

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century literary non-fiction

### Source B

This 1893 article considers what dancing does to people, responding to the fact that it is now “dancing season.” The author is particularly concerned by the waltz, which was still a fairly new invention. Unlike previous dances, which kept dancers at arm’s length, the waltz was danced in ‘closed position’, with the dancers continually holding each other. Dancing was a topic of genuine moral concern in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly for the church.

### Is Dancing Frivolous?

Is Dancing frivolous? I suppose that ever since the grace of rhythmic step was discovered by the elementary Hindoo\* whilst his brother played a rapid beat on the Tom-Tom, that delicate and tuneful instrument of antiquity, there were some grave and melancholy minds which asked the question and sighed in horror! We are in the midst of the dancing season; young  
5 hopefuls rise in the morning bleary-eyed and dull and come forth to work with the most doleful gloom of countenance; and “dancing men,” men, I presume, who make a profession of dancing and take it in the evening as another man might take a hot whiskey – are tripping around nightly in one eternal hop. Those who wish to compound with the fascinating pleasure do so by a weak adherence to Cinderellas\*; which class of dance takes its name,  
10 surely from the fact that after a violent struggle and a heated world of fair heroes, a lady looks at the end much as the young victim of the dusty hearth noted in story, hair agog and costume in queer contortions. There are men who seldom pass a night in this season without a dance. They are not, as a rule, the most intellectual.

Those who dance have the most convincing arguments to prove their case. They always  
15 dance for exercise. And curiously enough they take their exercise, not to the dignified step of the minuet\* or the courtly elegance of the Roger de Coverly\*; no it is to the frantic race of the voluptuous waltz, to the swelling harmonies of passionate music sobbed forth by the dolorous violin. At any time a waltz is a little too much for the nerves; it carries one a step further in any emotion one may possess, as if it were a force sweeping us onward without  
20 our knowledge. But to dance to it with a beautiful girl and one’s arm tenderly clasping her waist – exercise, O thou weak Apologist! Why claim thy joy and then have no courage to name it? Why not dance with thy fellows, with lamp-posts, with automata\*; or by thyself, flinging my legs in spider lightness to right and left? No: the moment the Waltz came in and pushed, shouldered, and sidled all other dances to the wall, where they remain like  
25 antiquated survivals of the dreary past, the plea for exercise had gone; it was excitement, wild, rapid, vehement that remained; and excitement prolonged so greatly that the dancer was left prostrate and enervated\*, his feelings exhausted, his energy gone, his bodily fabric in a state of absolute collapse. Exercise! When I meet my young friend Light Toe on the morning after a dance and see his lassitude\* and find his beautiful mind obscured by the  
30 density of an opaque thought, do you imagine I see in dancing the desire for athletic exercise which those Casuists\* would have us believe?

For my own part, I shall never believe so highly of human nature. I prefer dancing when it stands confessed in all its innocent reality. Men like to dance because they like feminine society, because to dance with a lady is an aesthetic joy, because they like to excite

35 themselves and feel the glow of an exhilarating emotion, because the beauty and warmth  
and glow of the ball-room is ever delightful to the charmed sense, and because it leads them  
into paths which are too often closed, into the pleasures of intimate conversation and flirting,  
nay, why not also say of delicious moments in which the lover proclaims his love (in evening  
dress) and is accepted by the blushing one, who an hour or two before had thought of  
40 rejecting him. [...] Dancing is a pleasurable excitement just as brandy is or the merry-go-  
round or a football match. It gives us artificial vivacity and life; it rouses us from torpor\* and  
the dullness of dismal dreariness. It charms us out of ourselves and re-creates us.

## Glossary

- \* Hindoo – the author refers to an Indian man who follows the Hindu religion
- \* Cinderellas – short for ‘Cinderella balls’, dances which finished at midnight
- \* minuet – a slow, stately ballroom dance popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- \* Roger de Coverly – a popular English/Scottish country dance danced in a set with several couples participating
- \* automata – automated figures, think of a cross between a puppet and a robot
- \* enervated – lacking in energy, drained
- \* lassitude – a state of physical or mental weariness; lack of energy
- \* Casuists – people who argue cleverly, but without a logical basis
- \* torpor – a state of physical or mental inactivity; sluggishness

### **Sample Paper 2 Section A Question 3:**

**03** You now need to refer only to **Source B** from **lines 16 to 27**.

How does the writer use language to describe the waltz?

**[12 marks]**

This article is from *South Wales Echo* (27<sup>th</sup> January 1893) by author unknown. The full text can be found online at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4429736/4429738/5/>.

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