

# Traditionnal French-Canadian Dance Iconography : A Methodology for Analysis

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Article abstract

Prenant à témoin le dessin d'Henri Julien intitulé *La danse chez Batissette Augé*, l'auteure tente de rendre compte de la valeur historique et ethnologique du document iconographique. À cette fin elle utilise le modèle d'analyse élaboré naguère par Erwin Panofsky et selon lequel l'œuvre d'art doit répondre du quoi, du comment et du pourquoi d'une réalité culturelle donnée.

Au terme de son cheminement l'auteure observe tout d'abord que l'œuvre de Julien s'insère étroitement dans le courant de retour aux sources typique du discours de l'élite canadienne-française de cette époque; reconnaît en second lieu qu'on ne peut rien affirmer de précis sur l'identité de la danse illustrée par l'artiste, ne sachant pas très bien si celui-ci a voulu produire un document précis ou simplement évoquer un climat; conduit finalement sur le fait qu'on ne peut considérer sérieusement une source iconographique sans l'avoir préalablement soumise à la critique interne et externe.

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# TRADITIONAL FRENCH-CANADIAN DANCE ICONOGRAPHY : A METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYSIS

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Ellen SHIFRIN

Historians specializing in the area of human movement are often obliged to rely on the visual arts for much of their understanding of a particular activity in its place and time. Iconography has a lot to offer this type of study, both for validating literary sources and for provoking new explorations. Occasionally it seems that a visual source provides misleading information. My own investigation of traditional French-Canadian dance iconography encountered all these possibilities, and included searches through varied types of source material, requiring a truly eclectic vision. I wanted to determine which pictorial works stand as valid historical and ethnological documents. This avenue of inquiry yielded some unexpected answers and an infinite number of questions. This article will outline the methodology used in my analysis with one major example to clarify the procedure.

One of the first issues that demands attention is the question of whether the artists of the past were photographers of the era. The answer is both yes and no. Certainly the general population did rely on the artist as a kind of photographer for knowledge of inaccessible places and events, as today we are obliged to trust an artist's representations of courtroom episodes. But by the very process that an artist works — through his eyes and consciousness — any work cannot help but be, to some extent, subjective. Even if an artist intends the work to be a factual reproduction, he nevertheless must rely on his own vision and experiences.

Iconographic material, then, requires a careful analysis in order to determine its historical validity. A methodology is important to establish a thorough course of investigation. Betty Jean Putnam outlines three major concerns necessary for reaching accurate conclusions about historical works of art.<sup>1</sup> Her ideas are based on the

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1. Betty Jean Putnam, "Art in Historical Research: A Method of Interpretation," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 1, No. 2 (1970), 55.

theories of art historian Erwin Panofsky, who identified three levels of meaning in any work : material form, which answers to the question *what* ; idea, which answers to the question *how* ; and content, which responds to the query *why*. Each aspect has its own form of elaboration.

The first concern, that of material form, answers the *what* of the picture, and is generally descriptive. Through line, shape and colour, the artist creates forms which the analyst can interpret as familiar objects, such as people, bat, and ball. On this level it is possible to determine qualities of emotion — happiness, sadness, anger — by examining the lines and shapes in the face and posture. A study of clothing and features can provide essential information, but sometimes it might be necessary to use secondary sources, such as books or films, in order to identify accurately any ambiguous or unknown objects. Knowledge of historical style is also important in order to avoid misinterpretation.

One example of this type of misinterpretation occurs in the use of a watercolour by George Heriot, *La danse ronde : Circular Dance of the Canadian* (Plate 2). This work was done circa 1805, and the costume is clearly consistent with the fashionable elite dress and fabric of the time. In a little book by historian Arthur G. Doughty, *A Daughter of New France : Being the Story of the Life and Times of Magdelaine de Verchères 1665-1692*, *La danse ronde* was placed in the midst of a discussion of *habitant* (rural folk, often farmers, but not necessarily so) holidays.<sup>2</sup> Considering the range of Doughty's dates — 1665-1692 — it is obvious that whoever decided to use the work (whether Doughty or an editor) was mistaken on two counts : *La danse ronde* depicts neither habitants nor the late seventeenth century. From the dress alone, Heriot's work falls squarely in the early nineteenth century and depicts bourgeois city people.

