

### **Mona Caird's Dancing Daughters**

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<1>The New Woman liked to dance. *Fin-de-siècle* texts by New Woman writers, including Ella Hepworth Dixon, Mona Caird, and Sarah Grand feature significant scenes of dance in which their heroines dance for their lives—sometimes literally. These dances were socially and culturally fraught spaces because the ballroom, with its emphasis on heterosexual partnerships, stands in direct opposition to the positive images of unmarried womanhood perpetuated by many New Women.<sup>(1)</sup> New Women writers, then, use a combination of dance scenes rendered in specific detail and references to dance to convey the conflict between old and new femininities at the turn of the century.

<2>Perhaps the most familiar dancing figure from this period is Salome, who became inscribed into late-Victorian debates about aestheticism, sexuality, and gender roles. Featured in works of history, art, and literature, including Oscar Wilde's notorious 1894 play *Salome*, Salome unabashedly performed alone, and various New Woman writers re-created her sensual dance in their texts. For example, the protagonist of George Egerton's "A Cross Line" (1893) performs a solo dance in a "dream of motion": "She can see herself with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye, sway voluptuously to the wild music that rises, now slow, now fast, now deliriously wild, seductive, intoxicating, with a human note of passion in its strain" (15). Here, Ann Ardis explains, Egerton's protagonist "moves from culture into nature—and exposes the latter as culture's vision of what lies below or behind itself in a primitive or archaic cultural formation" (100). Egerton uses dance to emphasize her protagonist's femininity and sexuality—the performance titillates both dancer and spectator, culminating as "the men rise to a man and answer her, and cheer, cheer till the echoes shout from the surrounding hills and tumble wildly down the crags" (15). Although Egerton's fantasy dance and Salome's seduction of Herod through dance may be far removed from the Scottish reels and English country dances featured in Mona Caird's 1894 novel *The Daughters of Danaus*, all three demonstrate the power of the female body and late-Victorian writers' exploration of the potential of dance as a site of cultural resistance.

<3>In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Mona Caird (1854-1932) uses images and rhetoric of dance to depict her heroine's struggle to achieve self-realization within a stifling social hierarchy. In *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* Lynn Pykett notes how, like many New Woman novels, "this novel persistently emphasizes the lack of fit between the heroine's sense of self, and the versions of proper femininity transmitted via the

culture” (146). Indeed, Caird views her present—the 1890s—as a point of transition; it is a time for recovering the past for the purpose of building a feminist future. To that end, throughout her novel, Caird employs the Scotch reel as a motif representative of progress and liberation. Similar in structure and cultural significance to the English country dance, the Scotch reel reflects certain ethnic and social tensions between Scotland and England, which are played out on the dancing body of Caird’s protagonist, Hadria Fullerton/Temperley. The dancing women in Caird’s novel embody femininity in ways that transcend patriarchal constructions, and through dance, Caird is able to connect Hadria to her Celtic past as well as to evoke the potential of the dancing woman—enacting power through her body—which had begun to permeate late-Victorian culture. In doing so, Caird revises Egerton, bringing the fantasy of her daydream into the reality of the ballroom—a space that for Caird’s Hadria is complicated by the constraints of gender, culture, and national identity.

<4>New Women writers demonstrated how women’s bodies could be sites of both oppression and rebellion, and contemporary feminist theorists have continued to explore this idea. For example, in *Unbearable Weight* Susan Bordo explains, “Now, feminism imagined the human body as *itself* a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control” (21). For women, systems of control included items of dress, such as the Victorian corset, as well as sexual acts, such as rape and physical abuse. In the ballroom, less overt systems of control were exerted as both etiquette guides and the steps of the dances themselves offered prescribed roles for male and female behavior both on and off the dance floor, thereby dictating the ways in which the physical body could move. As feminist dance theorist Judith Lynne Hanna explains, such control is manifested in many forms of dance: “Because dance is part of the cultural communication system, modeling of gender-related dominance patterns may occur through observing in dance who does what, when, where, and how, alone or with whom” (227). In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird challenges the limited mobility (both emotional and physical) allowed to Hadria as a wife and mother, and the dance that permeates the novel adds another layer of physicality to the text, focusing the reader on Hadria’s body and the spaces in which it can, and cannot, move.

