

# The Waltz and Women's Education in the *Folhetim* Section of the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*

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The *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* – DRJ (1821-1858; 1860-1878) was a daily newspaper that supplied the most varied services to the population. Among the information provided by the DRJ appeared: the schedule of the sea tides, the listing of goods and passengers and boats entering and leaving the port, the purchase and sale of slaves, as well as the sale of scores and announcements of musical theatre etc. In addition, there was a column of the DRJ (and other periodicals as well) which was intended for women, the *Folhetim*, printed like its French model *Feuilleton* at the bottom of the first pages, and separated from the political part by a line. In the *Folhetim* (pl. *folhetins*) column were published serial novels (such as *The Count of Monte Cristo*), as well as opera and concerts reviews, besides a chronicle of the latest fashions and review of balls and dances, the latter becoming known in the twentieth century as “social chronicle.” The presentation at the IASPM conference focused on two waltz-related *folhetins* in both formats: the first, published throughout September 1849, with the novel (translated from French) based on a ballad-song (*Le gentil Hussard*), whose plot tells the love story between a peasant girl and a “gentle Cossack soldier”, under the soundtrack of a waltz tune played by a solo flute. The second format, “*Folhetim de Domingo*” [Sunday’s *Feuilleton*], with the social chronicles, included even a critique of the ball of the week, where the editor-in-chief of the DRJ, Jose de Alencar (1829–1877), exponent of Brazilian literary romanticism, commented on “the death” of the waltz. The two instances were meant to allow a reflection on the musical characteristics and meanings of the waltz from rural villages to urban ballrooms in the nineteenth century. During the conference, the focus shifted only to the social chronicles; so, I decided to discard the discussion about the musical characteristics for the proceedings. I thank the comments of the session attendees, especially Pablo Alabarces, who urged me to clarify why the *folhetim* was so well known, while the literacy rate was so high, and Jocelyne Guibault, to whom I will refer later.

## The waltz

Preliminary information on waltz and German dance (a generic term for couple dances in the 18th century) can be consulted in the *Grove Music Online* encyclopedia, where the latest version of the articles written by Andrew Lamb and Cliff Eisen, respectively, are from 2001. In the book format, there are the publications of Sevin H. Yaraman (2002), resulting from her doctoral thesis in musicology at the City College of New York, and of Dereck Scott (2008) on the waltz, as one of the four musical genres to be established in large urban centers in the Twentieth century.

For the purposes of the present text, the observations of Yaraman (2002) regarding the role of women in waltz history are pertinent. According to her, the waltz seems to convey paradoxical meanings of individual pleasure and social disapproval, being able to express feminine vitality and, at the same time, its damnation, making it particularly significant in the context of musical drama. In the book she analyzes the role of the waltz in connection with female roles in three operas: Verdi’s *La traviata* [1853], where the waltz structures the development of Violetta and Alfredo’s romance; *La bohème* [1896], by Puccini, where the waltz identifies the seduction and sensuality of Musetta; and, *Wozzeck* [1925] of Berg, where Mary is infidelity herself personified, her waltz confirming the lascivious fraud (Yaraman 2002: 44–55).

It is coincidental that *La traviata* was based on the novel *The Lady of the Camellias*, by Alexandre Dumas Filho, a famous book that was half novel, half leaflet/melodrama, so close to the moralistic *folhetim* plots. Regarding the Brazilian scene, the literature comments that, in a patriarchal, monogamous society with high rates of illiteracy, the control of women occurred often through the literature provided in the *Folhetim* of the Sunday papers. And the censorship of the waltz – a couple dance, with the pair spinning around themselves and moving in a circle

around the hall, that is, with the possibility of physical contact, and also with the freedom to converse away from parental ears – emerges as a sensitive issue in that scenario.

In Brazil, the waltz as a dance was repressed, remaining today only as a ritualized moment at debutante balls. In the nineteenth century, the censorship to the dance was made, apart from church sermons, through the Folhetim column, as we will comment further below.

## Reading Folhetins

With the transfer of the Portuguese court to Brazil in 1808, the press began to operate in the then colony, which became part of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Algarve and Brazil. Gradually newspapers were growing in the country and from the 1830s onwards, there was an increase in their audience, driven mainly by the folhetim novels published in the periodicals.

