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“It was one’s body feeling, not one’s mind”: A *Pas de Deux* for Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and the Russian Ballet

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*The Russian ballet was celebrated amongst the Bloomsbury group in the early twentieth-century. Throughout 1910s-1930s, Virginia Woolf enjoyed Russian ballets such as Petrushka, Le Spectre de la Rose and Scheherazade staged by Michel Fokine and Sergei Diaghilev. The expressivity of the dancing body rectifies words which, as Woolf delineates in “Craftsmanship,” are dishonest in articulating emotions (Selected Essays 85). This paper thus divulges an oppositional thinking that belies Woolf’s modernist aesthetics – a compulsion to give words to emotions that should be left unsaid. In *To the Lighthouse* (1928), this “silence” is communicated in the dancing gestures that populate the novel. Juxtaposing the context of Woolf’s attendance at the ballet with her concurrent composition of *Lighthouse*, I shall argue that the aesthetic convergence between Woolf’s prose and the Russian ballet is not a coincidence – that Woolf very much had the ballet in mind when she wrote. Woolf’s and the Russian ballet’s shared aesthetics however, do not characterise this paper as a study of influence the Russian ballet had on Woolf. Rather, Woolf involuntarily deploys the language of dance/ballet in articulating ineffable emotions. I will offer a close reading that scrutinizes the underexplored physical gestures of Mr and Mrs Ramsay with a perspective of dance. In projecting emotions, Woolf’s novel sketches a reciprocal network between the dancing body and the mind. I conclude by suggesting that the communicational lapses do not sentence the failure of but sustain human kinship. By extension, the Russian balletic presentation of the dancing body will also reanimate the mind-body conundrum that has haunted academia for centuries.*

Sergei Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* – a group of French-based Russian ballet dancers – monopolised the arena of dance in the early twentieth century. Funded by the Russian government, Diaghilev brought his dancers to Paris to advertise Russian culture. *The Ballets Russes*’ popularity soon amplified in England around 1910. Commenting on the Russian ballet, Edward Gordon Craig marvels that it is “essentially the ‘Art’ which is created by the body. Its perfection is physical. Its appeal is to our senses, not through them” (40). On the other hand, the Russian ballet equally enshrines spiritual content. Early twentieth-century Russian ballets placed an unprecedented emphasis on spirituality that heightened the drama between body and mind. In *The Spiritual Dynamic of the Modern Art*, C. Spretnak outlines the emergence of

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a “post-materialist realisation” during the mid-1880s to 1918, in which artists showcased “primitive” and “naturalistic” qualities (65). Diaghilev’s ballets, Spretnak argues, bring to the surface humanity’s spirit equally with, if not more than, the dancer’s technique. The balletic dispute between technique and artistry is not unrelated to the “mind-body problem” that propagated doctrines which philosophers from Plato, René Descartes, John Locke, to T.H. Huxley respectively defended. Like this philosophical conundrum, the translatability of spirituality through the body remains an enduring question for the Russian ballet.

Woolf was an enthusiastic attendee of the Russian ballet. Throughout the 1910s-1930s, Woolf enjoyed ballets such as *Petrushka*, *Le Spectre de la Rose* and *Scheherazade* staged by Diaghilev and the *Ballets Russes*. On 20th November 1911, she invited Lytton Strachey to watch *Le Spectre de la Rose* with her (*Letters Vol.1* 481). In her diary of October 12, 1918, she compares the Diaghilev production (which included Fokine’s *Scheherazade*) she attended at the Coliseum with the session she attended in London: “when I saw it I remembered it better done at Covent Garden” (*Diary Vol.1* 201). Orchestrating the body’s drama in communicating inner spirit, Woolf, like the Russian dancer, similarly addresses the risks of representing consciousness physically in *To the Lighthouse*, a novel pre-occupied with bodily expressions. Embodied in their silent (non-)communication, Mr and Mrs Ramsay often replace verbal language with physical gestures. Despite Mr Ramsay’s usual verbosity, he grows uncomfortably taciturn when it comes to personal emotions. On the other hand, Mrs Ramsay is not a woman of words. Yet, beneath Mrs Ramsay’s superficial “sternness” lies a mental restlessness of inexhaustible self-criticism: “But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said it? Not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean” (59). The body-mind discoordination in these thwarted episodes of self-expression seems to imply a dualistic view of the mind-body relationship, as interiority and appearances seemed divisible. As Lily Briscoe notes however, it is “one’s body feeling, not one’s mind” (169). In other words, the mind and body *function* as one: though emptied of linguistic accounts for emotions, it was the body that feels, not the mind.