<5>Dance scripts the movement of the body, limiting it to a particular set of gendered movements, yet it also encourages the body to break free of those limits by inducing a feeling of euphoria and freedom. For Hadria, dancing becomes a way to as to challenge patriarchal strictures as well as to align herself with positive views of heredity, race, and nature. An expression of celebratory physicality, the Scotch reel itself is a link to an idealized Celtic past and thereby racialized in the eyes of many Victorians who, like Matthew Arnold in *On Celtic Literature* (1867), began to see the differences between the Scots/Irish and the English in terms of race and ethnology. Such a perspective is particularly relevant for the study of dance, which takes the individual physical body as its subject. Indeed, as early as 1811 the conduct and deportment manual *The Mirror of Graces* argued that only dancers of Scottish heritage could truly do justice to a national dance such as the reel: “There are no dancers in the world more expressive of inward hilarity and happiness than the Scotch are, when performing in their own reels” (184). Similarly, the English Country Dance was thought to be particularly suited to the English, as dance master Thomas Wilson explains, “they are considered to be of English origin, and as according in a remarkable degree with the genius of ‘merrie England’ we are inclined to that opinion, and till better reasons are exhibited we shall continue to consider them as

national” (67). When performing these dances, then, the body emerges as specifically racialized and gendered.

<6>The following description outlining the basic figure of the Scotch reel appears in a number of nineteenth-century dance manuals: “The figure is performed by two ladies and two gentlemen forming two lines, the ladies in the center, they commence with a chain passing each other until the gentlemen return to their places, the ladies finish facing the gentlemen” (Koncen 122). Although similar to the popular and, by the end of the century, nostalgic and ceremonial English Country Dance in its linear structure, the reel is a more flexible dance that allows for some individual improvisation and interpretation. Because the reel is frequently danced in small groups, participants enjoy considerable mobility as the dance lines dissolve into circles and chains. In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Hadria’s marriage takes her from Scotland to England, distancing her from the Celtic roots that are so essential to her female identity and fixing her within a rigid social order. Nonetheless, Hadria maintains her links to the past through Celtic music and dance, and Caird uses the reel throughout her text to enable her feminist recovery of history.

<7>The history of the Scottish reel is entwined with debates over nationalism and race in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. Dance historian P. J. S. Richardson notes that the popularity of the reel during the nineteenth century can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the 1781 repeal of the Act of Proscription and “the fact that Almack’s, the most fashionable Assembly Rooms in London, were owned by a Scotsman and that a famous Scottish band, Neil Gow’s, played there” (52). In addition, Queen Victoria engaged Scottish dancing master Joseph Lowe to teach the Royal Family popular dances, including reels.<sup>(2)</sup> Of course, the reels that appeared in the nineteenth-century English ballroom were somewhat different from those practiced on the Scottish highlands. Lowe explains,

The Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal and the Princess Alice danced a Reel. It was some time before I got them to do the figure properly but at last we got it very well. Her Majesty then let me see several Scotch Steps she had been taught and asked them if I thought them good Steps for a Lady. I told Her Majesty that I considered them much too rough and masculine, and much more adapted for Men than for Ladies. Her Majesty told me she thought so too and that she thought my Steps much more elegant and better for Ladies than anything she had seen before. (25)

This 1852 entry from the dancing master’s journal aptly illustrates the relationship between the Scottish dance and the English ballroom—the reel has been tamed and transformed into an appropriate exercise for the Victorians. Similarly, in his detailed article “The Dances of the Highlanders” (1900), Dr. Norman Hay Forbes emphasizes the distinction between the pure forms of Highland dance and those found in the ballroom: “Perhaps the most graceful dance after the Sword-dance is the Highland Fling, which must never be confounded with the skips and sprawls of the so-called Highland Schottische or Fling in the society ball-room” (748). While Lowe suggests that the original steps of the reel are too “rough” for the ballroom, Forbes argues that the true Highland Fling should be “graceful” and performed more “neatly” than its ballroom counterpart. These examples differentiate among the various forms of Scottish dance that were

popular in the nineteenth century, but, more important, they emphasize how—regardless of the type of dance—the Scottish dances found in the ballroom differed from those preserved over time within Celtic cultures. It is this latter form of dance that appears in Caird’s novel—these reels have not been taught by a dancing master but are “pure” and have been handed down through generations as part of the familial and cultural heritage.