The second concern deals with the ideas within the work ; these are themes or concepts that emerge as a result of identification of the initial forms. Consider Putnam's example of a man, bat and ball conveying the idea of baseball, an easy task for us. However, to someone unfamiliar with North American culture, the baseball concept would be unrecognizable, and would necessitate a search through secondary sources to discover the meaning of the image. If a study is of a past era or a culture not our own, expertise in the social history of the artist's time and place is very important.

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2. Arthur G. Doughty, *A Daughter of New France : Being a Story of the Life and Times of Magdelaine de Verchères 1665-1692* (Ottawa : Mortimer Press, 1916), p. 77.

Another valuable part of the analysis process is the knowledge of contemporary symbols which were used to convey certain ideas. For example, certain articles of clothing can be used to identify a group of people. If we return to Heriot's work, we can see that he has given a few of the men toques, while others sport a *ceinture fléchée*, the braided belt-sash popular among the *voyageurs*. These pieces of apparel were indicative of the French-Canadian habitant. But because this fashionable group can in no way be said to be representative of rural people, it is possible to surmise that Heriot used the toques and ceintures fléchées to identify the group as French Canadian. Otherwise, the two groups — elite French and elite English — were undoubtedly indistinguishable from one another.

The third concern is more subjective in nature and requires the historian to have sound insight into the thoughts and values of the time. The focus is the interpretation of the work, a step which supposes the accuracy of the first two concerns. Important here are the choices that the artist, as spokesman for his time and place, has made. What intrinsic meaning is there in the motifs used? Why and how do these objects stand as symbols that portray the underlying beliefs and sentiments of the culture? The historian needs to be aware of other documents that record the basic ideologies of the period in order to make a correct evaluation of the artist's work.

A clearer idea of this methodology will emerge by tracing its application for one of my most problematical works. This is the 1893 drawing, *La danse chez Batissette Augé*, by Henri Julien (Plate 8). Along with three other pieces of iconography, this work was a case of the art instigating a particular avenue of research. The inquiry was into the formation of the dancers, since in my fieldwork I had never come across a dance for four people. Had there existed a dance of this type at one time? Most of the dances that I had seen were based either on the square formation, such as a *quadrille*, *cotillion* or American-style square dance, or on a *contredanse*, or *longways* arrangement. Also prominent were expanded squares that had four people on each side, and a longways-type quadrille, where each couple stands opposite another couple. Yet another formation is a circle, although the only circular dances I have seen accompanied a game and/or song. These were considered unimportant in the adult repertoire.

The fact that four pieces of iconography depict this *danse à quatre* is interesting. Was it a dance that was popular during Julien's time and then died out? Perhaps early dance collectors did not bother to note it down because only four people were involved, or because steps were too intricate. Another suggestion is that Julien

was the first to draw this formation and the other artists then took their inspiration from his work.<sup>3</sup> Chronologically this is viable. Possibly the four dancers serve as an artistic shorthand, and are really representing eight or more dancers. One question about Julien's work especially involves the dancers' postures, which are uncharacteristic for Québécois. These issues will be explored here, but the first step is to methodically describe, analyse and interpret the picture by Henri Julien.

*La danse chez Batissette Augé* was originally drawn to accompany a short, folk-inspired story by Honoré Beaugrand called "La chasse-galerie."<sup>4</sup> In the story a group of loggers call upon the Devil to transport by air their canoe to the town where their girlfriends live, a few hundred miles away. When they get there a New Year's Eve party is in progress, and naturally dance is an active ingredient. The picture contains many familiar objects that are immediately identifiable; there are people of all ages, half-way down the room on the left a man plays a fiddle, in the back is a canopied bed, mounted on the wall are various utensils — scythes, axes, a rifle, pictures — and from the ceiling hang drying herbs or vegetables. Candles shine from the mantelpiece and a fire glows in the fireplace. A table on the right holds platters of food and a jug. In the back left is an area that might be the kitchen, since a woman holding a plate heads in that direction. Both floor and ceiling are wooden, and a trunk occupies the lower right corner.