Reading dance into Woolf’s works, this paper discusses the mind-body collaboration where emotions are externalized through balletic bodily movement. Indeed, the meticulous structures in Woolf’s prose already reveal a choreographic impulse. *To the Lighthouse* is divided into three sections: “The Window,” “Time Passes,” and

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“The Lighthouse.” In a notebook dated March 1925, Woolf envisions the novel as “Two blocks joined by a corridor” which formed a shape like the letter “H” (*To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft* 48). At the same time, Woolf also wishes to break through these static designs: she must “break up, dig deep, make prose move [...] as prose has never moved before” (*Diary Vol.4* 11). As such, writing is configured as a sense of movement that patterns itself according to a rhythm that alternates between “breaking up” and “digging deep” against the backdrop of set “choreography”: “Suppose I could run all the scenes together more? – by rhythms chiefly. So as to avoid all those cuts; so as to make the blood run like a torrent from end to end” (*Diary Vol.3* 343).

The dancing body’s privilege in performing as the only language of thought and emotion further informs Woolf’s idiosyncratic view on the mind-body problem. Customarily, “thought” and “emotion” are perceived as immaterial substance in the mind where the immateriality of thought is to be translated by language for communication. In dance and in Woolf, there is no “inner”: instead of consciously pre-conceptualising thoughts, the individual embodies thoughts as they occur. While critics such as Louise Westling, using Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, have discussed the ways in which Woolf conceives the body as the site where knowledge is arrived at, I suggest that Westling’s philosophical approach can be complemented by the dance theories. As Merleau-Ponty writes, words “must somehow cease to be a way of designating things or thoughts, and *become the presence of that thought* in the phenomenal world, and moreover, not its clothing, but its token or its body” (18, my emphasis). Dance places this attention to the synchronization of words/thoughts in the forefront, as dance’s non-verbal nature implores the dancer to articulate emotions through the body.

Although a more general comparison between Woolf and dance might suffice in this discussion, the focus on the Russian ballet is well-informed by the specificity of dance history during the early twentieth century. At the time, the Russian ballet was recognised as a major force composing the fabric of modern dance. Many novelists and poets, including Woolf, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Andre Gide, are conscious

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of the impact the Russian ballet had on their writing¹. In addition to this, Woolf's enthusiastic and frequent attendance of the *Ballets Russes'* performances further vindicates that the Russian ballet will furnish a more personal angle for examining Woolf's mind-body entanglement. In scrutinising Mr and Mrs Ramsay's underexplored physical gestures with a balletic perspective, I argue that in *To the Lighthouse*, states of mind interfere with bodily control while mental states become physical experiences. Translating emotive sensibilities physically, the (balletic) body simultaneously risks incomprehensibility while enabling self-expression. In turn, Woolf's novel also witnesses the inherent flaws in the Ramsays' extra-linguistic communications which sustain interpersonal intimacy.

