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Carol Easton. *No Intermissions: The Life of Agnes de Mille*. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1996. 548 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-316-19970-4.

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Dance in America: Agnes DeMille

In 1982, seventy-seven years old and debilitated by a stroke, Agnes de Mille fell on her bedroom floor. Nobody heard her calls for help. When, eventually, she was discovered, the rug was impeccably clean around her, with a small pile of refuse nearby. De Mille explained, "I fell and couldn't make you hear me, so I decided to clean the rug" (p. 453). De Mille's indefatigable energy resulted in clean rugs, thirty ballets, choreography for seventeen Broadway shows (including some of the most successful and beloved of the twentieth century such as "Oklahoma!" and "Carousel"), a few television specials, and eleven books. Facing this maelstrom of productivity, Carol Easton sharpens our attention to the pixie-ish, difficult, talented woman at its center.

In *No Intermissions*, Easton traces the life of de Mille from her beginnings as the granddaughter of Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty*, and niece of filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille, through her tenacious fight to become a dancer and choreographer, and her triumphant end as the doyenne of the American dance world. De Mille was as much a writer as a dancer and choreographer, and she wrote biographies and books ostensibly about other subjects that reveal as much about the author as the subject (notably, her biography of Martha Graham); her biographer thus has to contend with a familiar narrative and de Mille's insightful and witty interpretations.

Easton adds to de Mille's own telling by bringing out de Mille's personal life. Easton tracks her love affairs and her troubling relationships with her parents and fur-

nishes the other side of professional squabbles that de Mille glossed over in her own accounting. In this, Easton provides a close view of the intense, fractious atmosphere of the theater. She illuminates the hard work and struggles that made up the sweet glories of "Oklahoma!" and "Rodeo." Easton relies on recent interviews and letters with the various people involved in de Mille's life and productions to enliven and detail de Mille's achievements. As a result, the book brims with many different voices defining de Mille.

Easton's attention to de Mille's personal life, however, suffers from her tendency to put the details into a rigid psychoanalytic framework. The philandering and eventual departure of her father when she was an adolescent inevitably shaped de Mille's own tortured attempts to find love and believe in it, according to Easton. We also learn how and when de Mille lost her virginity and how many times she had sex with her husband before she married him. These details are then used to explain de Mille's choreography, which often did focus on romantic love and forbidden sex.

But the connection is too tenuous. Easton's biography replicates many of the limitations of the current scholarship on dance—which is almost all biography—by focusing so narrowly on one person's path. Thus, we miss a more complex picture and analysis of dance as a realm populated by women and imbued with changing societal views on sex and the body. De Mille herself in the first part of her autobiography, *Dance to the Piper*, offers one of the most incisive commentaries on the connection

between dance, gender, and sex. It still lies waiting for another scholar to challenge and explicate the irascible de Mille and the art form she advanced, endlessly fought for, and loved.

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