To extend this obviously common-sense description, other statements can be made. Certain observations are not difficult even without Beaugrand's story to supply details. The dress and physiognomy identify this group as habitant. One of the male dancers wears a ceinture fléchée, perhaps he is one of the story's loggers, or is a voyageur. The fiddler and the man sitting near the fire have toques. For footwear most people have a *botte sauvage*, a boot or shoe modelled after the Native North American fashion, which was in use among the early habitants. Motifs such as scythes and axes add to clearly establish a rural setting. The fire in the fireplace indicates the winter season, and the use of candle light confirms that the time period of the story predates gas lighting. In the centre of the room the four people with their left feet raised are unmistakably dancing. Others sit on the sides observing, socializing, smoking; some who are watching intently might be cheering the dancers on. Several people in the back appear not at all interested in the dancers as they

3. Robert Bouthillier, personal communication, June 1981.

4. Honoré Beaugrand, "La chasse-galerie", *Almanach du peuple*, 10 (1893), 58-76.

have their backs turned. These observations reveal that this *veillée* (party) is relaxed and informal, permitting the participants to engage in a variety of activities, albeit in close proximity. The dancers are not in a performance situation, but rather dance for their own pleasure. This picture conforms to that presented by literary and oral traditional sources that described a rural habitant party.

The second part of the analysis asks, what ideas do these dancers evoke? How are they dancing? What are they dancing? Now it is important to analyse the stance of the dancers and to try to find suitable explanations in the literature of the time. Although all the dancers raise their left feet, each is also unique. The couple in the background have a forward inclination to their torsos, but otherwise are quite different. Her back is straight, but her head pushes forward to look directly at her partner. His chest is practically concave, and he appears to have his attention in a downward direction. Her arms hang down just in front of her body, his left swings vigorously upwards. The couple in front presents yet another picture. Both are quite vertically oriented, but his weight is just slightly backward, and she might lean a little to her right. Arms here are in opposition: the right arm is forward and up, in opposition to the raised left leg. His arms are more energetically diagonal than hers. Again, the focus of attention is not each other, but she turns to look at someone or something unseen by us, while he seems involved with the dancing itself.

This analysis of the dancers' positions indicates relatively lively movement. Perhaps the dancers are about to start moving forward in order to 'cross over'. They might be 'setting' to their partners or opposites, a step which is common in country dance and is especially important in the Scottish dance tradition. In fact, it is conceivable that Julien's four dancers perform a Scotch reel. This idea emerges as a result of an examination of nineteenth-century literature.

However, just before we look at this literature, a description of the Scotch reel is necessary. There are many types of reels, but the most usual are the reels for three and four. In the foursome reel the usual pattern begins by having the four people stand in a straight line, two stand back to back in the centre facing the other two. All four now move simultaneously: the inside dancers toward the outside, the outside dancers toward the inside, all passing right shoulders. The dancers now on the outside follow a circular path in order to re-enter the set, while the two inside cross passing left shoulders. The four then continue this pattern, now crossing right shoulders again and then left shoulders. This constitutes the first half of the sequence, which is repeated. At the end of the eight-bar sequence all are back in their original places, but the two inside dancers may

change, so that everyone has a new partner. This hey, or figure-of-eight pattern, composes only half the dance. The other half consists of a series of setting steps, which are more or less intricate, according to the dancers' choice. These are done on the spot, and give the dancers a chance to acknowledge each other and to demonstrate their agility.

One might wonder why I have introduced the Scotch reel when obviously Julien's dancers do not portray this type of formation. As mentioned earlier, there are many types of reels, and many variants as well. Scottish dance historian George Emmerson outlines the existence of a squared variant of the Scotch reel that was (or is) popular in Cape Breton :

The ladies (starting from the vis-à-vis or "square" position, with the ladies on their partners' right) may change places, passing right shoulders, followed by the men doing the same ; the ladies likewise return to place, followed by the men. All then set to opposites for eight bars, then repeat the "crossing" figure and set to partners, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Surely it is possible that this version was the one favoured in Quebec as well.

But what is a Scotch reel doing in a French-Canadian work illustrating traditional habitant lore ? Scottish settlers were numerous in Canada, and started to arrive with the Conquest in 1760. Evidently they got along well with the Canadian habitants, and some social interaction was inevitable. One of the ways the French Canadians benefited from this relationship was by the addition of Scottish dances to their repertoire : the *danse de la jarretière* or *du balai* (a type of sword dance), the hornpipe and the Scotch reel.