“I don't want a ‘philosophy’ in the least”

Disengaging with Plato's and Rene Descartes's mind-body dualism, Woolf and the Russian ballet deem the body and mind inseparable. In *Passions of The Soul*, Descartes professes that “there is a small gland in the brain in which the soul exercises its functions more particularly than in other parts” (31). This small gland refers to the pineal gland, which for Descartes commands the body. Fabricating a supremacy of the mind over bodily movements, Descartes argues that body and mind are of distinct substances, therefore separated: the body is materialistic while the mind is “incorporeal.” It is the mind that accounts for our existence – “I think therefore I am,” writes Descartes. Conversely to Cartesian ontology, Woolf writes: “I don't believe you can possibly separate expression from thought in an imaginative work” (*Letters Vol.3* 294). The manifestation of “inner truth,” Woolf emphasises, depends upon physical matters: “...the truth is, one can't write directly about the soul. Looked at, it vanishes: but look at the ceiling, at Grizzle, at the chapter beasts in the zoo, and the soul slips in” (*A Writer's Diary* 145). Due to the soul's slipperiness, our spiritual mind is implicated in and partially reliant on the physical body. As Lily Briscoe's aborted verbal expression for her feelings towards Mrs Ramsay ruminates, the “feeling” of the

¹ In his essay “The Ballet,” T.S. Eliot suggests that the Russian ballet provides a new artistic language by its “radical resistance to conventional assumptions about narrative” (442); Yeats has written various dramatic plays which were subsequently adapted to dance-dramas: most notably *Plays for Dancers* and *Fighting the Waves* (subtitled “A Ballet Play”); French writer André Gide perceived the Russian Ballet not in terms of choreographic autonomy, but by the way in which movement could serve as poetic inspiration (Taruskin 989).

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“body” seems more capable of connecting with one’s emotions than the mind (169). The body, though devoid of identifiable spiritual contents, “feel[s]” and expresses emotions that escaped the mind. Woolf’s attitude towards the body’s indispensability in communicating feelings is most poignantly expressed in her essay “On Being Ill”. For Woolf, the condition of illness dramatises the indispensable role of the body in comprehending emotions. Woolf laments that our literary history “does its best to maintain that [literature’s] concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear...On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night, the body intervenes” (*Selected Essays* 101). The body’s indispensability, however, does not reiterate a reversal of a Cartesian dualism that champions the body over the mind. Unlike Decartes, the distinct substances of the body and mind do not entail a non-interferent relationship for Woolf. The body and mind function rather as distinct matters that are nonetheless co-dependent.

The liaisons between the body and the mind thus occupy a complex oscillation in Woolf’s writing. In “On Being Ill,” Woolf configures the mind and body as two disparate yet inseparable elements: “[the mind] cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant” (*Selected Essays* 101). As a matter of fact, bodily pain is always suffered through various psychological states: “love must be deposed in favour of a temperature of 104; jealousy give place to the pangs of sciatica; sleeplessness play the part of villain, and the hero become a white liquid with a sweet taste...” (*Selected Essays* 101). Such mind-body assembly is pivotal in ballet, in which the technical ability to perform difficult steps is as much a psychological skill as a physical one. In an interview Nicole Antonette Martinell conducts, participants recall how familiarising themselves with barre exercises before centre work/performances gave them “a sense of comfort” which “reduced their fear of falling” (106). Eliminating the mental fear of failure enables the dancer to ameliorate their control over their bodies with technical precision. As such, instead of preaching a body-mind oneness over a Cartesian dualism, Woolf sketches a *reciprocal network of movement* between the body and mind: the functioning of the body depends on the mind as much as the mind’s function is reliant on the body.

The mind-body imbrication means that Woolf’s emphasis of the body does not aim at philosophising a stern theoretical stance regarding the nature of the mind and the body. In her diary, Woolf proclaims her disapproval of “philosophy”: “I don’t want a ‘philosophy’ in the least” (*Diary Vol.4* 126). Specifically, she is critical towards

