Most of the dances at the *bal blanc* communicated a tendency to reproduce a family's intergenerational value system, and therefore their social belonging in the ranks of the leisure classes. However, the reproductive mechanism of the *bal blanc* in the January to March season 1913 was shaken by performances of the Tango behind the closed doors of the *hôtels particuliers* of Paris, providing evidence of the subversive potential of a ritual available to those young women who lived within the confines of this highly regulated and protected social milieu.

The *pas de quatre* is a female-only dance whose goal is to officially present the girls of marriageable age at the evening's event. Originally a dance performed on stage at the ballet, the *pas de quatre* entered the ball scene in the last half of the nineteenth-century. Only four young women occupied the dance floor, and each was introduced by name as she entered the spotlight. Generally the opening dance of the evening, this portion of the night's activities provided the audience with useful information about each young woman's status—the girls entered the dance floor in order of descending age. As we saw in the first chapter of this study, physical demonstrations of respect were executed according to social station, sex and age. Being presented first was a sign of respect for the seniority of the *fille à marier,* however, since a young woman should ideally find a suitor in her first season, this presentation had the potential to cause embarrassment as well. Insofar as the audience might assume that the age of the young

woman introduced was indicative of the number of ball seasons she has attended, her desirability could be put into question. This was an important moment for each young woman to physically demonstrate all of the grace she could muster in front of her mother, her family, and her social peers.

The highlight of the evening was most certainly the "cotillion." This was an event that consisted of an improvised succession of different dances, each one initiated by one of the young people in attendance (see figure 4 below).

Figure 4. Hermen Anglada Camarasa (1871-1959) *Le Bal blanc*, 1900. Huile sur panneau, Barcelone, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

According to the outline of the cotillion given by Ermance Dufaux in her 1883 text *Le Savoir-vivre dans la vie ordinaire et dans les cérémonies civiles et religieuses,* the cotillion was the last event of the evening: "Le cotillon se danse à la fin du bal, avant le souper. Cependant quelques maîtres de maison préfèrent que l'on soupe auparavant, à

cause de son interminable longueur" (270). Once the cotillion began, the schedule of events was turned over to the young people, and often times these young people danced until late in the night.

The dances themselves could vary between the waltz, the polka, the quadrille and the *pas des patineurs*—a dance move that mimics the movements of ice skaters and provides an excellent occasion for young people to demonstrate their poise and elegance. The basic waltz step of the quadrille is fairly simple, though gender-specific. Whereas the male dance partner starts his 3/4 meter step (that is, the basic **one-**two-three, **one-**two-three rhythm) by stepping first to the left, the female dance partner starts her 3/4 meter step to the right, resulting in mirrored consistency once on the dance floor (see figure 5 below). The quadrille would begin with four couples on the dance floor at the time, and as the dance developed, additional couples would join in.


THE POSITION IN QUADRILLE.

Figure 5. Quadrille position, Library of Congress

This dance brought together multiple pairs of dancers who would then switch partners throughout the course of the song, providing an opportunity for young men and women who had not yet met on the dance floor to be paired up.

The honor of beginning the cotillion was given, of course, to the *fille de la maison* who would select a *cavalier* to be the dance's conductor (or, simply put, the *cavalier* would choose the succession of different dances throughout the cotillion). To start, the honorary *fille de la maison* would perform the dance by pairing herself up with each suitor within the circle, after which all of the other young women would follow her lead. As Dufaux demonstrates: "La dame conductrice l'exécute la première et fait en dansant le tour du cercle; puis toutes les dames prennent sa place, une à une, et l'imitent" (270). After these initial steps have been taken, however, the power to direct the dance transfers to the male dance partner initially chosen by the *fille de la maison*: "C'est au cavalier conducteur à s'ingénier à varier les combinaisons, à l'aide d'accessoires, pour le plus grand plaisir des assistants" (270). The titles of *fille conductrice* and *cavalier conducteur,* then, constituted both a privilege and a responsibility for the young men and women at this ceremonial ritual.

The most surprising dance at the *bal blanc* was performed for just one season. The Tango is explicitly sexual both in its movements and its accompanying musical scores (see figure 6 below). Working-class black Argentinians in Buenos Aires originally performed the dance during the nineteenth-century, and appeared in Europe in the 1910s. According to Christine Denniston, a current expert on the Tango and its history, the dance was most likely transported across the Atlantic by young upper-class Argentinian men who had travelled to Paris to study. As she points out,

Some of these young men, not surprisingly, had spent many happy hours in the brothels, clubs and places of ill repute in Buenos Aires, where they had learned to dance the Tango. […] Polite society in Paris saw the dance for the first time and fell in love, and very soon the whole of Europe was whipped by a furious Tangomania. 1913 was the year of the Tango (Denniston, 1)

Figure 6. Xavier Sager, *Le Tango,* 1913.

It is quite shocking today to learn that the participants of the *bal blanc,* which was a veritable moving tribute to grace, elegance, poise, manners and respectability, danced one of the most sexually provocative dances of the day. The sexually charged moves of the Tango flew in the face of the moral standards of conduct shared by the members of polite society so passionately dedicated to maintaining a level of decorum and avoiding overt physical expressions of sexuality. The *fille de la maison* or the *cavalier conducteur* who

dared to begin the Tango at the *bal blanc* were most certainly aware of the insubordination in which they were engaged. The "Tangomania" described by Denniston was likely a craze of the youth, and not of the parents of the *filles à marier du bal blanc.* Given the specific functions of the *bal blanc*—that is, to demonstrate the girls' upbringing, to find suitable marriage matches, and to blend together old names and new money—scholars of the Belle Époque can look to the early 1913 ball season of Parisian elite culture as a clear example of a traditional, ceremonial ritual being used by its participants as a site of cultural subversion.

VII. Conclusion.

The *bal blanc* was a tasteful affair for unmarried, respectable young members of the leisure classes to gather for an enjoyable evening of dancing and socializing. Its explicit goals were to introduce daughters to polite society, and to hopefully find a marriage match for the young woman that would be beneficial to the economic and social standing of both families. The ceremonial ritual, originally a phenomenon of the aristocracy of the Ancien Régime, was reflective of the social changes of the nineteenth-century because it was now being performed by an amalgam of old aristocratic French lineages and newly-arrived families with only a few generations of consideration attached to their names. Those in attendance were all on stage, performing their right to be there by following certain verbal and physical scripts of *politesse* that put others at ease. The ceremony functioned as an occasion to celebrate of the long amounts of time spent between mothers and daughters over the previous fifteen to seventeen years. As such, the *bal blanc* was an

emotional, culminating capstone in the lives of both women. The pair had worked together on controlling the girl's fidgeting, her posture, and the grace of her movements. They had attended salon *visites* together on a nearly daily basis for years, served tea to their weekly guests, and had put vast amounts of time (and money) into making sure that the young woman knew how to dance the *pas de quatre* and play the piano. This ritual, at least for the mothers and daughters in attendance, acted as a graduation ceremony marking the passage from the era of protected girlhood to the budding new homofamilial relationship between two adult women. The *filles à marier* were making their mothers proud, showing them that they had been listening and learning all those years. Physically performing the family's value system and respectable character was a point of pride for the young women at the *bal blanc.* The ball itself was a celebration of French court tradition, of the shared values and beliefs of the leisure classes at the turn of the twentieth-century, and of intergenerational, homofamilial relationships. `The collective beliefs, behaviors, manners and mannerisms of each family were on display at the *bal blanc*, and it was up to the *filles à marier* to stand up and perform.

Chapter Four: To the Streets: *Catherinettes, prêtes pour la fête*

I. Introduction

While young women of the leisure classes gracefully executed ritualized postures, gestures, and dance moves at the *bal blancs* that were taking place inside prestigious *hôtels particuliers*, seen only by their socioeconomic peers and sheltered from the vile gaze of the public, another group of unmarried working women jostled, marched and sang their way through the streets of Paris every year on November 25th. They sported ridiculous hats and bright green and yellow ribbons, carried flowers and trinkets, and their friends often egged them on to kiss random men in the crowds. The unmarried, working women of the Sentier, who are the objects of this chapter, were seamstresses, department store workers, and hat makers, the majority of whom had recently migrated to Paris from smaller, rural towns. Unlike their leisure class counterparts in the *faubourg Saint-Germain* who were well mannered, poised, and strikingly graceful, these workingwomen had little time for curtsies, afternoon tea, or *soirées dansantes.* In the early 1900s, thousands of rural migrant *catherinettes* lived, worked, and played together in the center of Paris, forming their own support systems in sisterhood and friendship. Each year, these so-called *vieilles filles* animated the city's sleet-driven avenues with physical manifestations of social change, using their bodies to show everyone in their path that other lifestyles of femininity—ones that had less to do with marriage and reputation and more to do with self-sufficiency and mutual support—were not only

possible in some distant future, but were being materialized at that very moment of celebration.

Ritual is often conflated with conservative, traditional, religious and sometimes superstitious rites that mark the passage of key moments in an individual's life. However, there is nothing inherently religious or conservative about ritual. Performances of the *fête de la Sainte Catherine* at the turn of the twentieth-century reveal that ritual can be as progressive and innovative as any other form of cultural expression. Cultural geographer Gavin Brown proposes in his 2003 article "Theorizing Ritual as Performance: Explorations of Ritual Interdeterminacy" that we, as scholars "shift our concerns away from the 'tyranny of form' associated with ritual and explore instead the cultural dynamism, efficacy, and transformations that emerge when ritual is recast as a processual mode of cultural activity rather than a static one" (3). This chapter will trace the spatial and cultural movement of the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* from its original rural and Catholic setting to the urban, secular setting in *Belle Époque* Paris. I will ask what effect these shifts had on these particular women who participated in the celebration—the single, working class women of twenty-five, thirty or thirty-five years working in the urban fashion industry—and what effect these changes had on the social mood towards single women in general. Indeed, all social classes had their single women, their "femmes non-mariées," but those of the leisure classes were not apt to go parading through the streets alerting the public of their private affairs. Some women of means had been left out of marriage plans in their early years on the market, others were burdened with the task of caring for ailing parents, and others still took it upon themselves to remain unmarried so they could do as they please. The *catherinettes* of the urban garment industry, of

course, were not women of means, and used the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* as an opportunity to band together in solidarity and celebrate their membership in the lively sub-culture of the Sentier.

The *Belle Époque* saw an exceptional rise in the publications of inexpensive daily newspapers in Paris. According to Vanessa Schwartz's estimations in *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris,* "Between 1880 and 1914, the overall circulation of Parisian dailies increased 250 percent […] Newspapers for a *sou* made up the greatest number of new titles" (27-29). Paired with the visual, real-life experiences of Haussmannian *boulevard* culture, this recent influx of inexpensive mass media inspired Parisians to "first read and then see things for themselves" (16). The city of Paris encapsulated modernity at the dawn of the twentieth-century, and its inhabitants were flocking to newsstands and then to the streets so that they, too, could witness (and therefore participate in) this new urban culture in the making. One way they did this was to first read about, and then attend the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine,* joining the crowd as it cheered on the city's own *catherinettes du Sentier.*

In 1912, the periodical *L'Éclair* informs its Parisian readership of a scandalous and spectacular urban ritual being performed in the streets of the garment district. In lively, visual and aural terms, the celebration is presented to the public:

> Tout à coup, les portes s'ouvrent et par bandes, bras dessus, bras dessous, les *catherinettes* au milieu, avec leurs bonnets fantaisistes, armés de mirlitons, d'ombrelles de papier, de colifichets de toutes sortes, la gaieté aux lèvres, une joie mutine aux yeux, les midinettes s'en vont par les boulevardes et les avenues

> accompagnées, acclamées, saluées, taquinées, répondant aux plaisanteries par leurs rires francs, aux bravos par des chansons. (*L'Éclair,* 26 November, 1912).

As I propose in this chapter, early twentieth-century celebrations of the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine*—that is, the annual *fête* honoring the patron saint of unmarried women—provide a clear-cut example of how ritual can, in fact, function as a progressive and innovative form of cultural expression.

II. Brief History of Saint Catherine

The legend of Saint Catherine is said to date back to Christian oral traditions of 4th century Alexandria. The French have a long history with Saint Catherine, the patron saint of unmarried women, educators, philosophers and seamstresses. According to data collected by Anne Monjaret, the story of Saint Catherine was "racontée pour la première fois au Xe siècle dans le *Ménologe de Basile* et popularisée en Occident par la *Légende dorée,* recueil des vies de saints composé au XIIIe siècle" (20), paving the way for numerous medieval cults honoring the saint.

Catherine of Alexandria (see figure 1), born to a pagan king and a Christian mother, is said to have been a philosopher in her own right, and remained unmarried until her death in 305 C.E. Legend has it that she visited Roman Emperor Maxentius, who sent as many orators and debaters as he could find to dissuade her of her Christian beliefs. Catherine not only held her ground, but did Maxentius one better—she converted every last one of her sparring partners, including the Empress Veronica—Maxentius's wife.

The Emperor responded by having Catherine hung up on a torture wheel (see figure 2 above) and eventually beheaded, sealing her fate as a Christian martyr to learned, unmarried women.