Several literary sources document the popularity of the Scotch reel among French Canadians, beginning with Canadian ethnologist Ernest Gagnon. He reports a musical Scotch reel in 1849, when two groups of travelling Canadians met by accidents and had a spontaneous veillée. The fiddler played Scotch reels that "made everyone's feet move."<sup>6</sup> Another source, published in 1859, mentions a Scotch reel in a voyageur camp :

The day after Christmas, Flett gave a Christmas ball. . . . The dancing was, I may say without vulgarity, decidedly 'stunning.' I should hardly call it

5. George S. Emmerson, *A Social History of Scottish Dance: Ane Celestial Recreation* (Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), p. 176.

6. Ernest Gagnon, *Choses d'autrefois : Feuilles éparses* (Québec : TYP Dussault & Proulx, 1905), p. 162.

graceful. The figures, if they may be called such, were only Scotch reels of four, and jigs. ...<sup>7</sup>

Four years later, in 1863, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé published his historical novel, *Les anciens Canadiens*. In one of his many footnotes, he provides information on the Scotch reel :

Scotch reels, which the habitants call *cos-reels*, were, to my knowledge, danced in the country some seventy years ago. The Scottish Highlanders, as passionate about dancing as we Canadians, undoubtedly introduced them just after the Conquest.<sup>8</sup>

A last reference to the Scotch reel occurs in an habitant-inspired novel, *Fleurs champêtres*, 1895. The author mentions the "casse-reel" as among the dances done at a wedding.<sup>9</sup>

All this literary evidence suggests that the Scotch reel was indeed popular during the nineteenth century and perhaps in the last half of the eighteenth as well. The discrepancy in date between most of these literary works and Julien's drawing might not pose a big problem in this case. Because the intellectual climate from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries aimed to glorify the 'good old days,' many literary and artistic efforts were oriented in this way. Everyone was caught up in romantically recreating the past, so the failure to match dates, in this particular case, might not be a significant anachronism.

Therefore, to suggest tentatively that the dancers in Julien's work are performing a Scotch reel is not far-fetched. But questions remain. If the Scotch reel was popular, why did it die out so completely by the time more comprehensive dance research began in the 1940s and 50s? Other old-time dances, such as the quadrille and the cotillion, managed to retain their vitality. Perhaps it was only a passing fancy, or may be Julien's work shows another type of dance for four people.

In the further investigation of contemporary literature, some clues arise to suggest that Julien's dance might be a *reel à quatre*. This dance figures in several stories. Two folk-oriented novelists, Robertine Barry in 1895 and Antoine Gérin-Lajoie in 1862, relate that the *reel à quatre* was the first dance at weddings. The bride and groom, along with the best man and maid of honour, danced it in a semi-

7. "Robert Kennicott," in *Transactions of the Chicago Academy of Sciences*, 1859, as quoted in Grace Lee Nute's *The Voyageur* (St. Paul : Minnesota Historical Society, 1931 ; rpt. 1955), pp. 83-84.

8. Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, *Les anciens Canadiens* (Montréal, 1863 ; rpt. Montréal : Librairie Beauchemin, Limitée, 1925), p. 73 n.

9. Robertine Barry (Françoise), *Fleurs champêtres* (Montréal : Librairie Beauchemin, Limitée, 1895 ; rev. 1924), p. 83.



performance situation.<sup>10</sup> Probably the most persuasive evidence comes from Beaugrand's story, which was, after all, the guiding inspiration for Julien's *La danse chez Batissette Augé*. In context, the hero relates that he "approached her [his girlfriend] to greet her and to ask her for the next dance, which was a *reel à quatre*."<sup>11</sup> It seems rational to surmise that Julien took his stimulus from this line.

Supplementary to these three fictional accounts of a *reel à quatre* is one notice in an ethnological source. In the 1940s Quebec folklorist Madeleine Doyon-Ferland documented a *reel à quatre* at l'Île-aux-Coudres called "la Vireuse" (the Turner).<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately she provides no further details, but because this is the most recent documentation of a *reel à quatre*, it is worth noting if only as evidence for the existence of a dance for four people.