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a highly-academic brand of philosophy as emulated by “Mr Ramsay and his exactingness” (142). As philosophers obsess over Truth, Mr Ramsay is likewise allergic to alternative viewpoints: “He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being...” (4). His intolerance of multiple truths rendered him intellectually stagnant, as “he would never reach R”: Even though he reached Q, there are “a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance” (31-32). Eventually, he would become a pathetic figure, “demanding sympathy” from the “intensity of his isolation” (33-4). Rather than imposing a philosophical paradigm on the novel, Woolf’s view on the body-mind will be more effectively examined with a perspective of dance that aligns closer with her “choreography” of the mind-body *pas de deux*. In *Reading Dancing*, Susan Forster comments on modern dancer Isadora Duncan’s talent to marry spirituality with physicality: “Duncan’s dances seem always to refer, ultimately, to a relationship between spirit and body, a relationship that she replicates in the dance movement” (70-71). Woolf knew of Duncan and had most likely read her autobiography – *My Life*. In a letter to Vanessa in 1928, she writes: “[Rebecca West] gave me the true history of Isadora Duncan’s life—(I sent you the life, by the way, which is rather valuable, as the libraries are banning it)” (*Letters Vol.3* 501). Known for her barefoot dancing and liberated movements, Duncan was a “symbol of freedom” for various Russian ballet choreographers, schools, and companies, including Fokine’s dances and Diaghilev’s company (Sourtiz 283)².

Mr and Mrs Ramsay’s *Pas de Deux*

“It was absurd. It was impossible. One could not say what one meant” (18).

In her autobiography, Duncan further elaborates her philosophy of dance as the involuntary overflow of inner truth through bodily movements: “I...sought the source

² In “Isadora Duncan’s Influence on Dance in Russia,” Elizabeth Sourtiz argues that Duncan’s innovative departure from academic and classical ballet postures “direct[ly] influence[d]” Russian choreographer Alexander Gosky’s ballets (*Little Humbacked Horse, Nur and Anitra, and Etudes*) in the 1910s. Sourtiz also notes that Duncan indirectly founded the “plastique dance” (Russian free dance) which was professionally practised by Elena Rabarek’s Rabarek school and company (283).

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of the spiritual expression to flow into the channels of the body filling it with vibrating light – the centrifugal force reflecting the spirit’s vision” (60). The light that vibrates within and without continues to illuminate in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, which was published in 1927 – the year of Duncan’s demise. The legacy of Duncan’s spiritual light in the body is discerned in the propensity of Woolf’s characters to embody rather than verbalise thoughts. Patrick Oudek Laurence, in *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*, observes that “much of the communication that takes place among her characters in her novels after *Jacob’s Room*, published in 1923, is not voiced or audible” (96). Such inadequacy of words, he argues, is vocalised in three types of silences in *To the Lighthouse* that characterise Woolfian silence: “Woolf’s subjective mode of being rather than doing”; “things not yet spoken”; and “things that are unsayable” (1-2). Building upon the modalities of Woolfian silence that Laurence identifies, I suggest that there is a fourth type of silence that can be read into the novel: Things that cannot be worded but “danced” through reciprocal bodily movement. In this section, I will argue that the reading of *pas de deux* into the Ramsay couple enriches Woolf’s insight towards extra-linguistic communications as central yet necessarily “imperfect.” Such flawed communication further addresses Woolf’s counterintuitive use of a linguistic/literary medium (the novel form) to express emotions that elude language in *To the Lighthouse*.

During the 1910s-1920s, Woolf frequently attended modern ballets that heavily featured *pas de deux*. In a letter (dated 6 November 1911) to Lytton Strachey, Woolf invites Strachey to accompany her to the three ballets (*Les Sylphides*, *Le Carnaval*, and *Le Pavillon*): “Will it suit you to come to the dancers (Anna Pavlova & Nijinsky) tomorrow night – dining here at 7.30 first? They’re only amphitheatre this time; but when they do the other thing we will go to the stalls” (*Letters Vol.1* 479). While the *pas de deux* is not a unique feature of the Russian ballet, partnering technique in the 1920s reached a new height with the trend of risky movements which required advanced bodily communications between partners. In *Pas de Deux: The Art of Partnering*, Anton Dolin remarks that “acrobatic lifts” and “catches” were introduced to partnering steps, which demanded unprecedented “trust” between partners (4).

