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The modernist, the dancer and the dance: An interdisciplinary approach to Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence and Williams

Mester, Terri Ann, Ph.D.

Case Western Reserve University, 1993

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THE MODERNIST, THE DANCER AND THE DANCE:
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence and Williams

By

TERRI A. MESTER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Advisor: William H. Marling

Department of English
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

May, 1993
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Lani A. Muten
THE MODERNIST, THE DANCER AND THE DANCE:
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence and Williams

Abstract

by

TERRI A. MESTER

Snubbed by literary critics, dance in the first quarter of the century contributed to the shape of modernism by influencing four of its major practitioners. This study makes biographic, thematic, technical and figurative cases that Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence and Williams turned to its theatrical and non-theatrical forms to reinvigorate their literary practices. The first chapter maps out some commonalities between the two arts, like a preoccupation with Oriental and “primitive” themes. It then explores the modernist fascination with dance’s formal qualities, like its “impersonality” and fusion of mind and body.

Chapter two analyzes the forty year evolution of Yeats’s dancer and her sources in Michio Ito, Loïe Fuller, Ruth St. Denis, the Hindu god Shiva and decadent Salomé of Wilde, Symons and Mallarmé. Because her “body is not bruised to pleasure soul,” she is Yeats’s figure for unity of being, a
spiritual truth similar to Mallarmé’s *idée*, which man could embody but never know rationally.

Eliot envisioned dance as a form of religious asceticism based on his observations of two stars from the Ballet Russe. Vaslav Nijinsky’s legendary roles are a subliminal source behind much of his verse and Léonide Massine’s self-discipline and sacrifice to ballet’s four hundred-year-old tradition may have led Eliot to his theory of impersonality in art.

Lawrence approximated the dance mimetically through a highly rhythmical prose. The dance scenes in his major fiction uncover the deeper, “allotropic" self hiding beneath the “old stable ego of the character." Dance is demonic for the Brangwen women as long as they suffer from an imbalance of mind over body, while it constitutes “phallic consciousness" for Kate Leslie and Constance Chatterley, because they are capable of “letting go” their egos.

For Williams, dance exists at a pre-reflective level of consciousness and is a figure for the poetic process. His search for a “new measure” led him back to verse’s origins in the “old measure” of dance. Two dance rites loosely based on the Dionysus and Persephone myths are discernable in his poetry, in which the dance either connects the poet to the sensuous world or his creative, feminine nature.
For
Tom, Jonathan and Nicholas
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INTRODUCTION

There are many studies tracing fertilization among the various arts as they entered modernism. As one critic said, the interfusing "not only among the separate nations of Europe (and America) but also among the various arts of literature, music, painting and sculpture, was on a scale as never before" (Bradbury and McFarlane 201). The influence of cinematic montage, for example, on Woolf, Joyce and Faulkner has been analyzed, as has Cubist and Dadaist technique in Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. ¹ But less than a handful of critics have written at any length on the impact of dance on literary modernism, despite the fact that dance too met the new century with some profound innovations. ² Ballet was revolutionized and a totally new genre--the modern dance--was invented.

No matter how many radical innovations the dance underwent, the notion that it could be part of the intellectual history of the times seemed an absurdity for some time. First, it was largely perceived as a woman's art. ³ Secondly, as a corporeal art, dance ran counter to the ethical and religious foundations of Western society, which, at least since the Puritan-dominated seventeenth century, remained hostile to the demands of the body. Some intellectuals, moreover, shunned dance because of its inherent ephemerality. Speaker “B” in T.S.Eliot’s “A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry”
expresses this idea when he simultaneously praises the ballet for concerning "itself with a permanent form" and discredits it for concerning "itself with the ephemeral in content" (Selected Essays 34). A poem, the theory seems to have been, could last forever; the dance existed only at the vanishing point. And finally, dance and literature were particularly uneasy bedfellows, for writers and dancers were said to possess antithetical sensibilities. Narratives of dancers' private lives have left us with the stereotypical, narcissistic image of a female or homosexually-bound male thwarted intellectually at an early age by long years of grueling, physical training in front of a mirror. On the other hand, what could practitioners of a living art which dispensed with words entirely possibly have in common with the stereotypical image of a poet, bent over an ink-stained table, burning midnight oil and endlessly "stitching and unstitching" a line or two?