<8>Within her novel, Caird succinctly articulates the difference between the Scottish and the English by describing the performance of a reel at a party: “The northern blood took fire and transfigured the dancers. The Temperleys seemed to be fashioned of different clay; they were able to keep their heads” (136). Here, through the description of the dance, Caird immediately distances Hadria from her future husband Hubert and his family. Indeed, throughout *The Daughters of Danaus*, Hadria is repeatedly aligned with her Celtic ancestors through her response to Celtic music, dance, and culture: “Every instinct that was born in her with her Celtic blood—which lurked still in the family to the confounding of its fortunes—was fostered by the mystery and wildness of her surroundings” (17). A similar perspective on ethnicity was also articulated by late-Victorian writers on Celtic culture. In his article on Highland dance, Forbes notes “It is well known that the passion for dancing, linked with an innate love of music and poetry, was strong throughout the Celtic race, both in the Highlands, in Ireland, in Wales, and in Brittany” (749). And, in “The National Music of Scotland” (1889), J. Cuthbert Hadden connects cultural identity and national art forms, writing that the national music of Scotland is “interwoven with the history of the country from the earliest times; and it is closely associated with all the national, social, and religious feelings of an ancient, free, and thoughtful people” (250). Caird builds on such discourses and cultural constructions to underpin the feminist consciousness of her novel, using Hadria’s affinity with Celtic music and dance to both establish her character and to emphasize the way in which she is distanced from the cultural and personal ideals of her English husband Hubert.

<9>The novel opens with a scene of the Fullerton siblings dancing a reel in the garret, and Caird’s narrator focuses in on Hadria:

Among the dancers was one who danced with peculiar spirit and brilliancy, and her little cry had a ring and a wildness that never failed to set the others going with new inspiration.

She was a slight dark-haired girl, with a pale, rather mysterious face, and large eyes. Not a word was spoken, and the reel went on for nearly ten minutes. At length the girl with the dark hair gave a final shout, and broke away from the circle.

With her desertion the dance flagged, and presently came to an end. (6)

This instance of Hadria breaking away from the group foreshadows her later life in which her distaste for traditional gender roles and individual ambitions will force her to choose between following the group and striking out on her own. Although the objectives pursued by Hadria are characteristic of those expressed in many New Woman novels and represent a desire for feminist social reconstruction, here, Caird uses dance to add an element of physicality to her text. The

struggle of the individual woman against an inflexible social hierarchy is, then, played out upon the body itself. Bordo explains that attitudes toward the body, specifically the female body, have historically been negative: “For if whatever the specific historical content of the duality, *the body* is the negative term, and if woman *is* the body, then women *are* that negativity, whatever it may be” (5). In promoting a positive view of the body through dance, Caird works to reclaim the female body, which has often been tortured into submission, as a site of feminist resistance.

<10>Ironically, Hadria finds herself in the position of wife and mother as the result of a dance. Like many nineteenth-century women writers, such as Jane Austen and George Eliot, Mona Caird associates dancing with courtship. Hubert Temperley first encounters Hadria as she dances an impromptu reel upon a stone in the middle of a stream: “The figure of a young woman in mid-stream, dancing a reel with extreme energy and correctness, and without a smile, was sufficiently surprising to arrest them” (64). Hadria’s solemnity is characteristic of her attitude when dancing—for Hadria, the ancestral dances take her out of herself and into a larger cultural and historical space. She articulates this experience during a New Year’s ball:

It fills me with bewildering memories....It seems to recall—it eludes description—some wild, primitive experiences—mountains, mists—I can’t express what northern mysteries. It seems almost as if I had lived before, among some ancient Celtic people, and now, when I hear their music—or sometimes when I hear the sound of wind among the pines—whiffs and gusts of something intensely familiar return to me, and I cannot grasp it. It is very bewildering. (137)

The physical experience of the dance transports Hadria into the past, filling her with tangible sensations such as sounds and smells. Here, her experience echoes that of George Egerton’s protagonist who taps into a similarly primitive emotion and whose dance, daydreamed “in the shade of Irish hills,” carries similar racial associations, again suggesting that a feminist potential can be reached, in part, by connecting with the power of the Celtic past (15).

<11>Transported by the dance and overcome by pressure to be the family “consolation” following her elder sister Algitha’s removal to London, Hadria is vulnerable to Hubert Temperley’s ballroom proposal. She listens to Hubert in a dream-like state, contemplating the power of the individual will:

Still the trance seemed to hold her enthralled. The music was diabolically merry. She could fancy evil spirits tripping to it in swarms around her. They seemed to point at her and wave their arms around her, and from them came an influence, magnetic in its quality, that forbade her to resist. All had been pre-arranged. Nothing could avert it. She seemed to be waiting rather than acting. (138-9)

The “it” that cannot be averted is, for Hadria, an acceptance of traditional gender roles. Hadria is “waiting rather than acting,” in accordance with the “natural” role of women as inactive and passive, waiting for a male partner to lead them into society. By setting this scene at the dance, Caird stresses the role that social pressures and responsibilities, represented by the heterosexual dance partnership—in stark opposition to Hadria’s solo dances—play in influencing Hadria’s

decision. If women's lives are pre-ordained, then why should they struggle? Later, Algitha explains how a man can take advantage of ballroom courtship: "A man proposes to you as if he were asking you for the sixth waltz, only his manner is perfervid. And my belief is that half the girls who accept don't realize that they are agreeing to anything much more serious" (165). Mesmerized by the sheer physical pleasure of the dances themselves, women like Hadria temporarily overlook the implications of the dance for courtship and social expectations.

<12>Throughout the novel, Hadria constantly fights against the current of contemporary thought and refuses to fulfill traditional gender roles. She offers a suitable analogy to her brother Ernest:

'Girls,' she went on to assert, 'are stuffed with certain stereotyped sentiments from their infancy, and when that painful process is completed intelligent philosophers come and smile upon the victims, and point to them as proofs of the intentions of Nature regarding our sex, admirable examples of the unvarying instincts of the feminine creature. In fact,' Hadria added with a laugh, 'it's as if the trainer of that troop of performing poodles that we saw, the other day, at Ballochcoil, were to assure the spectators that the amiable animals were inspired, from birth, by a heaven-implanted yearning to jump through hoops, and walk about on their hind legs—' (23).

Here, "Nature" figures in Hadria's understanding of the relationship between women and society. What society wants to view as women's natural destiny, Hadria perceives as the result of specific, misogynist, socialization. The question of nature versus nurture was of considerable interest to Caird and figures in many of her writings, as Angelique Richardson explains, "For Caird, nurture was not subordinate to nature: instead it played a key role in individual and social development, enjoying an active and altering union with the individual, and housing the key to the cause and cure of ill-health" (188). Caird refuses to accept the determining power of nature, which had long been used to subordinate women based on their "weaker" and "inferior" physiognomies and confine them in the home as wives and mothers. Indeed, in *Woman and Labour* (1911) Olive Schreiner would clearly articulate how a cultural focus on biology has reduced woman to a "parasitic" existence, defined only by her ability to bear children: "social conditions tend to rob her of all forms of active, conscious, social labour, and to reduce her, like the field-tick, to the passive exercise of her sex functions alone. And the result of this parasitism has invariably been the decay in vitality and intelligence of the female" (74). In her novel, Caird engages these late-Victorian feminist debates about nature and the construction of femininity by depicting the physical pleasure Hadria experiences while dancing and demonstrating how women can become empowered through connections to their individual and cultural past.