The ballet couple’s advanced physical partnering is illuminative in the Ramsay couple’s daily communications. As the male dancer leads his female partner in *pas de*

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deux, Mr Ramsay habitually chaperones Mrs Ramsay in their relationship. Lily observes that Mr and Mrs Ramsay's marriage could be summed up in "how they would retreat into solitude together, and walk on and on, he always leading her, and she pressing close to his side (as she did now)" (72). In *Experiencing the Art of Pas de Deux*, Kronenberg, Guerra, and Neal suggest that "the quality of [the female dancer's] performance will be measured in large part by [the male dancer's] partnering proficiency" (25). Mr Ramsay's leading position in the relationship is manifested in his high-profile egoism: "he dwells upon fame, upon search parties, upon cairns raised by grateful followers over his bones" (33). A mysterious sense of self-righteousness also possesses him, as he asks: "who shall blame him?" for his desires. Unlike her aggressive husband, Mrs Ramsay is always "silent" despite "stories of great passion, of love foiled, of ambition thwarted" being ever within her (26-27). While epiphanies frequently visit, Mrs Ramsay keeps her "irrational tenderness" for the world and her irritation of her womanly duties at bay (59). Implicitly coerced into compromises, Mrs Ramsay usually assumes a passive role in their marriage as does the female dancer in a partnership.

Mrs Ramsay's passivity, however, does not sentence female dancers to be prisoners of the patriarchy. In effect, *pas de deux* requires equal physical contribution in both parties. It is mostly in lifting and pirouette combinations that the male dancer's domination over the female's body is visually suggested. In the novel, there are aspects of Mrs Ramsay that elude her husband's puppeteering:

[I]t hurt him that she should look so distant, and he could not reach her, he could do nothing to help her. And again, he would have passed her without a word had she not, at that very moment, given him of her own free will what she knew he would never ask, and called to him [...] and gone to him. (60-61)

In this scene, it is Mrs Ramsay who initiatively reaches for Mr Ramsay while remaining silent to her husband. Here, Mrs Ramsay's "irrational tenderness" seems to have found its place in her gesture to "g[o] to him" (59-60). As Mrs Ramsay laments, she is always "trapped into saying something she did not mean" even when she "search[es] as she alone could search into her mind and her heart" (59). Mrs Ram-

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say's bodily movement embodies the tenderness that would otherwise become "insincer[e]" once spoken (59). In this sense, the psychological state of tenderness becomes a physical feeling that Mrs Ramsay "dances."

Kronenberg, Guerra, and Neal point out that a successful *pas de deux* depends on a "mutual reciprocity" from both parts: "He will be able to serve her well, but only to the extent that he deems her performance his priority" (25). As the dance couple would "instinctively kno[w]" where each other's balances are, Mr Ramsay similarly also "knew" that Mr Ramsay "wished" to protect her by him "passing her without a word" (60). Later and during dinner, such telepathic reading of each other's body languages becomes more prominent:

He loathed people eating when he had finished. She saw his anger fly like a pack of hounds into his eyes, his brow, and she knew that in a moment something violent would explode, and then – but thank goodness! She saw him clutch and clap a brake on the wheel, and the whole of his body seemed to emit sparks but not words. He sat there scowling. He had said nothing, he would have her observe. Let her give him the credit for that! (89)

Observing her husband's anger, Mrs Ramsay, like partners who understand each other's body in a functional *pas de deux*, reads between the contraction and release of his body. Simultaneously, Mr Ramsay also knew that his wife knew what he is feeling: "they looked at each other down the long table sending these questions and answers across, each knowing exactly what the other felt" (89).

Interestingly, Mr Ramsay's habitual control in their marriage is mitigated when it comes to personal matters. During dinner, Mr Ramsay "felt extremely, even physically, uncomfortable. He wanted somebody to give him a chance of asserting himself. He wanted it so urgently that he fidgeted in his chair, looked at this person, then at that person, tried to break into their talk, opened his mouth and shut it again" (84). Though desperate to seek everybody's attention at the table, Mr Ramsay, strangely, does not speak. Instead, he fidgets, constantly opening and shutting his mouth. For Mr Ramsay, his vanity could only be physically soothed: "he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself" (84). Like the dancer, neither the mind nor words could tolerate Mr Ramsay's emotion, which could only be blurted out awkwardly in bodily movement. It is true

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that Mr Ramsay is an enthusiastic talker, especially in philosophical subjects. As Mrs Ramsay observes, her husband “found talking so much easier than she did” (114). Yet, he seems incapable of verbalising his private feelings. Mrs Ramsay’s observation continues: “So naturally it was always he that said the things, and then for some reason he would mind this suddenly, and would reproach her” (114). In marriage, Mr Ramsay’s oafish movement epitomises his failure to assume his usual confident advances in speech.

