



Dancing out of Line: Ballrooms, Ballets, and Mobility in Victorian Fiction and Culture

Molly Engelhardt

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Dancing out of Line transports readers back to the 1840s when the craze for social and stage dancing forced Victorians into a complex relationship with the moving body in its most voluble, volatile form. Molly Engelhardt challenges our assumptions about Victorian sensibilities and attitudes toward the sexual/social roles of men and women by bringing together historical voices from

various fields to demonstrate the versatility of the dance, not only as a social practice but also as a forum for Victorians to engage in debate about the body and its pleasures and pathologies.

Engelhardt makes explicit many of the ironies underlying Victorian practices that up to this time have gone unnoticed in critical circles by partnering cultural discourses with representations of the dance in novels such as *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Daniel Deronda*. She analyzes the role of the illustrious dance master, who created and disseminated the manners and moves expected of fashionable society, despite his origin as a social outsider of nebulous origins. She describes how the daughters of the social elite were expected to “come out” to society in the ballroom, the most potent space in the cultural imagination for licentious behavior and temptation. These incongruities fueled the debates and in the process generated new, progressive ideas about the body, subjectivity, sexuality, and health.

Dancing out of Line will be of interest to scholars in the fields of Victorian studies, women’s history, the nineteenth-century novel, dance and theater studies, and medicine and literature.

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