<13>Caird also creates two male characters who espouse conflicting versions of nature, and their arguments offer further evidence for the ways in which late-Victorian society conceived of the nature/nurture debate. Professor Fortescue, scientist and New Man, studies natural science and heredity, issues that had imprinted themselves on the Victorian consciousness; as Gillian Beer explains, "In its imaginative consequences for science, literature, society and feeling, *The Origin of Species* is one of the most extraordinary examples of a work which included more than the maker of it at the time knew, despite all that he *did* know" (4). Topical debates concerning the role of nature and natural selection rage throughout Caird's text, and, Abigail Mann links Caird's

exploration of heredity specifically to the female body, noting “Caird’s writing indicates that understanding women as evolutionary bodies and tracing how they are shaped by interaction, both physical and rhetorical, begins to shape a better future for both the individual and the species” (44). In the novel, Professor Fortescue views heredity—like the female communities and mythologies created by Caird—as something that can help women achieve their potential. He tells Hadria, “You have peculiar advantages of a hereditary kind, if only you can get a reasonable chance to use them. I have unbounded faith in the Fullerton stock. It has all the elements that ought to produce powers of the highest order” (107). Through Fortescue, Caird reflects her engagement with post-Darwinian ideas of heredity, such as those proposed by Sir Francis Galton, who argues in *Hereditary Genius* (1869) that “man’s natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world” (45). Caird’s assertions about the role that female communities and inheritance play in the reconstruction of society demonstrate a feminist extension of Galton’s ideas.

<14>In contrast, Hadria’s husband Hubert Temperley opposes the feminist potential of scientific discourse, focusing instead on the argument that women’s subordination is the result of the role nature has assigned them: “I must admit frankly that I think you forget that, after all, *Nature* has something to say in this matter” (78). He continues, arguing that women should take their example from industrious birds: “*They* never attempt to shirk their lowly tasks on the plea of higher vocations. Not one turns from the path marked out by our great Mother, who also teaches her human children the same lesson of patient duty; but alas! by them is less faithfully obeyed” (79). Rather than recognize how women’s natural abilities are in conflict with the social order, Hubert argues that women are naturally predisposed to fill a subservient place in society—a position that has been culturally-constructed and is reinforced by their obligations as mothers. In *New Women, New Novels*, Ann Ardis points out that “Darwinian science, specifically the conceptualization of ‘instinct,’ made it possible at the end of the century to naturalize behavior that mid-Victorians would not have sanctioned” (93). In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Hubert represents this mid-Victorian position; he refuses to acknowledge scientific or cultural progress. By including these opposing views on the scientific destiny of women, Caird both places herself in dialogue with contemporary scientific debates and strengthens her argument for the recovery of a feminist past through an appreciation of heredity.

<15>For Hadria, particular difficulties arise when she tries to pursue her work as a musician and composer but must confront the biological destiny of women. Caird ties femininity, both its problems and promise, to the female body. It is through physical sensations from music, dance, and nature that Hadria draws strength from her Celtic past; however, society views the female body as primarily a tool for reproduction: “Throughout history, she reflected, children had been the unfailing means of bringing women into line with tradition” (187). Arguing with her “angel in the house” sister-in-law Henriette about how marriage is a kind of slavery, Hadria points out,

By bartering your womanhood, by using these powers of body, in return for food and shelter and social favour, or for the sake of so-called ‘duty’ irrespective of—perhaps in direct opposition to your feelings. How then do you differ from the slave woman who

produces a progeny of young slaves, to be disposed of as shall seem good to her perhaps indulgent master? I see no essential difference. (343)

Caird makes a similar point in her essay, “The Morality of Marriage” (1890), which opens with a description of a fictional, but typical, middle-class marriage:

Is it fair, she asks, that she should be claimed body and soul for a life-time, that she should work hard and suffer much, without earning a bare subsistence? Were she not the man’s wife, he would pay her a salary for far less toil, and she would be a free agent into the bargain. She seems vaguely to hanker after the cook’s place in her own establishment! To work without pay—what is it but to be a slave? (631)