It should be noted that readership was very small. However, despite the small editions of newspapers the impact of the folhetim was enormous. The access and popularity of the folhetim was possible because, even with extremely high rates of illiteracy, people had access to the novels and chronicals through collective readings, a custom at the time.

The preference for reading aloud was great; there was even a literary genre known as “recitative”, with poetry being recited in soirées and meetings. The reading sessions of the serials were held by someone who knew how to read to groups of women, eager for the novels and news of the social events of the imperial court (Machado 2001:40).

As noted, between 1855 and 1858 José de Alencar was the editor-in-chief of the *DRJ*. An exponent of Brazilian literary romanticism, Alencar wrote the editorials and the *Feuilleton* serials, whether in the form of “Sunday’s Book” where he commented on the social life of the city (dances, concerts, masked balls), or in the form of a folhetim novel (where he published in a serial form, several novels, including *Il Guarany*, whose plot was to be used by Carlos Gomes in the homonymous opera), among others. In several of the articles written by Alencar, there are mentions of the waltz, some which will be commented on below.

Alencar’s passage as a Folhetim writer may have been fundamental to his maturation as a writer of novels. In the years that he exercised the dual roles of journalist and serial writer, Alencar was able to observe the society of Rio de Janeiro, around the Emperor and his consort, and the pretense of living in a tropical Versailles. In this society, a woman could enjoy some independence and even identity, but only between her presentation in society and her marriage.

By following the undulating thread of the few social chronicles written by the Alencar, then managing editor of the *DRJ* where the waltz is present, the disenchantment taking over the writer regarding daily life and the emptiness of life in society becomes apparent. This moves him to write novels as a mission with the goal of regeneration of the motherland. Besides his writings regarding patriotic themes (rural, Amerindian, and historic novels), the woman was central in his urban novels.

As Luís Filipe Ribeiro (2008) comments in the book titled *Mulheres de Papel* [Women of paper] about the José de Alencar’s imaginary:

[...] the nineteenth-century novel is written by men, about women, and directed towards women. [...] Women are focused upon as public consumers of novels. But with the conservative perspective that underpin the social system, such attentions undoubtedly aim at a pedagogical objective: to teach them the *place* of women. (50-51). [Highlight in the original]

For this study, I selected only folhetins in the *DRJ*, first series, (1821-1858), which mention the waltz. There are 42 records, the first on 24 Oct 1843 and the last on 10 Dec 1858. Here, three Folhetim chronicles will be commented upon. The first, about a year before Alencar took office as editor-in-chief of the *DRJ*, was probably written by Luiz Antonio Navarro de Andrade, as a way of comparing his speeches about the waltz and women; the other two are by Alencar himself, one giving a defense of the waltz and another commenting on its “death”.

## The waltz in Brazil

The waltz in Brazil was a tributary of the waltzes launched in Europe, mainly through Paris, the cultural center of the time. The waltz was brought to Brazil by the Portuguese court, without any “peasant” connotation as in

Europe. Instead, it always has had an aura of sophistication. Debutante balls, after spending some time “out of fashion” at the end of the twentieth century, are returning in the Twenty-first century in middle-class circles, with the waltz being the culmination of young adolescents’ coming-out parties to society.

In the nineteenth century, it was part of young people’s education to take dance classes, as various newspaper ads point out. As an illustration, it is worth knowing the content of a dance manual (Figure 1a), known to have existed since 1854, but advertised only in 1896 (Figure 1b).