Figure 1. Silvestros Teoharis, *St. Catherine*, tempera on wood, circa 1640.

Figure 2.
Caravaggio, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, oil on canvas, circa 1598.

The torture device became known as the Saint Catherine's Wheel, and closely resembles the spinning wheel. Although the two serve completely different purposes—the former used for torture, the latter for production—both came to represent the saint and the unmarried seamstresses whom she protects.

III. The Rural, Catholic *fête de la Sainte-Catherine*

From the twelfth- through the eighteenth-centuries, the Catholic Church promoted the figure of Saint Catherine, requiring its young female members to honor the saint each year by decorating her statue in the local *églises.* As Monjaret explains, "Du XIIe jusqu'au XVIIIe siècle, la Sainte-Catherine est considérée comme une fête d'obligation […] et célèbre les « jeunes filles à marier » et les « vieilles filles », le 25 novembre" (19). Before its primary focus became the women who were coming to the end of their youths, the *fête* was a time for women of a far larger age group to pay homage to Catherine, to make known their single status, and to non-verbally express their desire to find a match.

For most of its history, the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* was not associated with the seamstresses, department store workers, and hat makers of Paris portrayed in this chapter. In fact, the word "catherinette" was originally used in reference to dissertations that were defended at the Sorbonne during the month of November. This use of the term reinforced the connection between Saint Catherine and her legacy as a philosopher and debater for centuries before *catherinette* became synonymous with the single woman. Indeed, "Il faut attendre […] la fin du XIXe siècle pour voir ce terme définir toutes les jeunes filles âgées de vingt-cinq ans encore célibataires" (Monjaret, 36). It would seem, then, that Saint Catherine was cited for her intelligence for many years before being reduced to her unmarried status. Today, the expression "coiffer sainte Catherine" today has purely negative connotations (meaning to fail to find a husband in particular, but also to fail at life in general). But this was not always the case. For centuries, the expression was used

literally to mean caring for Saint Catherine's statue: "Cette expression qui remonterait au XVI ou au XVII siècle […] se fonde sur l'ancienne coutume de coiffer, voire de vêtir les statues des saints dans les églises, charge souvent confiée aux plus vertueuses ou aux plus âgées demoiselles" (Monjaret, 33-34). Instead of being associated with failure, having the honor of being chosen to "coiffer sainte Catherine" suggested accomplishment and valor. Over the course of the nineteenth-century, as the *fête* moved from the French countryside to Paris and began to focus solely on the twenty-five, thirty, or thirty-five year old unmarried working woman, Catherine, *catherinette,* and *coiffer Sainte-Catherine* all took on specific, and rather insulting, connotations. Male versions of these expressions were also used to chastise bachelors who were also neglecting their traditional duties as husband and father. The term "catherinet" was used for single young men in general, and "catherin" designated those men who dated, but did not marry, a *catherinette.* Because these migrant female garment workers had left the traditional confines of their rural families and were parading their single status through the streets of Paris in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, the virtue and piety once associated with the *fête* was no longer applicable.

The rural, Catholic *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* of 1800-1850 was far more centered on initiating young women into the age of match-making than it was on singling out those unmarried women who were approaching their thirties. Within this context of initiation and inclusion, Catherine and her *fête* became associated with textile and fashion industry workers. As the "atelier" was a primarily feminine workplace, and because many of the women who worked in these shops were unmarried, the seamstresses' workshop came to be associated with Saint Catherine. Around the age of fifteen, rural

girls of marriageable age were sent to the seamstresses to learn how to fashion clothing and hats, but also to learn the language of womanhood. Now that she was to be preparing herself for marriage (and, therefore, relations with the opposite sex), she needed to learn certain skills of the trade. And so she went, at age fifteen, to the *atelier* to learn about womanhood, and all that was to come along with it—including sewing, flirting, and sexuality:

> L'année de leur quinze ans, les jeunes filles de condition modeste […] passent l'hiver chez la couturière, femme qui détient les savoirs du corps, de la sexualité, et de l'amour. La couturière est chargée de « dégrossir », de « façonner » la jeune fille, de lui faire découvrir la beauté et l'envie d'être femme. Elle aide la jeune nubile dans ce parcours qui la conduira au mariage et lui confectionnera d'ailleurs sa robe de mariée, faisant le lien entre le mode de l'adolescence et celui des adultes. (Monjaret, 27)

As an initiative practice, then, the rural *Sainte-Catherine* of the early nineteenth-century served as a framework within which young women experienced the fact that they belonged to a group, and this group was feminine, closely connected with each other, and flat-out enjoyed being women. Saint Catherine was used to mold young women into members of their rural communities, not to marginalize them or to shame them into a last-minute scramble for social acceptance. They were at the seamstresses' workshop to learn two skills—to sew, and to be a woman.

IV. The Vastly Varied Category of the Unmarried Woman in *Belle Époque* Paris

As we have seen, as the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* traveled from rural France to Paris, it took on new forms, was practiced in new spaces, and fostered female solidarity amongst the working class women of the city's fashion industry. It is certainly worth noting, however, that many other women were *catherinettes* by definition (that is, unmarried at the age of twenty-five, thirty, or thirty-five). Not all unmarried women took it upon themselves to don eccentric hats in public places that exposed them as single. Many women found themselves still unmarried at twenty-five due to circumstances out of their control, while others chose to sacrifice their romantic leads for the sake of aging or ailing parents. Society's opinion of the *vieille fille* was often insulting and accusatory, and there existed large groups of women who felt marginalized due to their unmarried status. However, some women of the leisure classes simply chose to remain single, as they were economically stable on their own. These women were certainly *catherinettes* by association with Saint Catherine because they were single, though they do not fall into the same category of the quintessentially Parisian *catherinette* workers of the fashion industry. In order to avoid confusion between these groups of unmarried women, I will employ the term *vieille fille* to refer to those women of means who wanted to marry but had not, the expression *dame célibataire* for independently wealthy women who chose not to marry for personal reasons, and *femmes non-mariées* to refer to all unmarried women past the age of twenty-five. The nickname *catherinette* will refer solely to the unmarried, female migrant worker of the Parisian garment industry at the turn of the twentieth-century who participated in the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* on November 25th.

Gustave Guesvillers, author of the short story *Catherinette!* appearing in the 1904 issue of *L'Illustration,* recognizes that not all unmarried women are single by choice. In his narrative, he uproots the common and recognizable literary theme of the economically ruined hero who has fallen victim to his mistress's lust for luxury. In *Catherinette!* two women—Madame Mahout and her daughter Mademoiselle Sophie—are financially ruined after the suicide of Monsieur Mahout, who, as the women learn at his funeral, spent all of the family's money on himself—including Madame Mahout's dowry and the inheritance left by her parents. Guesvillers's narrator mockingly cites the patriarchal legal system responsible for this type of larceny:

> Or, cet écrin volumineux dénommé Code civil contient, entre autres joyaux, cette perle éminemment précieuse: "Le mari administrer seul les biens de la communauté. Il peut les vendre, aliéner, hypothéquer sans le secours de la femme" […] Plein de respect pour la loi, M. Mahout avait donc tout seul administré les biens de sa femme : il les avait vendus, aliénés, hypothéqués, et, toujours par respect pour la loi, il s'était interdit de la renseigner sur ses transactions. (Guesvillers, 17)

Monsieur Mahout, then, could claim that he was within his rights as a husband by selling off all of the family's equity. As things stand, in France at the time of Guesviller's narrative, the terrible and shameful situation in which the Mahout women find themselves is abhorrently legal, and Guesvillers warns women to beware of the downfalls of marriage contracts.

Mademoiselle Sophie, the novella's *vieille fille,* is faced with the harsh reality of her unstable future. She has no practical training, aside from some rudimentary skills in the *arts d'agrément,* and feels, therefore, grateful for her uncle Archile's offer to allow the two women to live with him in the countryside, despite his humble dwellings and meager meals. Sophie spends the next several years of her life tending her uncle's farm and taking care of her mother and uncle. As her mother's mind goes, her uncle's health deteriorates rapidly. Confronted with the death of yet another male provider, Sophie considers a rather unattractive marriage proposal from one of her uncle's business associates. Before she can make her decision, Archile succumbs to his sickness and leaves Sophie his life's savings—which, incidentally, he had kept secret until his death to ensure that his beneficiary would be well deserving of his generosity. No longer constricted by financial instability, the same woman who spent years lamenting her unmarried status in the previous thirty pages of the novella suddenly has a change of heart. Her pursuer, M. Chachagne, seeing a luxurious future ahead of him, feigns surprise at his supposed "luck":

> Quatre-cent mille….Pas possible ! […] Ah ! Sophie !...Comme nous allons donc être heureux ! il ne se doutait guère, cet homme pratique et simple, qu'il venait d'infliger à la jeune fille la dernière de ses déceptions […] D'un geste sec, Mlle Sophie avait dégagé sa main. Elle prononça calmement:—Monsieur Chachagne, permettez-moi de vous rappeler que je ne vous ai jamais engagé ma parole. Je suis donc libre, et mon désir est de rester telle. (Guesvillers, 44)

Up to this point in the narrative, Mademoiselle Sophie has been self-sacrificing, passive,

soft-spoken, and spent most of her waking hours depressed about her unmarried status. Once she has hold of some real, tangible power of her own, however, we witness a complete reversal of our heroine. Now, she is "libre" and therefore no longer bound to financial obligations to her mother that had held the girl hostage since Monsieur Mahout's suicide. She can do what she wants, and what she wants is to remain unattached. Firmly taking control of her voice and her words, she blatantly states: "J'entends rester Catherinette" (Guesvillers, 44).

Such bold choices made by single women were unappreciated by certain anxious citizens who were focused on the nation's declining birth rate. Hugues Leroux, for example, declares that this population of unwed leisure-class women should be seen as a "grave worry," and demands that his reader pay close attention to this rising problem. In his 1898 treaty, *Nos filles, qu'en ferons-nous?* Leroux clearly maps out what he perceives as a critically weak link in French society at the closing of the nineteenth-century: "L'avenir des jeunes filles de la bourgeoisie, tous les jours plus nombreuses, qui ne se trouvent pas à marier, et qui, cependant, persistent à vivre dans le monde, est, pour la famille, pour la société française, une inquiétude autrement grave" (12). Leroux is anxious about the financially independent women who are choosing to pursue their own vocations and interests over marriage and family. He laments those who condone this type of behavior, and blames the parents of these *dames célibataires* for allowing such an "égoïste" to develop under their roof:

> De plus en plus, vous allez voir des jeunes filles riches se créer une vie indépendante. Les beaux-arts et le voyage serviront d'éventail. Pour excuser cette

> fantaisie de célibat, le monde dira : « C'est une artiste » ou encore « Elle avait une vocation… » ou enfin : « Son humeur est si vagabonde!... » (Leroux, 115-116)

According to Leroux the French "race" will suffer from these so-called selfish choices that young *dames célibataires* are making for themselves. These women will leave the nation childless, depraved, and immoral. According to Leroux, this problem is very serious, and very real. He fears that his contemporaries are choosing to turn a blind eye to the problem by neglecting to take in comprehensive data on the subject: "Il n'y a pas de statistique spéciale de cette particulière catégorie: « les jeunes filles à marier qui ont une dot bourgeoise ». Mais ouvrez les yeux et les oreilles" (12). He delivers an anecdote from a conversation he had with an upper-class *dame célibataire* to lend credence to his argument. Conversing with one of the unmarried women he so thoroughly describes in *Nos filles, qu'en ferons-nous?,* Leroux asks the young woman to explain her stance on marriage. The interviewee believes that, since she has the means and the opportunity to explore life outside the confines of marriage, she is entitled to do so. Being a woman should not stand in her way. As she explains,

> J'ai vingt-huit ans. Je ne suis pas mariée, je n'ai pas voulu l'être. Je m'aperçois qu'un peu d'argent, un peu de culture, la passion de la musique, le goût du voyage, la certitude que les hommes ne sont pas une humanité supérieure, les femmes une humanité inférieure, forment comme la chaîne d'un paratonnerre qui met à l'abri du coup de foudre. (Leroux, 138)

For many social commentators in the *Belle Époque,* this way of thinking was simply inappropriate for a lady. Baronne Staffe's definition of a feminine French identity is explicitly stated in *Usages du monde: règles de savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (1891): "Elle accomplit son devoir simplement, elle sait que le bonheur complet n'existe pas et elle n'a pas fait de rêves impossibles ou, du moins, elle les a étouffés" (256). Leisure class women weren't meant to explore life dreams outside of marriage. It was their duty, as traditional Frenchwomen of strong moral duty to marry, bear children, and impart a social education on future generations. To take their place in the natural order of things, as Louise d'Alq suggests in *Le Nouveau savoir-vivre universel* (1884), is to avoid chastisement and denigration from her peers, "car il n'est pas de position pour laquelle le monde soit aussi sévère que pour celle de la femme n'ayant pas son appui naturel: un mari" (29). These women who "ne se trouvent pas à marier, et qui, cependant, persistent à vivre dans le monde" were subjected to a particular form of shame, whether their reasons for remaining single were selfish, vain, unrealistic, rebellious, or simply a lack of luck.