Initially published in the *Fortnightly Review*, “The Morality of Marriage” was later included in Caird’s 1897 collection of essays *The Morality of Marriage*—the work for which she is probably best-known today. Like Schreiner who asserts that despite the demands of women’s domestic labor “yet did we never cry out that it was too heavy for us” (30), Caird, too, focuses on the role of domestic labor in determining gender roles. Of course, the marriage question engaged many other New Woman writers as well. Sarah Grand, for instance, argued that changes in masculine behavior could improve the status of women within marriage, writing in “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (1894), “the sacred duties of wife and mother will be all the more honorably performed when women have a reasonable hope of becoming wives and mothers of *men*” (145). Like the language of *The Daughters of Danaus*, critical discussions of marriage were often highly physical, evoking images of the working, deprived, and enslaved body of woman. These tangible and intangible restraints upon women, Bordo argues, render women immobile: “female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement’” (166). A dance such as Hadria’s, then, that celebrates the unruly body, becomes essential for woman’s liberation.

<16>In defiance of the idea that female mobility is dependent upon male partnership, Hadria abandons her family and travels to Paris to pursue her career as a composer. The description of her journey is filled with positive images of physicality and mobility. As she sits on the train, Hadria observes, “Thoughts ran on rhythmically, in the steady, flashing movement through verdant England. The Real! *that* was the truly exquisite, the truly great, the true realm of the imagination!” (294). Hadria left England in pursuit of her freedom and, initially, she finds it: “even this limited, this comparative freedom, which a man could afford to smile at, was intoxicating. Heavens! under what a leaden cloud of little obligations and restraints, and loneliness and pain, she had been living! (297). Her freedom is short-lived, however, as she quickly encounters financial troubles in Paris—she can barely support herself and must continue moving, constantly at the mercy of unscrupulous landladies. She is also plagued by social obligations: “Insidiously, treacherously, difficulties crept up. Even here, where she seemed so free, the peculiar claims that are made, by common consent, on a woman’s time and strength began to weave their tiny cords around her” (322). Hadria’s mobility is limited, and she cannot fill the fantasy—as articulated in the dream of George Egerton’s protagonist—of performing a woman’s solo. Hadria’s freedom is finally completely destroyed when her sister-in-law Henriette comes to Paris to convince her to return home, and shortly thereafter she receives news that her

mother is ill. Overcome with a sense of duty to her family, Hadria returns to England. Through Hadria's journey, Caird illustrates the liberating potential of women's mobility and the frustrations occasioned by the strictures upon it. Hadria's journey south also recalls another point of connection to her Celtic past—in traveling from Scotland to England to France, Hadria reverses the movement of the Roman troops who expanded their empire northward, eventually constructing "Hadrian's Wall" as a fortification against the Celtic tribes. By giving her heroine a name that recalls the strength of the Celtic peoples and an historical moment of challenge to a dominant patriarchal and military force, Caird, again, underscores how this ethnic past can serve as a source of strength for the feminist future.