Yet if the new dance had no effect on modernism, as the dearth of critical commentary might seem to indicate, how does one account for the prevalence of dance imagery in the works of four key modernist poets: W. B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence and William Carlos Williams? Dance imagery appeared early in Yeats' poetry, when an anonymous band of faeries danced under the Celtic twilight, and it grew in complexity to become his supreme symbol for unity of being. Yeats drew his composite image of a female dancing from a mixture of mythical and contemporary sources, which
included the androgynous Hindu dancing god Shiva and that archetypal
dancing *femme fatale*, Salomé of the Bible, plus American dancers Loïe
Fuller and Ruth St. Denis and some biographically significant lovers.
Williams, on the other hand, most often dramatized himself as a lusty dancer
in his poetry. Dancing, especially in *Paterson*, was Williams’ foremost figure
for the imagination. In an early poem, Eliot created the disturbing image of a
saintly dancer mortifying his flesh in the desert to become a “dancer before
God,” and in his last, *Four Quartets*, he dis-embodied the dance into an
image of religious transcendence. In between, his lost souls plod
rhythmically around in debased rituals, such as the “prickly pear” section of
“The Hollow Men.” Although the dance is absent in his poetry, Lawrence
wrote a highly rhythmical prose which mimetically approximated the art in
language. The dance scenes in his major fiction consist of either women
dancing alone as an expression of psychic imbalance or men and women
dancing harmoniously together as an expression of phallic consciousness.
In either case, the dance enabled Lawrence to unearth the deeper,
impersonal self buried beneath the “old stable ego of the character.”

No matter how it is portrayed, these four modernists saw in dance a
mirror of their own modernist preoccupations. They were either influenced
by or shared many of the same interests as dancer/choreographers Michael
Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Léonide Massine in ballet, and Ruth St. Denis and
Isadora Duncan in modern dance. Yeats, for example, drew his inspiration from the contemporary craze for Oriental dances, which included everything from St. Denis' mystical solos and Fokine's exotic ballets for the Ballet Russe to the public's appetite for treacherous *femme fatale* heroines. Several of Eliot's poems allude to ballets that Nijinsky rendered famous, and in his critical writings he repeatedly singled out Massine for the latter's exemplary "moral training" and self-sacrifice to ballet's unified point of view and three hundred-year-old tradition, in which the past existed simultaneously in the present. Williams, at the other extreme, found in Duncan's rebellion against a restrictive, European form, an analogue for his desire to forge a new, American poetry (Mariani 67). While he never saw Duncan perform, Lawrence shared with the dancer an anatomical view of human psychology, which exalted the solar plexus as the primary center of "blood consciousness" or one's sympathetic awareness of the universe. And like Duncan, both Lawrence and Williams spent a lifetime rebelling against Puritan morality.

Yeats and Eliot, through French Symbolism, became aware of connections between the dance's formal properties and their own art. As a pre-verbal activity, dance suggested several paradigms for verbal artists wishing to "make it new," including a "primitive" unity between dancer and dance and the dancer's "impersonality." Yeats' image of the dancer,
especially, draws heavily on Mallarmé’s “discovery” of the Symbolist dancer Loïe Fuller, a precursor of the modern dance. And finally, all four studied non-theatrical, primordial dance rituals in an attempt to recover something they thought lost to the modern world.

There were others among the literati who waxed enthusiastically over the new dance as well. Memoirs and diaries of the Bloomsbury group refer to attending performances to see Nijinsky and Karsavina, to hear the music of Stravinsky and Prokoviev and later to see the sets and costumes of Picasso and Matisse. Leonard Woolf was quick to perceive that dance was at the forefront of the “profound changes” taking place in London in 1911. In Beginning Again, he recalled his excitement after being away as a civil servant in Ceylon for seven years:

Freud and Rutherford and Einstein were at work beginning to revolutionize our knowledge of our own minds and of the universe.... In literature one seemed to feel the ominous lull before the storm which was to produce in a few years A La Recherche du Temps Perdu, Ulysses, “Prufrock” and The Waste Land, Jacob's Room and Mrs. Dalloway. In painting we were in the middle of the profound revolution of Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso.... And to crown all, night after night we flocked to Covent Garden, entranced by a new art, a revelation to us benighted British, the Russian Ballet in the greatest days of Diaghilev and Nijinsky. (37)

Forty years later, E.M. Forster vividly recalled “Nijinsky’s leap in Le Spectre
de la Rose, the first London performance of *Le Sacre du Printemps* and the drop curtain of *Schéhérazade* (4). Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey and Rupert Brooke all caught ballet fever and John Maynard Keynes married Lydia Lopokova, one of Ballet Russe's prima ballerinas (Garafola 316-20). But, satisfied with an intuitive understanding, these intellectuals refrained from analyzing how the new dance had touched their imaginations. Unwittingly, they contributed to subsequent impressions that the dance, in so far as it contributed to modernism, was a vanishing act.

**The Background: Dramatizing Primitive Myth**

In order to understand what "entranced" the Bloomsbury crowd and the four modernists who are the subjects of subsequent chapters, it is necessary to briefly note a few of the major happenings in dance in the early part of the century which were of special relevance to the literary movement. One of those crossroads where the new dance and modernism met was in the portrayal of "primitive" myths, rituals and archetypes. The titles of dances from this period point out this content: Martha Graham's *Primitive Mysteries* and *El Penitente*, Mary Wigman's *Dance to the Virgin Mary* and *Sacrifice*, Doris Humphrey's *With My Red Fires* and *The Shakers*. Unquestionably, the most famous dance in this genre, however, was Nijinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*, the ballet virtually synonymous with the idea of modernity. Its premiere in Paris in 1913 caused one of the greatest furors in French
theatrical history; fighting broke out and the music was all but drowned out in the hubbub.