Often times, it was the family members (most commonly, the mothers) who were to blame for a leisure class woman's failure to find a husband, and not the *femme non-mariée* herself. In Guesvillers's novella *Catherinette!* (1908), Sophie's mother is clearly at fault for her daughter's unmarried status. Referred to in the text only as "Madame Mahout," the woman takes great pride in the family name and rejects marriage proposals for Sophie left and right during the young woman's first years on the market. After the death of Monsieur Mahout, one final suitor presents himself—a certain Monsieur Drillard, who is humble and hopeful in his pitch to the intimidatingly proud Madame Mahout:

> Madame, j'aurai trente-deux ans aux Rois. Je n'ai jamais été malade. Je ne bois jamais que du cidre coupé et je ne fume pas, ni ne prise. Outre mon commerce, qui me rapporte bon an mal an quinze cent à deux mille francs, tous frais payés, je possède quelque épargne et une petite rente que j'ai hérité de ma mère. (Guesvillers, 19)

Unfortunately for both Drillard and Sophie, Madame Mahout has not yet realized that the Mahout name is now, at least financially speaking, worthless. She still clings on to the idea that she and her daughter Sophie are too good for someone like Drillard, and that they would lose their footing in the non-working classes should Sophie join Drillard in marriage. In a fit of glorious pride, Madame Mahout makes a break with decorum (and quite possibly a psychic break with reality)—interchangeably laughing and screaming, physically preventing Drillard from leaving her living room without a scene. Madame Mahout is absolutely furious that someone like Drillard—who is so clearly beneath the Mahout family name—would have the audacity to propose marriage to her daughter. She believes that Drillard is taking advantage of her husband's death to make a financially and socially beneficial marriage match. Drunk on rage, Madame Mahout reveals that Sophie has had plenty of suitors over the years, and that even these men—so clearly superior to Drillard—hadn't measured up:

> J'aurais refusé des ingénieurs, des fonctionnaires, des officiers…Et tout cela pourquoi ? Je vous le demande ? Pour que la fille de M. Mahout s'appelle un jour Mme Drillard ! J'aimerais cent et mille fois mieux que ma Zizi reste Catherinette jusqu'à la fin de ses jours ! (Guesvillers, 21)

When the reader learns that such admirable suitors as government officials and officers had sought Sophie's hand in marriage, the blame for her unmarried status is directed away from her and towards her mother. Sophie is no longer breaking the rules. Rather, her mother's maniacal vanity has kept her daughter alone all these years. In perhaps the most uncomfortable, sadistic, abusive and almost un-readable passage of the narrative, Madame Mahout calls Sophie down from her room to witness the verbal degradation of Drillard (see figure 3):

> Zizi ! Zizi ! Descends tout de suite ! Le rouge vint au visage de Drillard. Il supplia:—Madame, par pitié, laissez-moi partir. Mais Mlle Sophie parut et Drillard se cacha le visage dans ses mains. –Regarde cet imbécile, Zizi ; il ose demander ta main. Mme Mahout changea de manière et pouffa d'un rire énorme. (Guesvillers, 20)

Sophie is eventually able to calm her mother down enough to allow Drillard to finally leave. We later learn that Madame Mahout was, in fact, losing control of her mental stability. At the end of the text, when a weaseling friend of Sophie's uncle, Chachagne, proposes marriage, she only considers the offer because she needs to take care of her ailing and absent-minded mother. Although "les prétentions exorbitantes de Mme Mahout avaient dû paralyser toutes les bonnes volontés, tous les sentiments" of the potential suitors Sophie would have liked to meet, she is willing to marry Chachagne if it comes down to it (35). Luckily, it never does, and Sophie ends up fulfilling her mother's

wishes after all: she will “rester Catherinette jusqu’à la fin de ses jours"—though by choice, not failure.

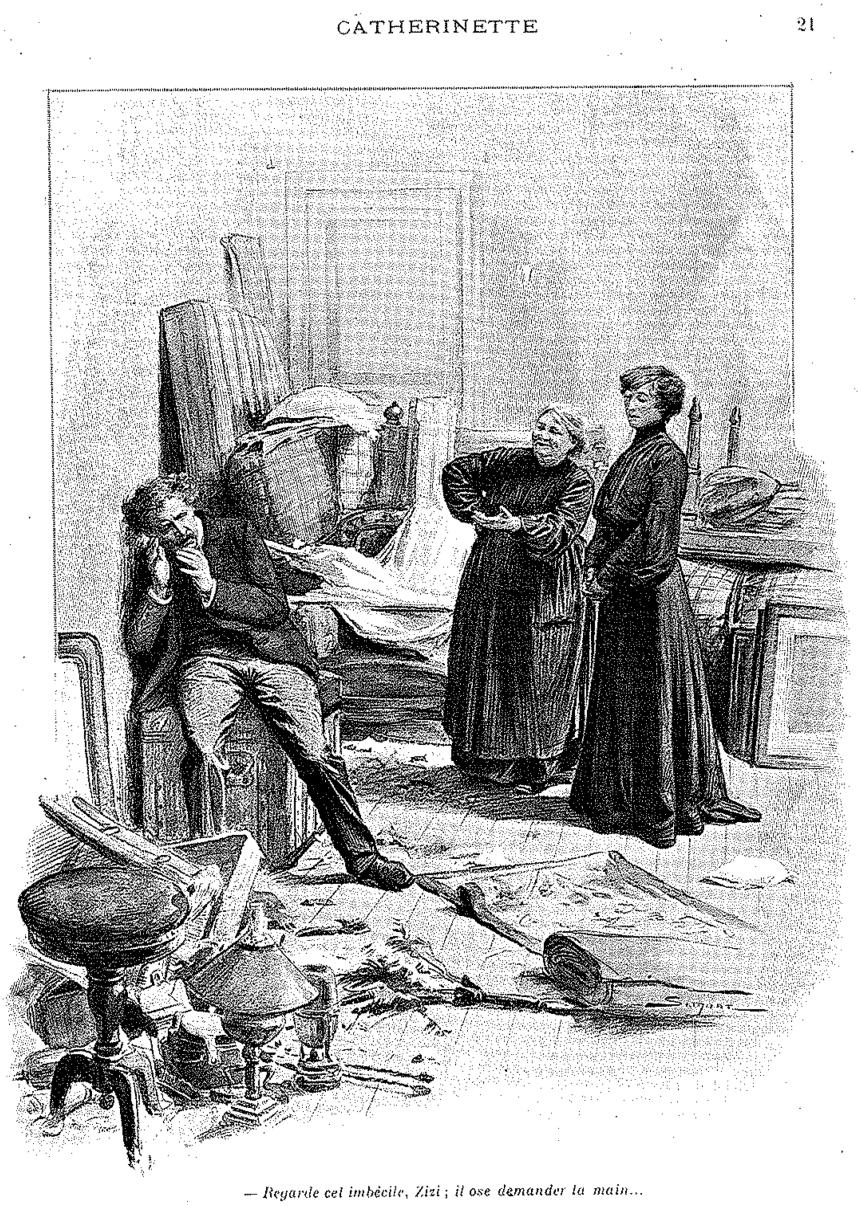

Figure 3. Illustration by Simont in 1904 *L’Illustration,* p. 20.

The homofamilial obligations a young woman had to her mother went far beyond following her advice on marriage. Often, as family members aged and as money was lost, unmarried women were needed in the home to take care of ailing parents. As we saw

with Sophie and as we will see with Germaine, the female protagonist of Mathilde Alanic's 1910 short story *Bal blanc,* when no male breadwinner was around to support a family financially, it was up to the unmarried daughter to take on this role. As Monjaret notes, "des obligations comme l'apport de soins réguliers à un proche parent contraignent à s'installer définitivement sinon pour une longue période, au domicile familial" (38). Unable to entertain the idea of moving away to begin a new life with husbands and families of their own, many women remained unmarried because it was their only option.

Alanic's *Bal blanc* (1910) tells the story of yet another pair of financially ruined women, Madame Duroncier and her daughter Germaine, following the death of Monsieur Duroncier. The two travel to visit Mademoiselle Tiercin, whom they hope might provide a dowry for the young Germaine. Mademoiselle Tiercin is an unmarried woman of some means who was left out of marriage plans as a young woman and was also left responsible for taking care of her aging parents in her twenties. At tea, Germaine laments Mademoiselle Tiercin's situation, claiming that the girls of her generation would never accede to being chained down by such self-sacrificing obligations:

> Oh ! mademoiselle, je vous admire…mais sans prétendre vous imiter…Ma génération ne possède pas à ce degré l'esprit de sacrifice…Nous voulons vivre notre vie activement, répandre nos forces avec le plus de générosité que possible…Mais se resserrer jusqu'à l'étouffement ! piétiner dans une cage où l'on s'émousse les ailes ! Brr !...cela m'épouvante comme une façon de suicide ! (Alanic, 6)

At this point in the story, Germaine still has high hopes of finding a husband. The three

women put on a *bal blanc* to this end, and the young woman shines at the event, moving gracefully throughout the ball tending to guests, making sure that every one present is comfortable (rule number one of French *politesse*), dancing with suitors and charming their mothers. At the ball, Mademoiselle Tiercin reconnects with a former suitor, Monsieur Lafarède, and the two rekindle a romance that soon turns into a marriage proposal. Germaine, now aware that Mademoiselle Tiercin's decision will most certainly mean that she can no longer rely on Tiercin's generosity for her dowry, comes face to face with the reality in which she and her mother find themselves: "Elle ouvrait sur la vie des yeux très lucides, qui se pénétraient bien de réalité. Et elle ne comptait pas modifier, en sa faveur, le train habituel du monde" (Alanic, 37). Because Mademoiselle Tiercin's marriage will, more likely than not, leave Germaine again without a dowry, the young men from the *bal blanc* thrown for her by Mademoiselle Tiercin are no longer viable suitors. Since "un garçon sérieux court risque de se discréditer et hasarde sa situation en se mariant à l'étourdie, par sentiment" (37). No respectable young man will marry her out of purely selfless and sentimental reasons, and the young woman no longer has a dowry to bring to the table. Germaine is caught in a scramble for economic security at the end of the novella. She learns of a group of nurses who are leaving for Morocco with the Red Cross and sees a way for her, and her mother, to survive. As her mother lay sleeping, she contemplates their meager future should Germaine fail to support them. Alanic's narrator paints a profound scene of familial intimacy, duty, and strength as the young woman signs herself up for their next stage in life:

> Germaine méditait encore ces graves vérités, en contemplant sa mère, quand Mme Duroncier s'éveilla et lui sourit. Et ce sourire d'amour parut à la jeune fille une promesse lumineuse, comme un arc-en-ciel dans la nuée d'orage. Oui, de même qu'en l'espace, les rafales se dispersent au-dessus de la perspective changeante et infinie de la vie. Le soleil reviendrait…Il fallait regarder en avant, au-delà de l'heure présent, avec courage, avec confiance, pour se retrouver fort…Germaine adressa un geste de caresse à sa mère, redressa le registre entr'ouvert, trempa sa plume dans l'encre, et dit à demie-voix : « Continuons ! » (Alanic, 38)

Germaine realizes that she can no longer trust in marriage as a source of financial security. With no one to rely on but herself, she signs herself up for a life in a foreign land spent exclusively caring for others. Far from being one of the vain, selfish, stereotypical "jeunes filles à marier qui ont une dot bourgeoise" whom Hugues Leroux blames for the declining birth rate and loss of morality in the Third Republic, many unmarried women instead personified the self-sacrificial character of the French family woman.

Unmarried Frenchwomen of the leisure classes were shamed and marginalized for several reasons, including choices they had made of their own accord, decisions made for them by others, or circumstances beyond their control. Society's opinion of the unmarried woman was most certainly unfavorable, and those who either were or had recently been financially fortunate were the least likely to find sympathy from within their peer group. It was the older *femmes non-mariées* who had failed to find a marriage

partner who were the most likely to succumb to feelings of loneliness and failure, always seeing themselves as the shut-out Other in opposition to the "natural" married mother of a civilized French family. There existed, however, another group, in another part of Paris, in which female solidarity and economic potential helped to lighten the mood a little.

V. The *Catherinettes* of Central Paris

The number of women employed in the fashion industry in Paris—which included the small, independent seamstresses who assembled pieces of clothing and the *grands magasins* like Le Bon Marché and Les Galeries du Louvre that sold them—was considerable. According to Emile Zola's personal compilation of notes taken for his *Rougon-Macquart* series, "Il y a environ dix mille employées de nouveautés dans Paris […] Il y a à peine parmi elles un quart de Parisiennes" (212). Given his rough estimate, then, there were around 7,500 rural women who found work in Paris as department store staff at the close of the nineteenth century. The modern, Parisian *grands magasins* purchased their *pret à porter* items from local dressmakers and hat makers (see figure 4) whose numbers also saw a significant rise at the end of the century. This rise mirrored the demand set forth by the large, mostly female customer base flocking to department stores in record numbers. According to Nancy Green's estimates in her historical study of the garment industry, *Ready-to-Wear, Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (1997), the central districts of Paris, "by facilitating access to fabrics and accessories, the new commercial emporia gave added business to private dressmakers, whose number in Paris climbed from 158 (private companies) in 1850 to

494 in 1863 and 1,636 in 1896" (80). The number of privately owned *ateliers de couture* increased ten-fold in the last half of the nineteenth-century, and the employees of these small shops were, like their peers in the aisles of the Bon Marché and the Louvre, recently migrated from smaller, rural towns.