<17>In her attempt to promote a feminist view of cultural history, Caird both celebrates Hadria's Celtic heritage and invests the novel in the recovery of the histories of individual women. These women include Eleanor Fortescue, who committed suicide because her husband refused to act as her "gaoler," and Ellen Jervis, a seduced and abandoned schoolteacher who also committed suicide after giving birth to a daughter. Caird re-inserts these histories into the collective consciousness, thereby providing models and warnings for women readers. In addition to promoting these women's histories, Caird criticizes the more general Victorian view of history. This perspective is embodied by Theobald, Professor of Archaeology and specialist in History and Architecture. From the first moment Hadria meets Theobald, she dislikes him: "As he drew near, a feeling of intense enmity arose within her...Every instinct rose up as if in warning" (215). Theobald values logic and uses his intellect to manipulate the emotions of others: "He seemed to be a man of keen and cunning ability, who studied and played upon the passions and weaknesses of his fellows, possibly for their good, but always as a magician might deal with the beings subject to his power" (216). Hadria feels that "in order to investigate the workings of her mind and heart, the Professor would have coolly pursued the most ruthless psychical experiments, no matter at what cost of anguish to herself" (217). Here, again, the image of the body in pain is used to evoke the cultural and social subjugation of women. Theobald's pursuit of logic and knowledge at any cost promotes a reading of the past that Caird works against—the rejection of individual lives and minds in favor of a general (masculine) understanding of dominant (patriarchal) trends. Theobald's version of history does not account for individual lives, which explains why he does not reveal his relationship to Ellen and Martha Jervis—as Ellen's unfaithful lover and Martha's father—until much later. Even then, he does not understand Hadria's reaction, asking "You *do* hate me! for a sin dead and buried?" (434). Theobald's logical, unemotional attachment to the past makes it impossible for him to understand why Hadria would view the betrayal of Ellen as a betrayal of herself. At this point, Hadria's initial dislike of Theobald becomes clear—her instinctual distrust is a result of the feminine heritage she has claimed through Ellen Jervis.

<18>Caird also challenges "objective" Victorian history by bringing mythologies into the text. These are primarily the Celtic mythology, represented by Hadria's connection to the past through music, dance, and heredity, and Greek mythology, signaled by the novel's title. Ann Heilmann offers an extended and perceptive discussion of Caird's mythology in *New Woman Strategies*, noting, "*The Daughters of Danaus* draws on Classical myth in order to problematize the condition of women in the late-Victorian family" (214).<sup>(3)</sup> Caird glosses the title toward the end of the novel: "She [Hadria] too, like the fifty daughters of Danaus, was condemned to the idiot's labour of eternally drawing water in [s]ieves from fathomless wells" (467). Caird's readers

would probably have been familiar with the rest of this story, which recounts how the daughters of Danaus were condemned because they killed the husbands they had been forced to marry. In this way, the myth provides an appropriate metaphor for Caird's novel—society punishes women for trying to retain their freedom and enforces the slavery of marriage. In certain versions of the myth, only forty-nine of Danaus's daughters are condemned. One, Hypermnestra, out of love or pity for her husband, cannot kill him and flees. The endings of this story differ slightly, but they all find Hypermnestra in paradise with her husband (Hamilton 295).

<19>The story of Hypermnestra has a correlation in Caird's *Algitha*. The account of Algitha's marriage directly follows Hadria's meditation on the daughters of Danaus. Although the reader sees little of Algitha's marriage, it appears to be a true marriage of equals—the fulfillment of what Professor Fortescue wanted to have with his wife. Algitha explains their philosophy: “the only tie that we respect is that of our love and faith. If that failed, we should scorn to hold one another in unwilling bondage. We are not entirely without self-respect” (468). This echoes Caird's perception of the ideal marriage:

In a marriage true to the modern spirit, which has scarcely yet begun to breathe upon this institution, husband and wife regard one another as absolutely free beings; they no more think of demanding subordination on one side or the other than a couple of friends who had elected to live together would mutually demand it. That, after all, is the true test. In love there ought to be *at least* as much respect for individuality and freedom as in friendship. (“The Morality of Marriage” 641-2)

The key words in this passage, “individual,” “mutual,” and “free,” reveal that Caird's version of partnership is not determined by any biological or social rules but by the shared respect of independent beings.

<20>Algitha's marriage and the connection to the natural and mythic past suggest a positive future for the feminism expressed in Caird's novel. Hadria asserts,

The hope of the future lies in the rising generation. You can't alter those who have matured in the old ideas. It is for us to warn. I won't pretend to think that things are all right, when I know they are not all right. That would be mean. What is called making the best of it, would testify all the wrong way. My life, instead of being a warning, would be a sort of a trap. Let me at least play the rôle of scarecrow. (474)