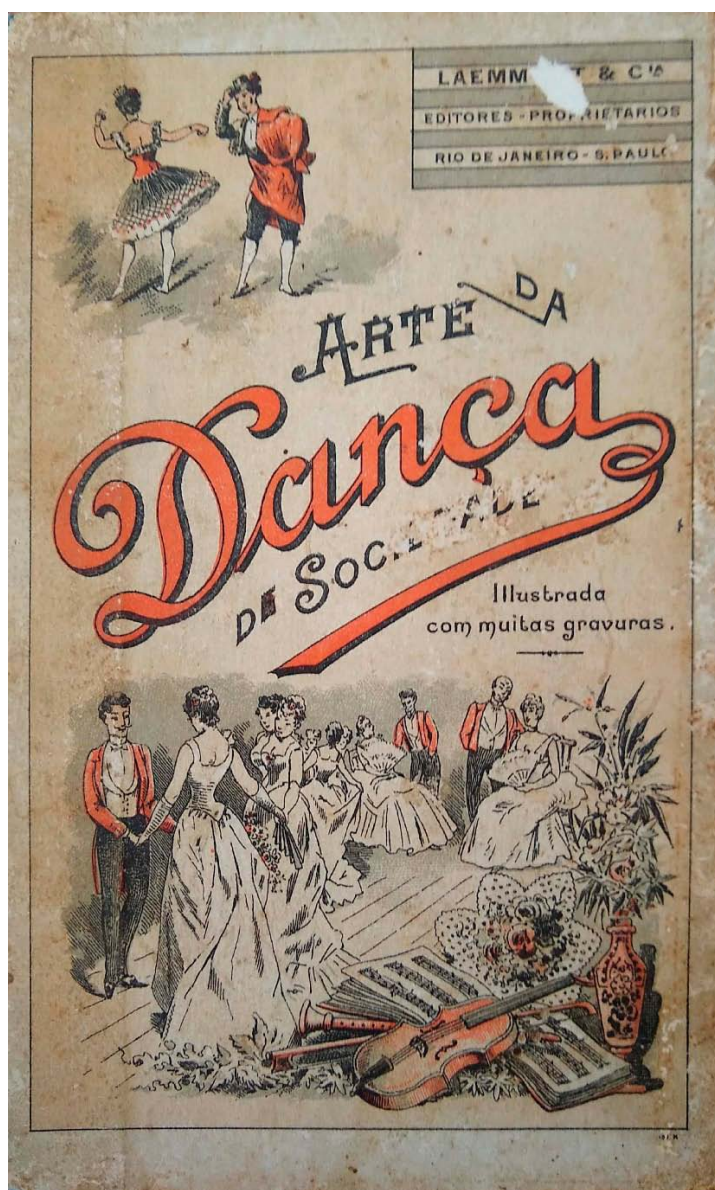


Fig. 1a: Cover of *Arte da dança...*  
Laemmert & C., Editores-proprietários.



Fig. 1b: Ad in *Gazeta da Tarde* (RJ), 21 Feb 1896, ed. 51, p.3

The explanatory text comes from an 1896 advert:

ART OF DANCE of society or a complete and brand-new illustrated explanation of the steps, movements, bars and figures of the main French quadrilles, Brazilian and foreign contradances, waltzes, mazurkas, *schotischs*, *habaneras* and other ballroom dances [couples dances].

*Besides the explanations in Portuguese of all the steps and movements of dances and contradances, including all the best and modern kinds of dances, it contains lessons and rules of good manners to guide gentlemen, ladies and heads of families in social dealings, at concerts, strolls, ways of seeking relationships, and in all respects true recreational sociability in the family room or ballroom. (Gazeta da Tarde (RJ), 21 Feb 1896, ed. 51, p.3). [my highlight].*

## Sunday Book

Prior to Alencar, in addition to passing allusions, there are some mentions of the waltz in the *Folhetim* published on Sundays in the *DRJ*, some very conservative. As an example, the text of the then editor-in-chief, Luiz Antonio Navarro de Andrade. After criticizing the presentation of the Barber of Seville at the Teatro Lírico, he begins to comment on the social life in the ballrooms and complain about the monotony of the quadrilles and waltzes, especially the latter:

But the waltz! It is an unbearable thing, capable of rendering ugly the most beautiful woman. The fine, soft features decompose, the smile melts in a tired, panting gasp, and the dried roses of a delicate face look like poppies at noon. The little body loses the graceful undulations, and the arousing hip movements become contortions in this rapid and mad movement. Look at that beautiful girl who waltzes, and you will see only a dress that turns, like a sail of a windmill beaten by the wind (DRJ, ed. 00221, 13 Aug 1854).