The department store employees described by Zola in his *Carnet d'enquêtes* are unsavory characters whose exposure to decadent dresses leaves in them a taste for elegance that they simply cannot afford. They are unmarried young women who date, spending their evenings with their beaux—their *catherins*—every night after work. His choice of location for *Au Bonheur des Dames,* whose narrative follows the plight of its migrant, working-class heroine, Denise, through the trials and tribulations of being single and economically vulnerable in the city, lies less than a kilometer from the statue of Saint Catherine at the intersection of rue Cléry and Poissonnière: "C'est le quartier de la rue de Michodière et de la rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, où Zola entend placer l'affrontement du petit et du grand commerce" (229, see figure 4 below).

The tone that Zola takes in his notes wavers between pity and contempt for this new brand of *ouvrières parisiennes* working in the department stores of Paris, as he simultaneously recognizes the hardships of their daily lives and chastises them for thirsting after the luxuries they sell to women of higher social standing. He identifies them as having a particular position in the fashion world that straddles production and consumption: "Elles ne sont pas tout à fait ouvrières. Des dames à peu près, des prétentions, des poseuses. Dames aussi par contact des clientes" (Zola, 212-213).

Figure 4. Current statue of Saint Catherine at the intersection of rue de Cléry and rue Poissonnière.

This particular brand of *ouvrière parisienne* occupied, then, a space in between propriety and vulgarity, wearing the luxurious silk they sold to their clients during the day and sleeping on a cot in the store dormitory at night—"La misère en soie," as Zola so aptly names it (211).

The female worker of the modern *grands magasins* shares most of the unseemly traits of the rural women who gathered in the *ateliers de couture* described by Anne Monjaret. Zola scoffs at the crowds of *catherins* waiting at the doors of the Parisian department stores for their girlfriends at eight o'clock every night. By his count, there was only "un cinquième de filles honnêtes et très méritoires" in the lot. The rest, by Zola's standards, were immorally entertaining suitors simply to obtain the luxury items

they could not afford to buy for themselves. Conditions in the large Parisian department stores of the *fin-de-siècle*, in fact, seemed to actually favor non-marital relationships. Many of larger departments stores like Le Bon Marché and Les Galleries du Louvre housed their workers in nearby female dormitories. Additionally, their work schedules provided a regular three-hour window of free time every night between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. that allowed them to carry on relationships with, but not marry, their *catherins*. Zola notes: "Dès qu'elle a un amant, elle le voit régulièrement le soir, de 8 à 11. Elle peut même découcher, en donnant de l'argent à la concierge. Toutes sortes de moyens pour se voir" (212). This time of night, according to Zola, was expectedly reserved for dates with their suitors, as evidenced by the physical presence of these men in the back alleys of the department stores in the first and second arrondissements. The fact that the store managers were aware of these encounters, but often turned a blind eye, leads Zola to hold them accountable for condoning such immoral behavior on behalf of its female employees: "Les directeurs, intéressés et autres, rencontrent leurs vendeuses au bras d'hommes, et affectent de ne pas les voir" (183). Zola's department store workers seem to have occupied a middle space between the working, self-sustaining *fille honnête* and the *fille entretenue,* maintaining a schedule that allowed for both roles.

The close proximity between Zola's famous fictional department store *Au Bonheur des Dames* and Saint Catherine's statue in the Sentier district reflects a spatial and visual connection between Zola's rural, migrant, working-class female department store employees and the seamstresses who had put together the garments they sold in their aisles. The neighborhood in which these women worked and lived were one and the same, and their similar occupations and single status connected them across the dividing

lines between small and big business. These working women touched, cut, sewed, composed, and sold the fashionable dresses worn by the society ladies of Paris, but, unlike their clients, would rarely expect to possess and wear one of these luxuriously labored pieces for themselves.

VI. Society, the Press, and the Single Lady: Following the *Fête de la Sainte-Catherine* From the Boutiques to the Streets

These migrant unmarried, female workers of the fashion industry formed a part of the Parisian social landscape that writers like Emile Zola in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, and by journalists writing for newspapers like *L'Éclair* put under a microscope. Responding to popular anxieties concerning depopulation, women's presence in the public sphere, and the *Nouvelle Femme,* numerous pages of commentary were published on the topic of this *fête parisienne.* Some accused the women of being "de fausses ouvrières" who were verging on prostitution by juxtaposing their work, and the streets. Others, like Emile Zola and Gustave Guesvillers expressed some degree of sympathy for the plight of the single working girl. As Monjaret reminds her reader, generally, the unmarried Frenchwoman was apt to feel isolated from society in her non-productive, unnatural role: "En dénigrant constamment les vieilles filles, le groupe […] social environnant pousse au mariage et provoque chez les malheureuses, un sentiment de marginalité" (40). For the working women of the Parisian fashion industry, being single didn't always have to be a cause for the psychic pain of exclusion. Instead, the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* allowed them to join together, forming a crowd of marginalized figures and taking central stage.

Compared with the literary figure of the socially isolated, unhappy, unmarried, upper class *vieille-fille,* the working-class *catherinette* of central Paris was very much a part of the communal life that surrounded her. Many of her close friends and coworkers were unmarried as well, which could have only helped to forge feelings of solidarity and community amongst these marginalized outcasts. Throughout Gustave Guesvillers's 1908 novella, *Catherinette!,* the narrator exposes the isolation and melancholic state of Sophie to invoke in his reader feelings of pity. In a fit of self-loathing and uncontrolled rumination, Sophie laments her solitude, fancying herself an aimless soul in need of a normal, meaningful life:

> Les autres—les épouses, les mères—heureuses ou malheureuses, possèdent du moins cette conscience d'être humaines, de compter dans la grande famille, d'y marquer leur trace, si humble qu'elle soit ! […] Les autres—les épouses, les mères—constituent les anneaux de la multiple chaîne, et la bague qu'elles portent au doigt atteste cette mission sacrée ! (Guesvillers, 35)

Insofar as human identity is marked by the familial, to be excluded from wedlock is to remove the familial from one's self-conceptualization. Without bearing children, Sophie cannot complete the circuit of reproduction, thereby disrupting the "multiple chaîne" of familial, social, human existence. Guesvillers's *catherinette,* in this scene, is marginalized to the point of inhumanity.

The working class *catherinette du Sentier,* on the other hand, was very much a part of the many social connections that constituted her daily life. She awoke, dressed, ate, worked, and relaxed with her peers. Often far removed from her immediate family

back home in the rural French countryside, her new "family" consisted of women not unlike herself. Whereas the *vieilles filles* of fiction often incited feelings of pity in readers, the *catherinettes du Sentier* were portrayed in newspapers like *L'Éclair* and *Le Petit Journal* (see figure 5 below) at best as proud young working women who were unashamed of their unfortunate and unnatural lot in life, and at worst as classless potty mouths who slept around with the young wealthy *étudiants* of Paris. Journalists and their

Figure 5. *Sainte Catherine, fête des midinettes* on the cover of *Le Petit Journal,* 30 November, 1913.

Figure 6. Deux catherinettes, Agence Roi, 1908.

Figure 7. *Catherinettes autour des chapeaux*, Agence Roi, 1912

Figure 8. Sainte Catherine [femmes dansant dans une maison], Agence Roi, 1912.

publishers played a large role in the distribution of this stereotypical portraiture. The stories they printed encouraged the expansion and reproduction of the stereotyped *catherinette* in the papers, and encouraged its readership to attend the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* and see, for themselves, these spectacular and exciting characters.

The above images (figures 6-8) are the work of photographers at Agence Roi, a photography company that would merge with Agence Mondial Photo-Presse and Agence Meurisse to form the Service des Agences Françaises d'Actualités et de Reportages Associés in 1937. Their early documentary photographs of Saint Catherine's Day celebrations in the 1910s show fairly small, calm affairs between co-workers (figure 6.). On November 25th, these women would break from their daily routines and partake in such celebratory treats as cake, champagne and dancing (figures 7, 8). As the *fête* made

its way out of the shops and into the streets, familiar oppositions to female public presence are repeated in the papers. Reminiscent of contemporary complaints directed at actresses and reinforcing the rule that ladies do not go into public unescorted, newspapers remind their readers that "real" *catherinettes de la Sainte-Catherine* "ne se permettraient pas d'être dehors. Seules les prostituées font du trottoir lieu de travail" (Monjaret, 101). It was no surprise, then, that the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* should bring along with it an entire tribe of undesirables, including "« jeunes gens », « étudiants », souvent fils de bourgeois dont on connaît les pratiques libertines […]« faux étudiants » constitués en bande; les « mauvais garçons » les « voyous »" (*L'Éclair* in Monjaret, 100). Because the press had so thoroughly described the *catherinette* and her celebration to the public, her sexual availability was something of a spectacle as soon as she entered the streets.

The young women marched through town, drawing the attention of the city's inhabitants (figure 9 below) and inviting commentary by passers-by, neighboring business owners, and eventually, journalists. By entering the streets, the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine'*s public grew exponentially, opening the way for these young unmarried women to be written about, photographed, seen, and imagined by a larger public audience. By the dawn of the First World War, the festivities surrounding the *fête de la Sainte Catherine* came to include what was known as the *marche des catherinettes* (or, alternatively, the *course des catherinettes*). At this annual race between the numerous Parisian *maisons de couture* of the Sentier district, female employees would form teams led by the shop's unmarried *catherinettes.* As Monjaret reports, "Dix équipes de courtières dont une est catherinette […] s'affrontent sur une distance de huit kilomètres à parcourir en moins de quarante-cinq minutes" (93). Parading through the city streets, the

seamstresses joined in solidarity as their *catherinettes* publicly flaunted their single status through the center of Paris.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 9. Sainte-Catherine, quatre femmes marchant dans la rue. 1912, Agence Roi.

The race began at Montparnasse (see interactive map), continued through the department store districts in the first arrondissement and the Sentier in the second, through Haussmann's brand-new *grands boulevards*, past the statue of Saint Catherine, and finally finishing at Montmartre. The images (figures 10-17) below track the young women's route from its southern most point at Montparnasse to the finish line at Montmartre in the north.

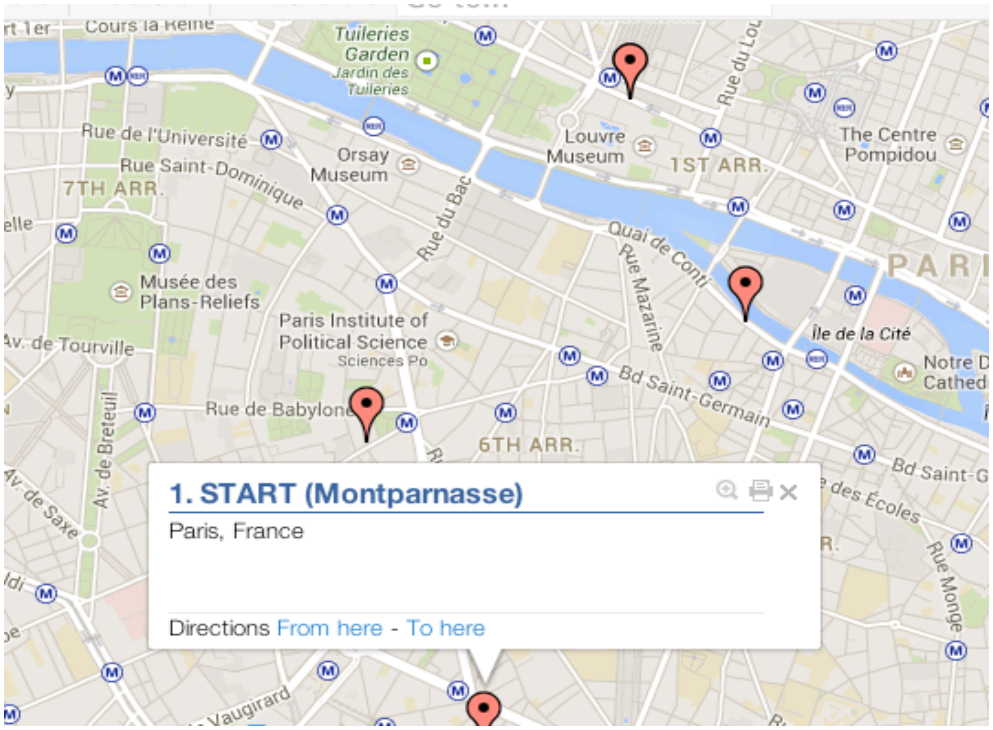

Figure 10. Starting point of the *marche des catherinettes* at Montparnasse in the 14th arrondissement.