Here, Hadria claims that she must continue to struggle because it is that struggle, not complacency, that she wants to hand to future generations. The image of the scarecrow that Hadria invokes here stands in marked contrast to the positive images of physicality and mobility that she has been associated with throughout the novel and, as such, underscores Caird's articulation of the power of the female body. The form of “warning” that Hadria chooses is a static one, asking future generations to embrace their own physicality and mobility, regardless of the consequences. Caird includes a similarly forward-looking and optimistic statement in “The Morality of Marriage” where she discusses women's nascent ability to influence their own social roles: “the result in the long run promises to be the creation of a new balance of power, of many

varieties of feminine character and aptitude, and, through the consequent influx of new ideals and activities, a social revolution, reaching in its results almost beyond the regions of prophecy” (633). In this vision for the future, Caird again draws on the power of nature and heredity to effect change, just as Galton explains the value of the study of heredity: “the improvement of the natural gifts of future generations of the human race is largely, though indirectly, under our control. We may not be able to originate, but we can guide” (41). Indeed, Caird leaves her reader with a sense of transition, from a rigid to a flexible social order in which individual women are free to move and to dance, embodying the individuality that B. A. Crackenthorpe, writing in 1894, ironically quips, “is at the moment the strongest—and the most inconvenient—thing about them” (263).

<21>Caird’s novel embodies the ethos of the New Woman who, herself, was mobile—represented by her bicycle, her bloomers, and her latchkey—moving freely around London in ways that women before her had been unable to do. Many New Woman novels, such as George Paston’s *A Writer of Books* (1899) and Ella Hepworth Dixon’s *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) reflect this mobility, moving their heroines throughout the city, which, itself becomes a character in the text and a witness to the struggles of the protagonists. Rational dress enabled mobility, promoting both independence and physical health. Like many aspects of the New Woman phenomenon, of course, Dress Reform was a subject of some anxiety. According to Patricia Marks, “when fashions began to mirror and express the new way in which women perceived themselves, however, everyone took notice” (147). Nonetheless, it was the change in clothing and the increased mobility—which went hand-in-hand—that enabled the liberation of the New Woman.

<22>*The Daughters of Danaus* uses dance and physicality to challenge the patriarchal model of English society by transforming the act of social dance—so often associated with heterosexual courtship and patriarchal marriage—into a source of individual feminine strength and power that is strongly connected to the Celtic past. Caird calls for the dismantling of the social order through the recovery of feminine history, so that alternate gendered and ethnic narratives can exist instead of, or at least alongside, the dominant tradition. The novel uses dance in provocative ways that allow the dances themselves to have relevance beyond the ballroom insofar as they raise questions about nature and the natural inclinations of female bodies. Caird places dance scenes or references to dance at key moments in the text when the narrative is invested in examinations of history, race, and society. Thus, the dance becomes entwined with these issues and takes on greater significance in promoting a positive view of female physicality and sexuality. Mona Caird’s dancing daughters are not only the women of *The Daughters of Danaus* but all women artists and writers who have followed her and for whom she has become a part of the feminist past she sought to reclaim.

## Endnotes

(1)For example, dance instruction manuals emphasize the role of the male partner in leading his female partner through the dance and initiating movements and steps. And, as dance master

Thomas Wilson explains in *A Companion to the Ballroom*, same-sex dance partnerships, while common, were only permitted when there was a lack of available partners of the opposite sex.(^)

(2)Queen Victoria's affection for Scotland and her Balmoral home has been well documented, and in 1859 she wrote to Princess Frederick William, "I am struggling with my homesickness for my beloved Highlands, the air—the life, the liberty—cut off for so long—almost could make me angry" (in Hibbert 147). Queen Victoria's interest in Scottish culture facilitated the entry of Scottish dance into the English ballroom; however, her withdrawal from public life with the death of Prince Albert in 1861 and the rise in popularity of other dance forms such as the waltz and the polka meant that by the end of the century, when Caird was writing, the reel had waned in popularity in London ballrooms. Nonetheless, as Caird illustrates, this dance continued to play an important role in defining Scottish culture and heritage.(^)

(3)Heilmann also discusses the Medea myths and their Celtic origins at length (*New Woman Strategies* 227+)(^)

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