One other possible name for this *danse à quatre* emerges. In 1915, Edmond-Joseph Massicotte drew *Une veillée d'autrefois* (Plate 7) as part of his series of works on life in the 'good old days.' In 1923 the series was collected in an album, *Nos Canadiens d'autrefois*, in which noted contributors comment on the various works. For *Une veillée d'autrefois*, historian Victor Morin wrote a few paragraphs. He created a verbal story to accompany the visual picture, fabricating a tale around the characters in the picture. He labelled the dance as a *gigue carrée*, or squared step-dance. His description of the *gigue carrée* states that the two couples dance until one of them gets tired, then another couple takes their place.<sup>13</sup>

This term also appears in a 1919 publication, *Veillées du bon vieux temps*, by folklorists Marius Barbeau and Édouard-Zotique Massicotte (brother of the artist). During an introduction for a fiddler and four dancers, the authors equate the terms *reel à quatre* and *gigue carrée*.<sup>14</sup> Because Barbeau, Massicotte and Morin all knew each other personally and were involved in propagating traditional lore, it seems possible that they invented the term *gigue carrée*. Perhaps they wanted to create some idea of cultural and/or linguistic purity by eliminating the English word *reel*. *Gigue carrée* does not appear

10. Barry, p. 83; Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, "Jean Rivard, défricheur," *Soirées canadiennes*, 2 (1862), 313.

11. Beaugrand, p. 66.

12. Madeleine Doyon-Ferland, "Rondes et danses à l'Île-aux-Coudres," *Annual Report of the National Museum of Canada (1950-1951)*, Bulletin No. 126 (1952), p. 108.

13. Victor Morin, "Une veillée d'autrefois," in *Nos Canadiens d'autrefois* (Montréal: Granger Frères Ltée., 1923), n. pag.

14. Marius Barbeau and Édouard-Zotique Massicotte, *Veillées du bon vieux temps à la bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice* (Montréal: G. Ducharme, Librairie-Éditeur, 1920), p. 89.

again ; these two references, plus one that appeared in the newspaper *La Presse* which seems to be taken from a press release for one of the Barbeau-Massicotte *soirées*, stand alone.

So far in this analysis I have confronted the concerns converging material form and ideas. Although the appearance of both Scotch reel and *reel à quatre* or *gigue carrée* indicates that some type of dance for four people existed, it seems impossible to determine whether Julien has, in fact, depicted one or another of the dances (an interesting side speculation is that the three dances could have been one and the same). But certainly the accumulated literary references suggest that the *danse à quatre* was more than a creative expression of Julien's brush, and that it was an actuality.

The third concern, the one that deals with intrinsic meaning and answers the why of the picture, has only been briefly mentioned. To question why Julien's four people are dancing seems superficially obvious. People in North America dance for a number of reasons : some because it is a social activity, others because someone urges, them to, while those who have dance in their blood do it for fun. There is not much of significance in these observations. A more interesting question might be, why did Henri Julien draw these dancers ? This is a more challenging task, one which will answer to the query why Julien and the others chose dance, and will elaborate on the intrinsic meaning within the work. Now it is necessary to investigate Julien's life and sympathies as well as the contemporary intellectual climate.

Henri Julien, born in a suburb of Quebec City in 1851, spent his adult life in Montreal. As a youth he lived a number of years in Toronto and became fluently bilingual. This ability enabled him to work in both languages. During his last twenty years, 1888 to 1908, he worked for the now defunct *Montreal Star* as an illustrator and caricaturist. At the same time he was one of the foremost illustrators for the journal *Almanach du peuple*, the "meteorological bible of French-Canadian homes."<sup>15</sup> It was here that Julien created many of his works based on traditional folk legends.

Julien obviously had first hand experience with Quebec culture. His portrayals of habitant types and activities were so successful that they became the accepted prototype for this idiom. But why did he become so involved in drawing habitant and legendary material when he had lived most of his life in the city ?

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15. Nicole Guilbault, *Henri Julien et la tradition orale* (Montréal : Boréal Express, 1980), p. 10.

One source of his inspiration undoubtedly arose from the childhood summers he spent in L'Ange-Gardien, a small town on the Beaupré shore just northeast of Quebec City. His wealthy habitant cousins gave him his first taste of rural life. But in addition to his own personal experience, the growing movement among nineteenth-century Quebec intelligentsia to idolize and romanticize the traditional ways of life was an important factor. Beginning with authors such as Philippe Aubert de Gaspé and Antoine Gérin-Lajoie in the mid-nineteenth century, folk tales and legends became the keys to acceptable and successful writing.