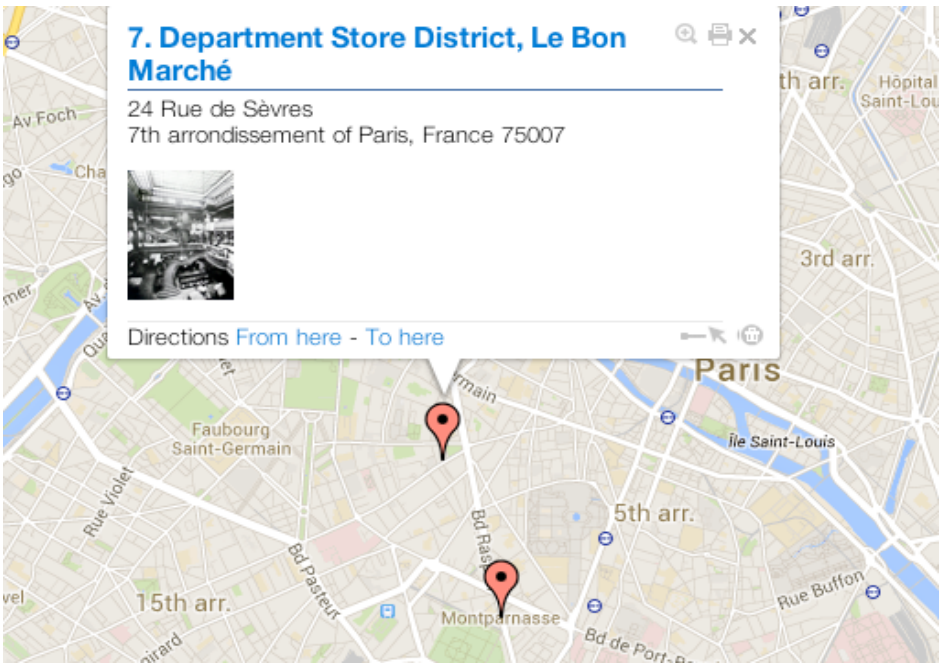

Figure 11. Department store district, Le Bon Marché in the 7th arrondissement. Map marker on the Seine river in the right of the frame designates female employee housing as noted by Emile Zola in *Carnet d'Enquêtes.*

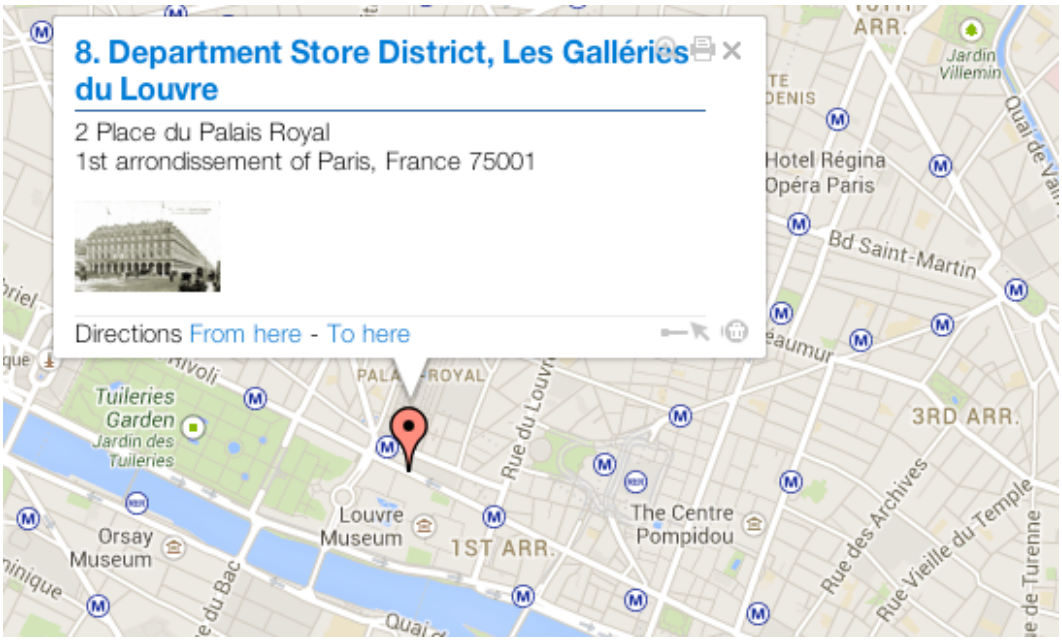

Figure 12. Department store district, Les Galeries du Louvre in the 1st arrondissement.

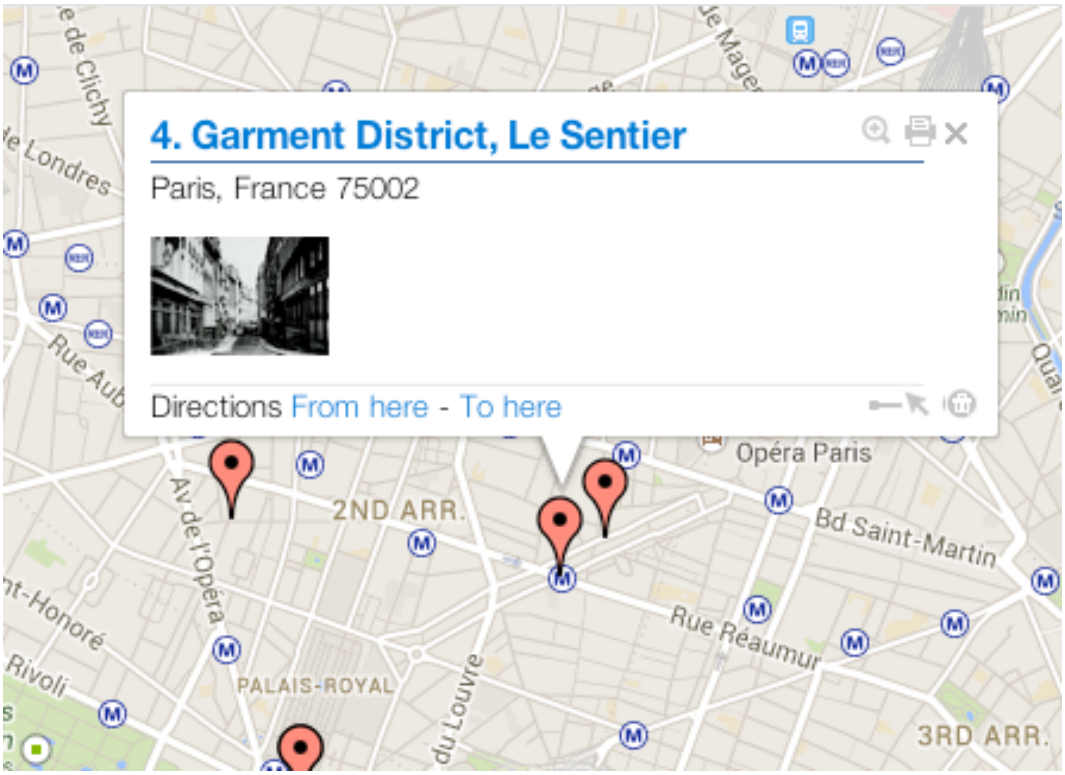

Figure 13. Garment district, Le Sentier in 2nd arrondissement.

Figure 14. Emile Zola's choice of location the department store in his study of the *grands magasins* of Paris, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883) in the 2nd arrondissement.

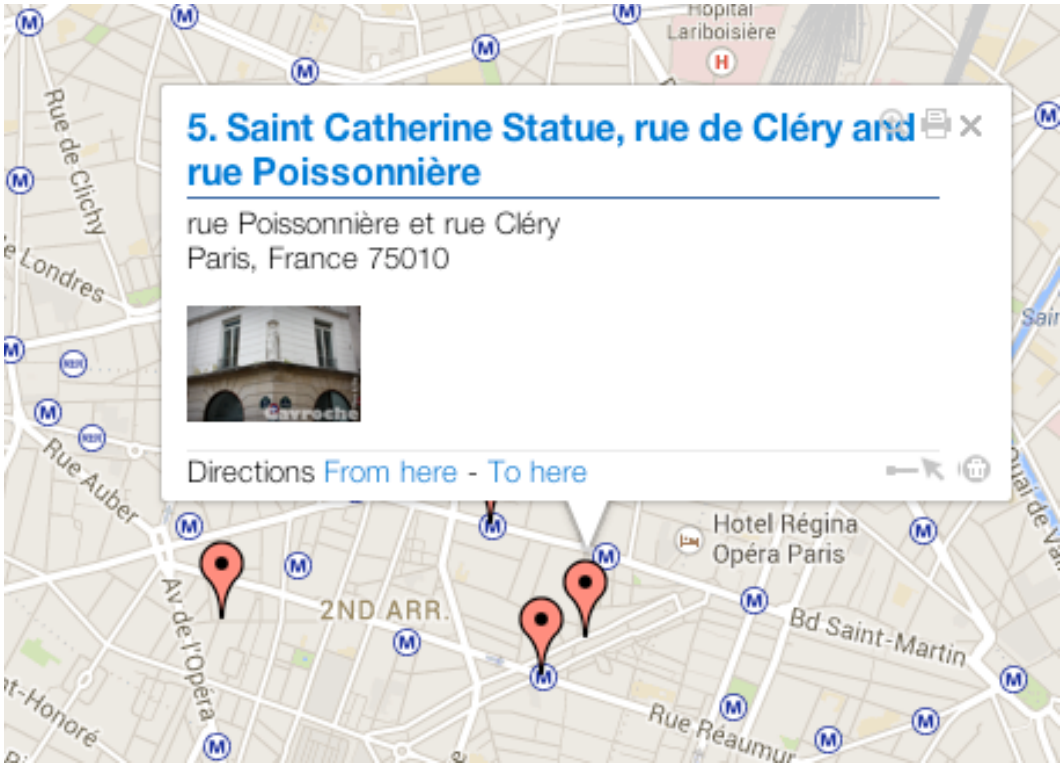

Figure 15. Saint Catherine's statue at the intersection of rue Cléry and rue Poissonnière in the 10th arrondissement.

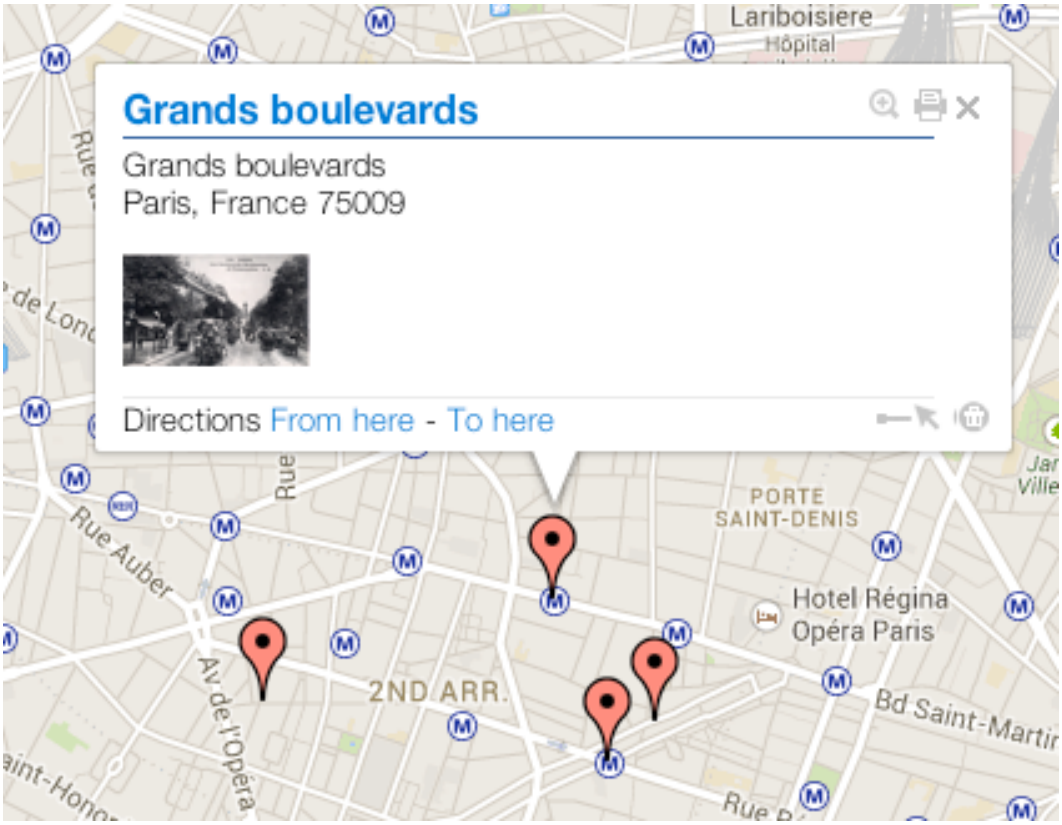

Figure 16. The *grands boulevards* district in the 9th arrondissement.