Alencar certainly idealized women, which is clear from the *Folhetim*. But he could be poetic as he wrote, certainly much less rancorous than the author above. Here are some excerpts, in which it is possible to perceive why some parents found his writings inappropriate for young maidens. I hope the translation does justice to his literary language. After equating music to the language of the heart he suggests the slow amorous involvement of the dancing couple:

[...] Music, that sublime language that the heart understands even when the lips do not know how to say it; music lends its melodious voice to inert objects; everything then becomes animated, moves and speaks and laughs and lives.

Sometimes it is the rhythmic singing that invites the slow pace of the contradance; other times it teaches the body the graceful movements and curves of the *redowa*, and sometimes it finally moves fast, animating the waltz.

At first the two intertwined bodies glide around the room, following the cadence of the music; they are timid because they do not know each other yet, and only spin to the voice of the orchestra, but the tempo becomes more alive, faster; the throbbing waist narrows more strongly; eyes glittering, an ardent fire lights up their faces, hearts leap in panting chests, short breaths pass heated from parted lips; dizziness and delirium begin, they no longer hear the sound of the music because it seems then that they hover in the space freed on angel wings, far from the world, suspended between the earth and the sky. (Alencar, DRJ, ed. 00052, 22 Feb 1857).

However, as a chronicler of social life in Rio de Janeiro, Alencar even claimed the "death" of the waltz, in a light and humorous style suitable for a newspaper. Let's look at an excerpt from the "Sunday *Folhetim*", where he criticizes the ball of the week, which should have happened in the second part of a Philharmonic concert, a new society. According to Alencar:

The week ran light as a balloon, quick as a girl's thought. / Suspended between two balls, balanced in space, like the grave of the prophet of the East, she hovered for a moment between the recollections of Philharmonic's concert and the throbbing hopes of the ball's dance. [...]

I'm sorry to say that, but it's an undeniable truth [...] Rio de Janeiro does not dance, Rio de Janeiro doesn't know how to dance.

Some obstinate ones had supported the waltz until now next to the French quadrille; despite efforts worthy of better pairs the waltz itself has degenerated and is currently *shuffled through* with difficulty. That one will disappear soon, under the influence and weight of the crinoline skirts. (DRJ, ed. 00202, 22 Feb 1858).

A more plausible explanation appears later. It turns out that the ball would take place after the concert! And as the editor of the *Journal* says: "... there is no *crinoline skirts* yet of the most modest dimensions, that after two or three hours of a concert would dare to appear in the middle of a room."

That is, with the weight of the skirts it would be impossible to dance the waltz. Here, the guilt is of the outfits, but, regardless of the fashion, the truth is that both in the journalistic texts and in his novels Alencar subtly repressed the waltz for single young females.

## And now? – concluding remarks

After fading out of fashion in the salons and balls, the waltz was incorporated to the repertoire of the street musicians known as *chorões* around 1870, where it blended with sentimental songs known as *modinhas* (literally little *modas* or tunes). As a serenade the triple-time *modinhas* took the role of mediating affection between man and women, now connecting the couple through the air, but like the dancing waltz still “promoting and reflecting a loving relationship”, as I comment in a forthcoming chapter of the series *Lied und populäre Kultur / Song and Popular Culture* (65/2020).

The presentation of research in progress during IASPM conferences are where one can receive some feedback that might help mature one’s understanding and interpretation of a theme. In Canberra it was not different. While listening to Jocelyne Guibault’s keynote talk on Affect, I noticed that the concept could be used in my case study on the waltz in nineteenth century Brazil. Jocelyne came to my presentation, and afterwards we talked for a while, when she suggested that my discussion of the waltz could be seen as an instance of spatial politics. Certainly, the attempt of controlling and restraining the female body using irony or disparaging the figure of the woman dancing the waltz is an instance of power exertion.

I am still reading and reflecting on affect, especially as posed by Spinoza in his *Ethics*, as well as observing how other authors use some of his concepts (for instance, Frédéric Lardon’s reading of Marx, Bourdieu, and Durkheim through Spinoza lens). But still there is a long road to arrive at a point in which it might be possible to sew music and philosophy; to put together aesthetics and ethics. Maybe a topic for a future IASPM presentation.

### References

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