An interesting side effect created by these folk-inspired authors was the arrest of the usual flow of oral tradition, for they captured it in print, thus halting any further natural evolution. Their particular variant developed into the 'right' or 'approved' one. For example, the *chasse-galerie* became always engineered through the canoe; in oral tradition the instrument of aviation included such vehicles as wooden beams and small boats.<sup>16</sup> Artistic works such as Julien's became the visual counterpart to the written work; it was the artists' particular visual image that became etched in the minds of the viewers. Julien always used his representative 'types' even when not illustrating for an author, for his public had grown to believe in them and to want more of the same kind of material.<sup>17</sup> To many people, both anglophone and francophone, the image of the early habitant is the type drawn by Julien.

Julien's subjects based on folk legends are diverse; *loups-garous* (werewolves), *lutins* (mischievous elf-types), *chasse-galerie* and habitants in various acts of everyday life — were all part of his general output. Dance is but another symbol representative of the collective consciousness of the late nineteenth-century Francophone population. Showing people at a happy, carefree moment when worries are put aside, dance is a perfect image to foster the 'good old days' concept, for it records history in a positive light (whether the old days were good or not was irrelevant for both author/artist and reader/viewer).

Three factors, then, played an important role in why Julien drew these four habitant dancers. First, he had to illustrate Beaugrand's story, so he was restricted to situations from within the tale. Second, his preoccupation with habitant figures was part of the whole flow of romantic literary thought at that time. The last factor is that dance is an inherently joyful activity, shows people to good advantage, and

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16. Guilbault, p. 11.

17. Guilbault, p. 185.

can be related to easily by viewers. Julien's work is a clear example of the romanticized image of the early habitant.

A last concern about Julien and *La danse chez Batissette Augé* focuses on Julien's own knowledge of the dance tradition. This is important for establishing his accuracy. Did he dance himself? Had he seen others dance? Writings on this important Quebec artist do not give such details of his life, but occasional clues permit an educated guess. Julien had a sense of humour that is evident from his artistic works. His closeness to his family implies that he probably participated in weddings and other celebrations in a jovial way, which likely included dancing. From another angle, ethnologist Jean Trudel says that the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the "golden age" for dance in Quebec, and that "everyone danced . . . at the slightest pretext, despite the bitter diatribes of the church . . ." <sup>18</sup> If indeed "everyone danced," then Julien's general good nature and good health undoubtedly counted him in.

Can we assume, then, that *La danse chez Batissette Augé* is a true representation of dance either for Julien's time or for the period of Beaugrand's story (late eighteenth century)? Although it could be that this work does truly reflect Julien's experience, one problem with his drawing from today's point of view is the postural quality of his dancers. The lively and varying positions are atypical when juxtaposed with the basic stance of today's elderly or middleaged Québécois dancers. Among all the dancers I have seen either in person or on film, not one had arms that moved vigorously, or a torso that deviated from a vertical, almost rigid carriage. In fact, their movement is remarkable for its lack of large and/or sudden gestures. Unfortunately no contemporary descriptions exist to help in determining Julien's documentary versus creative inclinations in this case. The comparison with today's elderly dancers, who were but a twinkle in their parents' eyes when Julien was working, seems highly anachronistic. But in an area where change happens slowly, where the pattern of daily life has evolved from pre-industrial to industrial agriculture and similar types of physical work only in the last half century, surely such a connection does not completely lack viability.

After much thought and discussion on Julien's abilities, possible intentions and resources, no definitive solution to the postural dilemma emerges. If we consider that Julien was an accomplished artist who was extremely well versed in drawing accurate representations, then we must conclude that the postural qualities of his dan-

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18. Jean Trudel, "La danse traditionnelle au Québec," *Forces*, No. 32, 3<sup>e</sup> trimestre (1975), 56.

cers are, on some level, realistic. On the other hand, it might be that Julien wished to show the dynamics of the scene more than a documentary view of four people dancing. In order to do this he might have sacrificed a typical postural image to a rigorous, vivacious one, one which more vividly expressed the energy of Beaugrand's story. Also conceivable is that the comparison of today's elderly dancers with Julien's 1893 work is untenable, that the movement qualities of Québécois dancers has changed dramatically over the past ninety years from a large orientation to a contained effort. Two conclusions emerge: one reasons that Julien's work is posturally authentic, the other disagrees, arguing that Julien's decision to portray the general dynamic of the situation created an uncharacteristic view of dance.