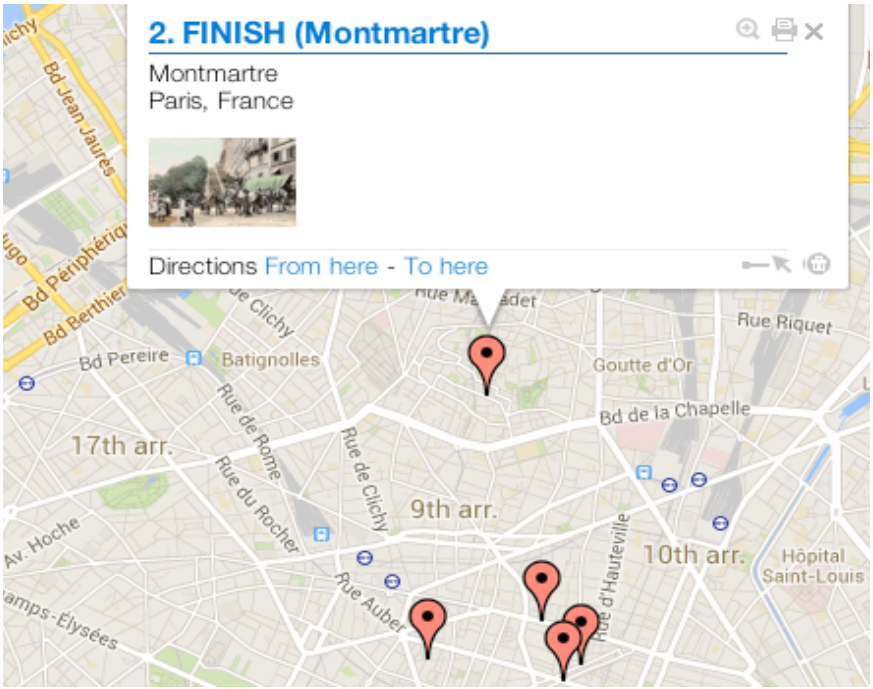

Figure 17. Finish line at Montmartre in the 18th arrondissement.

The newspapers were all aflutter over the unmarried, working-class *catherinettes* of the city's garment district, and the people of Paris came out to witness these local celebrities parade through their streets. Certainly, in turn of the twentieth century Paris, "le spectacle était offert à tout le public de la capitale […] la Sainte-Catherine était […] largement suivie par les parisiens qui ont pris part à son essor" (Monjaret, 213). The affair involved vast amounts of followers and participants, and created a space for the beginnings of a public acceptance—and even adoration of—*la catherinette du Sentier*. Using Paris itself as their stage, the charmingly subversive *catherinettes* moved through the city with their friends and coworkers—laughing, singing, chanting, and changing the way passers-by conceived of the single woman.

In the papers, this highly public, risqué celebration took on an overtly sexual character: "La 'promiscuité.' les 'contorsions,' les 'gesticulations douteuses,' les 'baisers à pleine bouche' ne peuvent qu'inciter l'acte sexuel" (*L'Éclair* in Monjaret, 102). These movements—these "contortions" and "doubtful gesticulations"—fell far from the civilized upper-class norms of polite physicality that included such graceful movements as the curtsey and the *baise-main*. These working-class, unmarried *catherinettes* were instead spotted flaunting their disregard for such standards, egged on by their friends to lock lips with sailors and students during their race from Montparnasse to Montmartre. The *catherinettes du Sentier* outwardly, publicly and physically demonstrated a sort of bemused acceptance and even satisfaction at their lot in life each year at the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine*. They may not have worn the same dresses, hats or petticoats as their clients, nor did they have enough leisure time in their lives to learn and practice polite physicality. But on November 25th, these women were able to publicly proclaim and

celebrate the self-sufficient, strong, and persevering character of the single, working-class *catherinette de Paris.*

In 1912, *Éclair* reports on the *fête de la Sainte Catherine* in jovial, celebratory, and ritualistic terms:

> Des taxis, des cyclistes escortent ces demoiselles […] L'honneur de conclure la course est laissé aux catherinettes […] Cette fin de course est couronnée par l'accueil, en grande pompe, des « autorités de la commune libre de Montmartre », maire et mairesse, capitaine des pompiers, garde-champêtre, [et] préfet en uniforme saluent les gagnantes; la catherinette de l'équipe gagnante est portée victorieusement. (*L'Éclair,* 1912)

On November 25th 1912, "authorities of the Free Commune of Montmartre" publicly and ceremoniously acknowledged the single status of the *catherinettes* without denigration or accusation when they greeted these women at the finish line. The French verb "saluer" (or, to greet) means to physically and verbally demonstrate mutual respect when encountering an individual. According to Emile Littré's 1878 *Dictionnaire de la langue française,* to "saluer" is to "donner à quelqu'un […] que l'on rencontre, *une marque extérieure de civilité*, *de respect*. *Saluer de la main, du geste, de la voix*" (1,814) This was an official, gestural, civil recognition of these women's claim to the Parisian landscape. These final celebratory acts of the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* of 1912—greeting the *catherinette gagnate*, carrying her across the finish line, and honoring her *en grande pompe*—were witnessed by the city's residents; both in person, and in the papers.

VII. Conclusion

World War I put a stop to the festivities of Saint Catherine's Day for four years. After the war, however, in November of 1918, the *catherinette* was again celebrated—but this time, as a local figure that simultaneously personified both victory over long-term hardships and the amorous and hopeful French character. The *catherinette* was important to Parisian—if not French—morale after the first World War. The *fête* was celebrated a mere two weeks after the official cease-fire on the western front.

Figure 18. Course de catherinettes ; arrivée de la gagnante Melle Germaine, de la maison Sophie : [photographie de presse] / Agence Meurisse, 1926.

Monjaret notes "L'armistice signé le 11 novembre mille neuf-cent dix-huit fait de la Sainte-Catherine une fête de la Victoire. La France doit maintenant se relever" (110). The *marche des catherinettes* continued to leave its mark on the Parisian experience

throughout the interwar years (see figure 18 below). The *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* attracted eccentric celebrities such as Paul Poiret and Joséphine Baker in 1925, (see figure 19) and wide array of women sporting rather butch top hats and neck ties in 1929 (figure 20). Numerous male parties also remained quite interested in celebrating the single woman, (figure 21) and tended to flock to the event every year.

Figure 19.
Paul Poiret et Joséphine Baker lors de la fête de Sainte-Catherine, chez un couturier français.
Paris,
25 novembre 1925

Figure 20. Sainte-Catherine sur les Boulevards : [photographie de presse] / Agence Meurisse, 1929.

Figure 21. Intersection des rues de la Poissonnière et de Cléry, 25 novembre 1932, Agence Roi.

Figure 22. J. Lorieux. *La Sainte-Catherine, 1908.* Place Montholon, Paris.

The *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* of the *Belle Époque* left its mark on the actual and imaginary landscapes of the city. In 1913, the city of Paris purchased a statue by Julien Lorieux entitled *La Sainte-Catherine* (figure 22 above) whose inscription reads "AUX OUVRIERES PARISIENNES," and still stands at Place Montholon. The figure of the *catherinette* continues to be celebrated by young *Parisiennes* on the twenty-fifth of November (figure 23 below).

The explosion of popular mass media and the collective spectatorship inherent in the *boulevard* culture of the Belle Époque fostered an environment that was uniquely generative for the kinetic and creative function of the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine.*

Figure 23. Catherinettes, Paris 2007

These women publicly used a rural, conservative, Catholic ritual that, in the past, had functioned primarily to promote the institution of marriage in a decidedly progressive, modern, and creative way that emphasized the self-sufficiency and solidarity of working women. As I hope to have shown here, ceremonial rituals like the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* are not simply prescriptive, reproductive, or conservative forms of cultural behavior. Instead, ritual provides historical agency to its participants who shape and shift its meanings with each new enactment. On Saint Catherine's Day, these marginalized figures came together, taking center stage in the city of modernity, celebrating their membership to the *catherinette* club of central Paris.

Conclusion

Ritual is never a merely reproductive endeavor. Many ritualized actions are performed so often that we cease to find them remarkable, while others are used so rarely that their connection to our daily lives becomes unclear. A false opposition has been created between the motions and movements of daily life, and those employed at the moment of ceremonial ritual. As I hope to have shown in this thesis, the postures and gestures of cultural rituals such as the *bal blanc* and the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* were not important because they were unique actions taken on a single day. Rather, these movements meant something because they were reflective of a collective lifestyle, of membership to a sub-culture of the French social landscape, and of a desire to either carry on or create customs proper to their shared experience.

The iceberg provides a useful symbol for the relationship between the everyday education on manners (specifically its gestural components) received in the family home and in social settings, and the performance of this training at ceremonial events. A symbol familiar to musicians, athletes and public speakers, the iceberg is seen in two parts. The majority of the iceberg is unseen, representing the long amounts of time spent away from spectators rehearsing, training, and practicing. Its visible section represents the moment of performance—the recital, the game, the speech, or, in this case, urban ceremonial rituals of the *Belle Époque*. The homofamilial apprenticeship discussed in chapter two (which included postures, gestures, polite conversation, receiving guests and various *arts d'agrément*) was finally on display at the *bal blanc*. Daughters of the non-

working classes were putting on a show, performing before an audience of their peers the results of years spent rehearsing the forms of *politesse* set forth by authors such as Louise d'Alq and the Baronne Staffe. The particular form of education seen in this study, often neglected by cultural historians and literary critics of the French nineteenth century, produced a form of physical knowledge that served as a woman's legitimate documentation at the initiatory rite of the *bal blanc*, validating or vetoing her entry into high ranks of society. This form of cultural capital was, in theory, available to anyone with enough money to purchase an etiquette manual. However, as I have argued here, mere intellectual knowledge of the rules of *politesse* were rather useless. One needed to physically embody these corporal codes of conduct, and this required years spent practicing and rehearsing. Women like the *catherinettes du Sentier* did not have time to spend practicing the *baise-main* or fretting after "les dames âgées qui […] font des réputations." Instead, the unmarried women of the Parisian garment district spent their time working together, supporting each other, and paying little heed to social opprobrium that had little to do with their actual, lived, day-to-day experiences.

Ritual movements—in both daily routines and in ceremonial, 'big day' events—have deep, cultural meanings, and these meanings are readable, malleable, and provide historical agency to the individual men and women who put them to use. I have employed the term *bodily bricolage* in this dissertation to refer to the corporal 'tinkering' executed at the site of the body by which, using previously established codes of conduct, individuals combine and fuse together new meaningful movements. Through this creative process, each generation uses movements from the one that preceded it, and leaves behind new tools for the next cohort of *bricoleurs*. Movements can either change, stay the

same, or be erased from popular use completely—and each result is reflective of specific cultural shifts that are of interest to scholars of historical agency. By ignoring the postures, gestures, ceremonies and celebrations in our novels, plays, poems and films, scholars of French Studies have left vast sources of visual, kinesthetic and proprioceptive knowledge untapped. In order to develop a fuller sense of the uniqueness of our historical eras of interest, we must pay attention to the movements described in our texts, decipher what these movements meant, and ask how individual people used them to reproduce or manipulate the meanings behind the motions.

The first half of this study defined *savoir-vivre* at the turn of the twentieth century in France as a code of conduct that non-verbally communicated attitudes of deference and respect between two or more persons interacting in a social setting. This skill was not solely concerned with showing class membership amongst the elite, non-working classes of the day, but was also concerned with questions of age, gender, and whether a person was in the role of host or guest. As Louise d'Alq reminds us, "L'ouvrière qui sait rester à sa place est plus savante à ce sujet [de savoir-vivre] que la grande dame faisant parade de ses titres" (46). Unlike in Ancien Régime culture, being born into the non-working classes in the nineteenth-century did not automatically guarantee social acceptance. Rather, a proper familial and social education was expected to produce in the child the innate, absorbed, embodied understanding of the world around her. The true measure of a young woman's manners, and of her family's claim to social respectability, was the ability to recognize and react to different circumstances. The embodied knowledge acquired over years of ritualized repetition of movements constituted a marker of status, a sign of upbringing, and a badge of honor.

The wide range of authors who felt compelled to offer advice on this matter suggests that both secular and Catholic families were training their daughters to show outward signs of respectability in their daily lives. Famous writers such as Louise d'Alq and Baronne Staffe published dozens of editions of their etiquette manuals, flooding the market with a new social tool for people of all classes to grab hold of and put to use propelling their own families into new ranks of society. Catholic authors like Ermance Dufaux and Mathilde Bourdon—along with the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes—promoted corporal codes of respectability as outward expressions of inner piety. In their texts, these writers express the need for Catholic parents to observe and correct the postures, gestures and comportment of their children to instill in them the sacred values of self-sacrifice and respect for authority.

Demonstrations of deference were, according to the findings of my research into the etiquette manuals and books written on the subject of *politesse* and *civilité,* executed based on visual analyses of intergestulators' social station, age and sex. Knowing how to navigate any particular social encounter was physical skill that needed to be performed quickly enough so as to appear 'natural' to onlookers. Over the course of a young woman's childhood in turn-of-the-century France, specific movements were repeated (or repressed) on a daily basis. The goal of this training was to erase any evidence of cognitive analyses being performed at the time of interaction. Young women were not expected to show any signs of *thinking* about what to do in a specific social situation, but should always instinctively and corporally *know* how to react. She should be able to proprioceptively feel-out her role in a conversation or intergestural encounter, and execute this role purely from muscle memory.

