

Kirkland dancing in ever smaller circles

by Katharine Kanter

The Shape of Love

by Gelsey Kirkland and Greg Lawrence
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256 pages, hardbound, \$19.95

Definitely not suitable for Christmas gifts to your balletomane friends! To review this is only somewhat less embarrassing than having to read it.

Miss Kirkland was, in the 1970s and 1980s, not only the best-known, but probably the best classical ballerina in the United States. In the early 1980s, she became a cocaine addict, fought her way out, and wrote a bestseller in 1986, *Dancing on My Grave*, in which she attacked the dope lobby which runs most of the so-called art world in the West today. As a result, she was blacklisted out of virtually every major theater. Only Rudolf Nureyev, then ballet master at the Paris Opera, had the guts to offer her work up to her undoubted ability, which she turned down after the Royal Ballet in London proposed her a one-year contract.

Judging by her second book, something queer happened to Miss Kirkland during the two years she was in England, 1986 and 1987. She has become typically English, i.e., less than truthful. She tells us that the reason she left the United States in 1986 was strictly personal—not a word about the threats or blacklisting, just a search for greener pastures. We are now supposed to believe that, in spite of the furor her book unleashed in the art world, no one could possibly have reacted violently to her attack on the dope lobby!

Miss Kirkland's planet has shriveled down to a dried-out raisin, revolving around herself and her husband's witty sayings; the only two topographical points on the globe, as located in her book, seem to be the ballet studio and the Lawrences' marriage bed.

We are told that her frightening orthopedic breakdown, which forced her to retire from the stage at the age of 33—she danced her last performance, which your reviewer attended, after taking hip injections under total anaesthetic—was simply due to “modern technique.” How vague! Where-

as, in her first book, Miss Kirkland had dared to blame that sacred cow, Georges Balanchine and his technical “innovations.”

Kirkland and the LaRouches

Lastly, Miss Kirkland seems to have listened to advice about the controversial pages in her earlier book on Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute. To Zepp-LaRouche's writings in *Campaigner* magazine, and to her outlook on the classics, which led the Lawrences to immerse themselves in Dante, St. Augustine, Shakespeare, Plato, and the classical musicians, Kirkland attributed a major part of the mental energy which allowed her to climb out of her debilitating addiction to cocaine. Helga Zepp-LaRouche is the wife and collaborator of American statesman and economist Lyndon H. LaRouche. Since *Dancing on My Grave* appeared, Mr. LaRouche can no longer be mentioned on the cocktail party circuit: He is in jail, America's most renowned political prisoner. And so, to many, manifestly including the Lawrences, he has become a non-person.

In *Dancing on My Grave*, Kirkland discussed real ideas, and their effect on the human mind and therefore on the arts.

The Shape of Love deals only with petty gossip and from the standpoint of the soap opera addict. From the standpoint of style and taste, it has nothing going for it. The only really exciting bits are the few scraps of conversation with Ninette de Valois, the founder of the Royal Ballet. Though it seems to have been written for young dancers, it has not one single, specific proposal about how to *change* the rotten technique we are using today.

Miss Kirkland is probably the only dancer to whom the late lamented Margot Fonteyn ever gave private lessons; this was in 1987 or 1988, but not one word do we learn about that. Why should we accept on pure faith that, because Miss Kirkland was an outstanding dancer, she and only she—or perhaps her husband Mr. Lawrence—knows what to do about the state of the art? There exists a teaching system and a repertoire which is both physiologically sound and artistically rewarding: the Bournonville school, to which Miss Kirkland devotes all of three lines. Either Miss Kirkland knows nothing about it, which is impossible, or she prefers not to let on about it, lest people think that there might exist something *outside* herself which is positive and important.

Miss Kirkland, or her husband—it is hard to know who is really doing the talking, or the thinking here—was in good mental shape when everybody in the so-called art world was telling her she was crazy, because she was *attacking* something very evil in the establishment. Now she, or her husband, has decided to get out of the kitchen because they can't stand the heat. They want back into the fold, back into the limelight. Fine—but they should stop trying to wring out every pennysworth of public sympathy by sticking to the pretense of being dissidents. There are other ways to sell books.