As further evidence for the validation of *La danse chez Batissette Augé*, it could be useful to investigate the possibility that there might be strength in numbers. There are, after all, four pieces of iconography that depict a danse à quatre, not just one. Betty Jean Putnam suggests that if a theme recurs then it is indicative of the values and concerns of the time. Of the other three works, one has already been mentioned, Edmond-Joseph Massicotte's *Une veillée d'autrefois*. In general Massicotte's work is believed to have been inspired by Julien's, as he worked very much under his predecessor's shadow.<sup>19</sup> The dress and overall atmosphere here are quite different, but the arrangement of the dancers is the same. Massicotte has altered the postures so that they are less in conflict with today's dancers, but he has retained Julien's large arm and leg movements.

A third work, *Le bal des noces*, is by an anonymous illustrator. It appeared in *La Presse* in 1920, five years after Massicotte's work was published. It is remarkably similar in all ways to *Une veillée d'autrefois*, and undoubtedly was copied from there (see Plate 10).<sup>20</sup>

*Danse canadienne*, attributed to folk artist André Bourgault, is a polychrome wood sculpture dated circa 1950 (Plate 13). It is somewhat different from the others in that both women are on one side, the men on the other, and not everyone has the same raised leg. Also noticeable is that it shows the dancers in the most characteristic posture. Because of these distinctions, and because Bourgault lived in the small, relatively isolated town of St-Jean-Port-Joli, it is uncertain whether this work was influenced by the previous three.

19. Bernard Genest, *Massicotte et son temps* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1979), pp. 81-101.

20. Genest, p. 89.

Does the fact that there are four works illustrating a *danse à quatre* mean that a dance of this type was popular? Unfortunately, in this case the evidence that Julien's work was 'used' by Massicotte, who in turn was 'used' by the anonymous illustrator, negates the viability of the strength in numbers theory. However, in another way the recurrent theme of four habitant dancers does demonstrate the values and ideas of the time. It indicates that the 'good old days' were still being romanticized, creating a market for artistic works of this genre. The candles, the rural setting, the security of the simple, warm, robust way of life — these are the important motifs and ideas that are expressed in the four works and that were prevalent in the general consciousness. (Today we call these concepts nostalgia).

In the end, no definitive answer responds to whether *La danse chez Batissette Augé* is a reliable historical and ethnological document. As primary source material from the late nineteenth century, it accurately represents the poetic and perhaps unrealistic ideals held by the contemporary intelligentsia. But as a document that shows a dance and dancers, it poses some doubts. True, as a historian I have been pleasantly surprised to find that my assumption that no dances for four people existed has been proved false. From the literary evidence it appears that some kind of *danse à quatre* was popular. The problem is with the posture of Julien's dancers. This is exasperated because the work is widely circulated and it irks some dance ethnologists to see the dancers so inaccurately portrayed by today's standards. We must surmise either that Julien knew people who danced in this way, or that the underlying spirit of the scene was more important to him than the authenticity of the dancers.

As a learning experience the application of the Panofsky/Putnam methodology has been valuable. Artistic documents need to be read both for their subject matter and as primary documents from their time. To simply accept what a work shows is not enough; iconography requires a thorough investigation before its full story is revealed. As human movement historians we owe it to our discipline to discover and interpret these visual artifacts with sensitivity and integrity.

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## Résumé

*Prenant à témoin le dessin d'Henri Julien intitulé La danse chez Batissette Augé, l'auteure tente de rendre compte de la valeur historique et ethnologique du document iconographique. À cette fin elle utilise le modèle d'analyse élaboré naguère par Erwin Panofsky et selon lequel l'œuvre d'art doit répondre du quoi, du comment et du pourquoi d'une réalité culturelle donnée.*

*Au terme de son cheminement l'auteure observe tout d'abord que l'œuvre de Julien s'insère étroitement dans le courant de retour aux sources typique du discours de l'élite canadienne-française de cette époque; reconnaît en second lieu qu'on ne peut rien affirmer de précis sur l'identité de la danse illustrée par l'artiste, ne sachant pas très bien si celui-ci a voulu produire un document précis ou simplement évoquer un climat; conduit finalement sur le fait qu'on ne peut considérer sérieusement une source iconographique sans l'avoir préalablement soumise à la critique interne et externe.*