Likewise, Mrs Ramsay’s domestic frustration is also vented through physical gestures. Realising her task ahead, Mrs Ramsay shakes her body to prepare herself for work. The transition to working mode is compared to the ticking of the watch, in which its repetitive lull of “one, two, three, one, two, three” resembles the rhythmic signature of the three-count waltz in ballet. It is in this mechanical, almost dehumanised physical push of her body that her life resumes – “the old familiar pulse began beating” (78). Summoned by the waltzing rhythm of work, Mrs Ramsay shuts off her mental life and resumes her physical labour.

Despite their uncommunicated hostility mixed with tenderness, their annoyance eventually dissolves by a telepathic bodily connection that coheres the “mutual reciprocity” between dance couples. Conscious that Mr Ramsay is “watching her,” Mrs Ramsay “looked at him” instead of “saying anything”: “And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him” (115). Having argued, the couple resolve their differences in clairvoyant exchanges of eye contacts. While nothing is pragmatically negotiated, peace is restored with Mr Ramsay’s reassurance of his wife’s affection and Mrs Ramsay’s eventual inner “triumph” (115). The Ramsays’ oscillations between love and disgust towards each other find their parallel in Harlequin’s and Columbine’s persistent flirtations in Fokine’s *Le Carnival* (Woolf attended the ballet during the 1910s-1920s). Dramatising various couples’ relationship in a masquerade ball, *pas de deux* makes up most of *Le Carnival*. In *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in Historical Avant-Gardes*, Gabriele Brandsletter observes that the couples “find and lose each other in a rapid succession” throughout the ballet (347). While lacking the gaiety of Fokine’s carnivalesque choreography, Mr and Mrs Ramsay often vacillate between losing and finding each other’s emotions, as Harlequin and Columbine perpetually hide from and seek one another in unexhausted sequences. With reciprocal movement, the body externalises the nuances of the mind that words fail to translate.

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Whereas the body enables expressions of abstracted emotions, Woolf was not oblivious to the frequent untranslatability of this physical expression. Even Mr and Mrs Ramsay's *pas de deux* is often entangled in awkward positions when gestures are miscommunicated. As the couple walk the hills together, Mrs Ramsay tries to signal Mr Ramsay by putting "a little pressure on his arm that he walked up hill too fast for her" and that "she must stop for a moment to see whether those were fresh mole-hills on the bank" (65). Mrs Ramsay remarks that her husband, insensitive to her nudge, "never looked at things. If he did, all he would say would be, Poor little world, with one of his sighs". While he did say "[v]ery fine" to please her and "pretended to admire the flowers," Mrs Ramsay knows too well that it was simply sheer pretension (66). Here, bodily language cripples Mrs Ramsay's desire to share a genuine appreciation of life with her husband.

The ballet dancer similarly suffers such occasional misinterpretation of body languages. Characterised by ungraceful movements and the often "turned in" positions³, Russian ballets in the early twentieth-century were notorious for transgressing the delicate spirit of classical ballet. Disturbed by the ballet's use of violent rhythms and outrageous movement, the majority of critics accused Nijinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* of being "a crime against grace" (Hodson x). Like Mr and Mrs Ramsay's struggle for effective representations of bodily emotions, the modern ballet dancer risks becoming a "madman" obsessed with creating transgressive movements. Reviewer Andre Levinson (1918) mocks the Russian Ballet as a farce: "the new ballet, pretentious but poor in content, naturally seeks support in other arts...having shifted its centre of gravity from dance to pantomime" (qtd. in Acocella 32). Abel Bonnard is also outraged by the new ballet's barbarism – "a clear hieroglyph of rage, hatred, or desire" (Quoted in Karthes, 102). The language of dance, despite offering an alternative to the ineffable, is often thwarted by communicational misunderstandings caused by a rift between spirituality and its external manifestations.