Secular writers like Staffe and D'Alq, Republican commentators like Hugues Leroux, and Catholic authors like the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes and Ermance Dufaux all advocated this skill. Because these authors vary so widely in political alignments, religious affiliations, and general purpose for writing on the subject of polite physicality, it becomes evident that polite physicality served as a unifying force that brought together citizens of conservative and progressive attitudes, of Catholic and secular persuasions, of those lamenting the passing of French court culture and those celebrating the democratization of new aspects of social life. In short, this polite physical code of conduct brought together Michelet's "deux France"—that is, the France of the *Ancien Régime* and Catholicism, and the Republican, secular France of the post-Revolutionary century. Writers from both "sides" agreed that physical signs of deference and respect were fundamental aspects of French national identity. Corporal customs of social engagement were passed down from generation to generation. Some, like Hugues Leroux, even argued that since these physical traditions were so fundamental to French identity, and because women were the transmitters of tradition, wives and mothers were needed outside the Hexagon in order to carry with them the manners and customs of the homeland. French men and women acted out these customs and mannerisms on a daily basis at the dawn of the twentieth century, making their Frenchness—their *francité*—a readable expression of their physical presence in the world.

In the second half of this thesis, I have asked how this embodied knowledge—this *francité faite corps*—was put to use by young, unmarried Frenchwomen on the 'big days' at the *bal blanc* and the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* to reinforce or tear down the normative social structures of the *fin-de-siècle.* A family's claim to respectability,

women's role in the transmission of French corporal (and moral) customs to future generations, and the ability to confirm one's belonging to a group were all at stake at these ceremonial rituals. Both the *bal blanc* and the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* served as venues for these young women to collectively express their social station, marital status, and celebrate a shared experience of belonging.

The *bal blanc* was an exclusive, closed affair for unmarried young women of the non-working classes whose goals were to introduce daughters to polite society and make an economically and socially beneficial marriage match with another prominent family. The upper-class event had evolved from the Ancien Régime rite performed exclusively by the aristocracy. By the turn of the twentieth-century, however, these balls were being thrown by a mixture of old families of the nobility and new families of the bourgeoisie. Reflecting a shift over the course of the nineteenth-century in the expansion and democratization of access to elite status, the *bal blanc* served as a site for members of the non-working classes to show each other the fruits of their shared lifestyles of leisure. All who attended the balls—including the *filles à marier,* their young male suitors, and their parents—were on their best behavior.

The *bal blanc* was also a special occasion for celebrating the time shared between mothers and daughters. These women had spent years discussing, practicing and practicing again their own, identifiable customs of familial heritage. As a cumulative expression of this homofamilial apprenticeship, the ceremonial ritual functioned as a sort of "graduation ceremony," with proud parents watching on as their daughters ascended from the ranks of *jeune fille* to the realm of the respectable, marriageable young woman. As they moved gracefully across the dance floor, the young *filles à marier* of the Third

Republic performed her social identity, embodying the grace and elegance proper to the upper crust.

At the dawn of the twentieth-century, the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* drew attention from Parisians as working class unmarried seamstresses celebrated their patron saint on November 25th each year. Inexpensive, mass-produced media were readily available to the public, and featured the *fête* and its participants in articles, photographs and engravings. In conjunction with the rising *boulevard* culture of the *Belle Époque,* the images and descriptions of the *catherinettes* in the Sentier provided a unique venue for their collective subversion of contemporary gender roles, their communal celebration of self-sufficiency and perseverance, as well as an exemplary site for scholars seeking out historical agency in conservative settings. The *catherinettes du Sentier* at the turn of the twentieth-century used an old, Catholic, conservative ritual in a generative, kinetic and creative way. The rural, conservative Catholic *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* was completely overturned when these women used the rite, which had formerly upheld the institution of marriage, in a secular, urban, modern way that celebrated the solidarity of these so-called outcasts. Their presence sparked debates in the papers on the proper role of women in the French Republic, intrigued and outraged readers, and attracted hoards of locals who took part in the *fête'*s rise in mainstream popularity. Marginalized characters of this particular urban landscape grouped together at the city's center each year on November 25th, visualizing their claim to the collective Parisian imaginary of the *Belle Époque*.

As I hope to have shown in this dissertation, daily routines and ceremonial rituals like the *bal blanc* and the *fête de la Sainte-Catherine* are never simply dogmatic, propagative, or conservative forms of social conduct. Instead, ritual behaviors—and, in

particular, their gestural components—also provide authorship, influence and agency to their participants who shape and shift its meanings with each new enactment. Body movements are always ripe with communicative power, and it has been my goal here to suggest that we, as scholars, pay close attention to the ritualized gestures, postures, styles and schematizations of physical comportment in our analyses of cultural and social interactions. Physicality, I propose, functions as a readable and malleable social code and is therefore a useful category of cultural analysis. By learning to interpret this unspoken language we are able to capture a clearer, fuller, and moving image of times past and present in our respective fields of inquiry. People move themselves in meaningful, ritualized ways that are far more indicative of a creative and co-operative process than the word "ritual" would lead us to believe. Ritual doesn't have to be conflated with a prescriptive, forced practice. Instead, its study can teach us to appreciate the creative, generative, and joyful experience of physically participating in social movement.

Selected Bibliography

Adams, Natalie G., and Pamela Bettis. *Cheerleader! Cheerleader! : An American Icon*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave, 2003. Print.

Andersen, Margaret L. "Thinking about Women-A Quarter Century Review." *Gender and Society* 19.4 (2005): 437-455. Print.

Anonymous. "Catherinette." *Kryptadia: recueil de documents pour servir à l'étude des traditions populaires* 8 (1902): 56-7. Print.

Ariès, Philippe, et al. *Histoire De La Vie Privée*. Paris: Seuil, 1985. Print. L'Univers Historique.

Aronson, Pamela. "Markers and Meanings of Growing Up: Contemporary Young Women's Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood." *Gender and Society* 22.1 (2008): 56-82. Print.

Attfield, Judy. "Barbie and Action Man: Adult Toys for Girls and Boys, 1959-93." *The Gendered Object.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996. 80-89. Print.

Auslander, Leora. "Beyond Words." *The American Historical Review* 110.4 (2005): 1015-1045. Print.

Avy, Joseph-Marius. *Study for Bal Blanc.* 1903. Photograph. Musée du Petit palais. Paris, France. *petitpalais.paris.fr* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.petitpalais.paris.fr/en/collections/205/study-pianist-bal-blanc

Avy, Joseph-Marius. *Bal Blanc.* 1903. Photograph. Musée du Petit palais. Paris, France. *Lessing Images.com* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.lessingimages.com/viewimage.asp?i=40121755+&cr=52&cl=1

Avy, Joseph-Marius. *Souvenir d'un Soir.* 19--?, Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Roubaix, France. *Art.com* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.art.com/products/p1775730860-sa-i4199145/joseph-marius-avy-souvenir-d-un-soir.htm

Balzac, Honoré de, Achard, Amédée, and Gavarni, Paul. *Les Français Peints Par Eux-Mêmes*. Paris: N.J. Philippart, 1861. Web.

Belmont, Nicole. "La Tâche De Psyché." *Ethnologie française* 21.4 (1991): 386-91. *primo3-Article-jstor.* Web.

Berenson, Edward. *The Trial of Madame Caillaux*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Print.

Berlanstein, Lenard R. *Daughters of Eve : A Cultural History of French Theater Women from the Old Regime to the Fin De Siècle*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001. Print.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Les trois états du capital culturel." *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. 30. 1979. 3-6. Print.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Raisons Pratiques: Sur La Théorie De l'Action*. Paris: Seuil, 1994. Web.

Bricard, Isabelle. *Saintes Ou Pouliches : L'Éducation Des Jeunes Filles Au XIXe Siècle*. Paris: A. Michel, 1985. Print.

Brown, Bill. "Introduction." *Thing Theory.* Ed. Bill Brown. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2004. 1-21. Print.

Brown, Gavin. "Theorizing Ritual as Performance: Explorations of Ritual Interdeterminacy." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 17.1 (2003): 3-18. Print.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theater Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531. Print.

Camarasa, Hermen Anglada. *Le bal blanc.* 1900. Photograph. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Barcelona, Spain. *latribunedelart.com* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.latribunedelart.com/spip.php?page=docbig&id_document=11720

Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Saint Catherine of Alexandria.* 1598. Photograph. Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, Spain. *Museo Thyssen.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.museothyssen.org/en/thyssen/ficha_obra/9

Carrier, James G. "Introduction." *Gifts & Commodities: Exchange & Western Capitalism since 1700.* New York: Routledge1-17. Print.

Corbin, Alain. *Les Filles De Noce : Misère Sexuelle Et Prostitution : 19e Et 20e Siècles*. Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1978. Print. Collection Historique.

Cornell, Drucilla. *Between Women and Generations*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print.

Dally, Anne. "Book Review: Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud." *Medical History* 35.4 (1991): 457-458. Print.

D'Alq, Louise. *Le Nouveau Savoir-vivre universel.* Paris: Bureau des causeries familières, 1884. Print.

D'Alq, Louise. *Le Savoir-Vivre Dans Toutes Les Circonstances De La Vie*. Paris: Bureau des causeries familières, 1874. Print.

Daudet, Mme Alphonse. *Oeuvres De Madame A. Daudet: 1878-1889. L'Enfance d'Une Parisienne [Et] Enfants Et Mères*. Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1892. Web.

de Bassanville, Comtesse. *Code Du Cérémonial: Guide Des Gens Du Monde Dans Toutes Les Circonstances De La Vie*. Paris: A Duquesne, 1867. Print.

de Baecque, Antoine. *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997. Print.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *Mémoires d'Une Jeune Fille Rangée*. Paris: Gallimard, 1959. Print.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988; 1984. Web.

Denniston, Christine. "A Brief Introduction to the History of Tango Music" *totaltango.com.* Web. 12 May 2014.

Edson Escalas, Jennifer. "The Consumption of Insignificant Rituals: A Look at "Debutante Balls." *Advances in Consumer Research.* Vol. 20. (1993) 709-716. Print.

Edwards, Kathryn A. "Female Sociability, Physicality, and Authority in an Early Modern Haunting." *Journal of Social History* 33.3 (2000): 601-621. Print.

Ellis, Joe. *Jointed doll, Late 19th-century.* 2013. Photograph. *Live Auctioneers.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/10193214

Erbeznik, Elizabeth. *Between Boulevard and Boudoir: Working Women as Urban Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century French and British Literature. Dissertation.* The University of Texas at Austin. August 2011. Print.

Edson Escalas, Jennifer. "The Consumption of Insignificant Rituals: A Look at "Debutante Balls." *Advances in Consumer Research.* Vol. 20. (1993) 709-716. Print.

Eves, Richard. "Engendering Gesture: Gender Performativity Ad Bodily Regimes from New Ireland." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 11.1 (2010): 1-16. Print.

Flaubert, Gustave, Alain Jaubert, and François Kerlouégan. *Madame Bovary*. 33 Vol. Paris: Gallimard, 2007. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Histoire De La Folie à l'Âge Classique*. 9 Vol. Paris: Gallimard, 1976; 1972. Print.

---. *Surveiller Et Punir : Naissance De La Prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992; 1975. Print.

Fredrickson, Barbara L. and Roberts, Tomi-Ann. "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21 (1997): 173-206. Print.

Fuchs, Rachel G., and Victoria E. Thompson. "Family Life." *Women in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 43-60. Print.

Gautier, Théophile, and Helen Constantine. *Mademoiselle De Maupin*. London: Penguin, 2005. Print.

Gilbert, Reid. "That's Why I Go to the Gym": Sexual Identity and the Body of the Male Performer." *Theatre Journal* 46.4 (1994): 477-488. Print.

Goblot, Edmond. *La Barrière et le niveau: Étude sociologique sur la bourgeoisie française moderne.* Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan.1925. Print.

Golden, Simha. "The Role of Ceremonies in the Socialization Process: The Case of Jewish Communities of Northern France and Germany in the Middle Ages/Le Rôle Des Cérémonies Dans Le Processus De Socialisation: Le Cas Des Communautés Juives Médiévales Du Nord De La France Et d'Allemagne." *Archives des sciences sociales des religions* 95 (1996): 163-178. Print.

Gordon, BJ, and Lori Labotka. "Gendered Gestures: An Experimental Approach to the Linguistic Embodiment of Masculinities". *Seventeenth Annual Symposium About Language and Society.* April 10-11, 2009, Austin, TX. 2009. 62-71. Print.

Gordon, Bryan James, and Lori Labotka. "Gendered Gestures: An Experimental Approach to the Linguistic Embodiment of Masculinities". *Texas Linguistics Forum, Seventh Annual Symposium About Language and Society.* 2009, Eds. BJ Gordon and Lori Labotka. Austin, TX. 2009. 62-71. Print.

Greenhalgh, Susan. "Book Review: Mothering: Experience, Ideology and Agency by Evelyn Nanko Glenn." *Current Anthropology* 36.5 (1995): 875-878. Print.

Grimes, Ronald L., ed. *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Columbia, SC: University of South Caroline, 1995. Print.

---. "The Life History of a Mask." *The Drama Review* 36.2 (1992): 61-77. Print.

---. "Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer." *The Journal of Religion* 66.1 (1986): 1-17. Print.

---. "Ritual." *Material Religion* 7.1 (1992): 73-83. Print.

---. "The Ritualization of Moving and Learning." *Time and Mind* 5.1 (2012): 85-98. Print.

Guesviller, Gustave. *Catherinette ! roman nouveau.* Paris: Illustration. 1908. Print.

Gullickson, Gay L. *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996. Print.

Hall, Judith A., et al. "Status, Gender, and Nonverbal Behavior in Candid and Posed Photographs: A Study of Conversations between University Employees." *Sex Roles* 44.1 (2001): 677-92. Print.

Harrigan, Patrick. "Women Teachers and the Schooling of Girls in France: Recent Historiographical Trends," *French Historical Studies* 21:4, 1998: 593-610.

Hendershot, Heather. "Dolls: Odor, Disgust, Femininity and Toy Design." *The Gendered Object.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996. 90-111. Print.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Misérables*. New York: Lassalle, 1862. Print.

Jolivet, Mme Gaston, and Marie Anne L'Heureux. *Pour Bien Connaître Les Usages Mondains. Préface De Mme Gaston Jollivet. Collection Publiée Sous Le Patronage Du Lyceum Et Sous La Direction De Mme Marie-Anne L'Heureux*. Paris: P. Lafitte et cie, 1911. Print.

Joyce, Rosemary A. "Archaeology of the Body." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 139-158. Print.

Kirkham, Pat, and Attfield, Judy. "Introduction." *The Gendered Object.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996. 1-11. Print.

Kramp, Corrina. "Performing Gender in Postures." *Notes* 21.E (2008): 52-53. Print.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique De La Vie Quotidienne*. 2 éd ed. Paris: L'Arche, 1958. Web.

Laforgue, Jules. "Dans Un Bal Blanc." *Œuvres Complètes.*, 1903. 72-73. Print.

Lejeune, Xavier-Edouard, Michel Lejeune, and Philippe Lejeune. *Calicot*. Paris: Montalba, 1984. Print.

Lorieux, J. *La Sainte-Catherine, 1908.* 1908. Photograph. Place Montholon, Paris. *The Invisible Tourist.* 12 May 2014. Web. http://parisisinvisible.blogspot.com/2010_11_01_archive.html

Fallières, Armand. "Il y a un siècle : un Président qui essaie de bien se tenir" 2010. *Le Monde.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://ilyaunsiecle.blog.lemonde.fr/2010/04/24/24-avril-1910-un-president-qui-essaie-de-bien-se-tenir/

Margadant, Jo Burr. *Madame Le Professeur: Women Educators in the Third Republic*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990. Print.

Martin, Alison. "Old Age and the Other within: Beauvoir's Representation of Aging in La Vieillesse." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 47.2 (2011): 127-137. Print.

Martin, Elaine. "Intertextuality: An Introduction." *The Comparatist,* 35 (2011): 148-151. Print.

Marcel Mauss, "Les Techniques du corps." *Journal de Psychologie,* 32-3, April 1936 p 7. Web.

Mayeur, Françoise. *L'Éducation Des Filles En France Au XIXe Siècle*. Paris: Hachette, 1979. Print.

McCarthy, E. Doyle: Book Review, The Civilizing Process Vol I: The History of Manners. *Symbolic Interaction* Vol. 8, No. 2 (1985): 320-325

McCracken, Grant. "Clothing as Language: An Object Lesson in the Study of the Expressive Properties of Material Culture." *Culture & Consumption.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988. 57-70. Print.

McMillan, James F. *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics*. London; New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

McNamara, Kenneth. "Introduction." *The Star-Crossed Stone: The Secret Life, Myths, and History of a Fascinating Fossil.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Print.

Mitchel, Jon P. "Ritual Transformation and the Existential Grounds of Selfhood." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 23.2 (2009): 53-66. Print.

Monjaret, Anne. "De l'Épingle à l'Aiguille: L'Éducation Des Jeunes Filles Au Fil Des Contes." *Homme*.173 (2005): 119-47. Web.

---. *La Sainte Catherine, Culture Festive Dans l'Entreprise*. Paris: Comite des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 1997. Print.

Offen, Karen. "Depopulation Nationalism and Feminism in Fin-de-siècle France" *The American Historical Review*, June (1984): 648-676. Print.

---"Defining Feminisms: A Comparative Historical Approach." *Signs* 14.1 (1988): 119-157. Print.

---. "Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945.(Brief Article)(Book Review)." *Reference and research book news* (2010) Web.

O'Riellly, Andrea. *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010. Print.

Parr, Catherine. *L'Usage Et Le Bon Ton De Nos Jours*. Paris: Rueff et cie., 1892. Print.

Partington, Angela. "Perfume: Pleasure, Packaging and Postmodernity." *The Gendered Object.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996. 196-203. Print.

Pelletier, Madeleine, and Claude Maignien. *L'Éducation Féministe Des Filles, Suivi De Le Droit à l'Avortement ; La Femme En Lutte Pour Ses Droits, La Tactique Féministe ; Le Droit Au Travail Pour La Femme*. Paris: Syros, 1978. Print.

Peters-Crick, Rosemary. "For the Pleasure of the Ladies: Theft, Gender and Object Relations in Au Bonheur Des Dames." *Excavatio* 12 (1999): 41-52. Print.

Pollock, Griselda. "Killing Men and Dying Women: A Woman's Touch in the Cold Zone of American Painting in the 1950s." *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed.* Ed. Fred Orton. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996. 75-101. Print.

Quack, Johannes, & Tobelmann, Paul. "Questioning "Ritual Efficacy." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 24.1 (2010): 13-28. Print.

Roberts, Mary Louise. *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-De-Siècle France*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002. Print.

Rogers, Rebecca. *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. Print.

Sager, Xavier. 1913. *Le Tango.* Photograph. *Flickr.* 12 May 2014. http://farm4.staticflickr.com/3461/3991819421_ceaaf3224e_z.jpg

Saillant, Francine. "Identité, Invisibilité Social, Altérité: Expérience Et Théorie Anthropologique Au Cœur Des Pratiques Soignantes." *Anthropologie et Sciences* 24.1 (2000): 155-171. Print.

Shakespeare, Tom, and Nicholas Watson. ""The Body Line Controversy": A New Direction for Disability Studies?" *Hull Disability Studies Seminar.* 1996. Print.

Simont, Marc. *Catherinette.* 1904. Photograph in *Catherinette! roman nouveau.* Paris. Illustration. 1908. Print.

Soumhya Venkatesan. "The Social Life of a "Free" Gift." *American Ethnologist* 38.1 (2011): 47-57. Print.

Strathern, Andrew, and Pamela J. Stewart. "Embodiment Theory in Performance and Performativity." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 22.1 (2008): 67-71. Print.

Teoharis, Silvestros. *Sainte Catherine Tempera on Wood.* 1640. Photograph. Sarajevo Church of the Holy Archangels. Sarejevo, Bosnia. *Icons of Bosnia-Herzegovina (16th-19th century)*. Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.rastko.org.rs/rastko-bl/umetnost/likovne/srakic-ikone/srakic-ikone_bih_e.html

Turner, Victor. *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*. Ed. Victor Turner. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982. Print.

--- *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. 3rd ed. Hawthorne, NY: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 1995. Print.

Unknown. *Annonce de la mort de Blanche Soyer, 1911.* Les Annales Politiques et Littéraires. Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.bricounette64.com/et-si-nous-parlions-de-la-baronne-staffe-blanche-soyer

--- *25-11-13, Sainte Catherine [Trois Femmes Avec Deux Marins, Place Vendôme] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1913. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2914. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69279547

--- *25-11-13, Sainte Catherine [Un Groupe De Femmes Coiffées De Chapeaux Place Vendôme] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1913. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6927953t

--- *25-11-13, Sainte Catherine [Une Femme Coiffée d'Un Chapeau] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1913. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6927955n

--- *Course de catherinettes ; arrivée de la gagnante Melle Germaine, de la maison Sophie : [photographie de presse]Agence Meurisse* / 1926. Photograph. *Gallica.* Paris. Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90264196

--- *Exposition Universelle de Paris 1900.* 1900. Photograph. *Tumblr.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m3rstcp5dB1rqd5coo1_1280.jpg

--- *French Boudoir Room Box, Lithographed paper on wood, late 19th-century*. Photograph. *Live Auctioneers.* 2013. Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/25105653_french-boudoir-room-box-in-gold

--- *La Sainte-Catherine : foule devant la statue : [photographie de presse] / Agence Meurisse.* 1932. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9048352n.r=Sainte+Catherine+1932+.langEN

--- *Long White Gloves and Pearls*. 2010. Photograph. *Catriona's Castle*. Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.catrionascastle.com/media/ss_size1/GlovesChildLongPrincessWithPearls.JPG

--- *Paris, 19--?*. 19--?. Photograph. *SPhotos*. Web. 12 May 2014. https://sphotos-b.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ash4/416800_4814192672345_1450748927_n.jpg

--- *Paris Auteuil Races 1911*. 1911. Photograph. *Tumblr*. Web. 12 May 2014. http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lgj86z1dVh1qa70eyo1_500.jpg

--- *Paris, Petit Palais, 1889*. 1889. Photograph. *Paris au XIXe siècle en photo*. Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.info-histoire.com/actualite/19eme-siecle/156/paris-au-xixe-siecle-en-photo/

--- *Paul Poiret et Joséphine Baker lors de la fête de Sainte-Catherine, chez un couturier français*. 1925. Photograph. Paris. *Pinterest.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.pinterest.com/pin/251568329159381527/

--- *S[Ain]Te Catherine, 24-11-10 : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1910. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69149667

--- *Sainte Catherine 08 ["Catherinette"] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1908. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6912932t

--- *Ste Catherine ["Catherinettes", Le 25 Novembre] 1908 [Devant La Vitrine d'Un Bijoutier] Agence Roi.* 1908. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6912914w

--- *Ste Catherine [2 "Catherinettes", Le 25 Novembre] 1908 : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1908. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6912913g/f1.zoom

--- *Sainte Catherine 1909 [Deux "Catherinettes"] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1909. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6912931d.r=chapeaux.langEN

--- *Sainte Catherine [Femmes Autour De Chapeaux Posés Sur Une Table] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1912. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69222726

--- *Sainte Catherine [Femmes Dansant Dans Une Maison] : [Photographie De Presse]Agence Roi.* 1912. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6922270c

--- *Sainte Catherine [Femmes Dansant Dans Une Maison] : [Photographie De Presse] (2) Agence Roi.* 1912. Photograph. *Gallica.* Paris. Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6922270c

--- *Ste Catherine [Groupe De "Catherinettes" Le 25 Novembre] Agence Roi.* 1908. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69129122

---*Sainte Catherine, fête des midinettes.* 1913. Photograph. *Le Livre.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.le-livre.fr/default.asp?page=58&C=70,4411&A=1&tri=

--- *Sainte-Catherine sur les Boulevards : [photographie de presse] Agence Meurisse.* 1929. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9029710f

--- *Sainte Catherine [09] "Trois Catherinettes" Agence Roi.* 1909. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69129300

--- *Sainte Catherine [Trois Femmes Aux Bras De Trois Marins Sur La Place Vendôme] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1912. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6922275f

--- *Sainte Catherine [Trois Femmes Coiffées De Chapeaux, Dans Le Rue] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1912. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6922276v

--- *Sainte Catherine [Une Groupe De Femmes] : [Photographie De Presse] Agence Roi.* 1912. Photograph. Paris. *Gallica.* Web. 12 May 2014. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6922273m

--- *Statue de Sainte-Catherine à l'angle des rues de Cléry et Poissonnière dans le Sentier*. Photograph. *Quand le Sentier fêtait la Sainte Catherine*. 2011. Web. 12 May 2014. http://www.gavroche-pere-et-fils.fr/quand-le-sentier-fetait-la-sainte-catherine/

--- *The Position in Quadrille*. Photograph. *Library of Congress*. 19--? Web. 12 May 2014. http://memory.loc.gov/musdi/181/0019.gif

Van Gennep, Arnold. "The Classification of Rites." *The Rites of Passage.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960. 1-13. Print.

---. "Introduction." *The Rites of Passage.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960. v-xxvi. Print.

Wallace, Anthony F. C. *Religion; an Anthropological View*. New York: Random House, 1966. Web.

West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1.2 (1987): 125-151. Print.

Wilson, Cheryl A. "Dance, Physicality and Social Mobility in Jane Austen's Persuasion." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 25 (2003): 55. Print.

Winthrop, Robert H. *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991. Print.

Zerilli, Linda M. G. "Doing without Knowing: Feminism's Politics of the Ordinary." *Political Theory* 26.4 (1998): 435-458. Print.

Zola, Émile, and Henri Mitterand. *Pot-Bouille*. 1408 Vol. Paris, France: Gallimard, 1982. Print.

Zola, Émile, and Thierry Paquot. *Fécondité*. [1] Vol. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993; 1899. Print.

Zola, Émile, and Marie-Ange Voisin-Fougère. *L'Œuvre*. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1996. Print.