Both Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and the Russian aesthetics of *pas de deux*, however, precisely poeticise these complexities as the prerequisites for genuine human communications. As previously delineated, Patrick Oudek Laurence identifies

³ The technique of classical ballet is built upon a "turned out" position, in which the dancer's hip joints rotate outwards. Every classical step should be performed according to this physical law.

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Woolf's "confront[ation] of the narrativity of silence" since *Jacob's Room*" (1). Imposing words into "something about life that is ineffable," Woolf's literary practice attempts the impossible by portraying life "between the islands of speech." Woolf's textual portrayal of the ineffable is a counter-intuitive impulse which self-reflexively encapsulates the very notion of ineffability: effable words, being the flesh and bone of the novel form therefore, simultaneously enabled and failed to embody the ineffability Woolf wishes to communicate. As such, Mr and Mrs Ramsay's communication errors act as ways in which Woolf dramatises the inherently flawed nature of human communications: to establish a telepathic intimacy like that of the Ramsays, one must suffer the occasional "depress[ion]" which simultaneously sustains such kinship (66).

For the Russian ballet, avant-garde choreographers' transgression of classical training similarly facilitates more poignant expressions for complex subject matters that singularise Russian ballets. Unlike classical ballets which usually follow similar romantic plots and familiar human emotions⁴, modern Russian ballets adopt heterogeneous plots and larger-than-life emotions. In *Ballet Beyond Tradition*, Anna Paskevskaya comments on the ways in which "specific roles affected the movement vocabulary" in Fokine's works (18). In *Petrushka* (a ballet starring three puppets), the puppets are marked by how they "throw [their] limbs from side to side." Though composed of "recognisably classical steps," the puppets' movements are danced with a languid style that contrasts the classical dancer's controlled posture. Paskevskaya clarifies that these "choreographic choices were made within a specific context" as the doll's "superficial manner" is expressive of its "shallow nature" (18). Nijinsky's betrayal of classicism in *Le Sacre du Printemps* by the use of "turned-in" positions and un-pointed feet, in addition, is also impelled by the emotion of a violent sense of anger. As Woolf anti-intuitively writes about the ineffable, Russian ballet dancers appropriate their classical training to deliver ballet's modern vocabulary in the more complex themes of the Russian repertoires. The Ramsay couple's occasional communicational collapses and the hieroglyphics of Russian ballet thus do not undermine

⁴ Many classical ballets – most notably Marius Petipa's ballets – are set in the royal court and feature monotonous romantic plots. Examples include: *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Raymonda*. Most of these also share the fairy-tale plot of the prince and the princess losing and finding each other, ending in a happily-ever-after.

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but exemplify a tension that must be maintained and negotiated via physical communications.

Coda

For Woolf, the body and mind reciprocate each other to give form to complex emotions in spite of their distinct natures. Often obscured in “the dark places of psychology,” these emotional contents cannot simply be worded or thought with coherency (*Selected Essays* 11). Through movement, the materiality of the dancing body reifies the content of the mind. It is vital to reiterate that although the body is the instrument for articulating mind-content, the mind is not thereby superior to the body. After all, the mind relies on the body to make itself heard. Similarly, the body does not dominate the mind because of its ability to externalise emotions. Without the emotional content the mind supplies, the body will be reduced to machinery. Russian dancer Makarova ruminates that the Russian school’s artistic principle is that “a dancer must sense a movement with his entire body,” sometimes and paradoxically, in the brink of “abandoning technique altogether” (Quoted in Royce, 65). In *Mr and Mrs Ramsay*, bodily movement precisely straddles the body and the emotions. The Russian ballet’s vigorous presentation of physicality and their concurrent emphasis on artistry vivify the at-times difficult technique Woolf’s body-mind *pas de deux* gracefully danced.

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