The original ballet, unfortunately, was a casualty of dance’s “inherent ephemerality” and vanished after eight performances. Nijinsky’s impersonal form and profound innovations in movement were lost to posterity when his erstwhile lover Diaghilev fired him from the Ballet Russe for marrying the Hungarian ballerina Romola de Pulska. When the company revived the ballet after World War I, Diaghilev replaced Nijinsky’s modernist choreography with Massine’s conventionally romantic movement. Since that time, over sixty different versions of the ballet have been mounted, including Millicent Hodson’s scholarly reconstruction of the original for the Joffrey Ballet in 1987. In light of the ballet’s history, one can understand why a literary critic like Herbert Howarth would note the influence of Stravinsky’s dissonant score on the “method” of that other quintessentially modernist document--The Waste Land, and conspicuously ignore Nijinsky’s name and contributions (234).

Yet while it is true that Stravinsky’s music was the most uncompromising of his compositions so far, Nijinsky had the difficult task of decoding its rhythmic complexity. For help, Diaghilev turned to Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, a Swiss musician who, at his institute near Dresden, had devised
a system called eurhythmics, which was based on exercises to reproduce increasingly complex patterns of rhythm or beats in the body. Nijinsky transplanted whole segments of Dalcroze’s exercises into *Le Sacre*. Reports indicate that the movement resembled the involuntary condition of trance: the dancers shook, trembled, shivered and stamped convulsively. Lincoln Kirstein likened it to an “apocalyptic epilepsy hypnotizing a community of ecstatic spastics” (144). The French critic Jacques Rivière described the horror of the de-personalized mass depicted in the ballet:

> We find ourselves in the presence of man’s movements at a time when he did not yet exist as an individual. Living beings still cling to each other; they exist in groups, in colonies, in shoals; they are lost among the horrible indifference of society.... Their faces are devoid of any individuality. At no time during the dance does the Chosen Maiden show the personal terror that ought to fill her soul. She carries out a rite; she is absorbed by a social function, and without any sign of comprehension or of interpretation, she moves as dictated by the desires and impulses of a being vaster than herself. (qtd. in Kirstein 168)

Like *The Waste Land*, *Le Sacre*'s depiction of a primal past was a figure for modern life, especially its barbarism and savagery. The ballet was, in fact, a harbinger of the dark, Dionysian forces discerned under man’s surface, whether they were called the unconscious (Freud), the dark gods (Lawrence) or the Sidhe (Yeats). It anticipated the evils of war and a society ruled by the machine. Jean Cocteau later regarded this ballet as a predic-
tion of the "Great War." Certainly its depiction of a de-personalized mass that sacrificed youth to life's annual renewal would become a reality in the Russian Revolution four years after the ballet's premiere. 5

The Lure of the Orient

The depiction of "primitive" myth was not the only common ground between literary modernism and dance. Many artists, disillusioned with their Christian humanist heritage, looked to the Orient for alternative spiritual values. Eliot's Waste Land had its Oriental aspects, like Buddha's "Fire Sermon" and the Sanskrit of the last section, just as Pound had his Cathay poems and the ideogram. Yeats' lifelong preoccupation with Eastern literature and philosophy resulted in his Noh plays, his translations of the Upanishads and the speculations of A Vision. The cult of the East was no less popular as a cultural phenomena. The mania for Oriental things in the decorative arts, for example, contributed to the exotic, curvilinear lines of art nouveau. The Oriental trend, however, was probably most conspicuous in dance, which, chiefly through the works of two of its innovators, Fokine and St. Denis, managed to capture both the style and spirit of the East.

Fokine's Eastern ballets, which included Cléopâtre (1909), Le Dieu Bleu (1912) and The Firebird (1910), established the Ballet Russe in the public mind as the most exciting and important artistic enterprise in the first
decades of the century. In the words of one French critic, Fokine’s ballets were spectacles in which all the sensations corresponded, and were woven together by their “continual interlacing ... the collaboration of décor, lighting, costumes and mime,” establishing “unknown relationships in the mind” (Priddin 106). In *Schéhérazade* (1910), the number one crowd pleaser in the company’s first few seasons, Leon Bakst’s *art nouveau* sets with their opulent, glittering, luxurious curves and bold color combinations were combined with the rich sonorities of Rimsky-Korsakov’s nationalistic music, never heard before in the West. What most thrilled audiences, however, was the notorious orgy scene, whose impact Serge Grigoriev, Diaghilev’s *regisseur*, attributed not to its voluptuousness, but rather to its variety of dances and to its timing: the scene reached a great climax, came to a halt and then unwound (Spencer 46). The ballet’s lead dancer, Zobeide, the sultan’s wife, was a variation of the *femme fatale* or predatory female, dear to the hearts of *fin-de-siècle* audiences and a decided influence on the image of the dancer in Yeats, Eliot and Lawrence. Critic Arlene Croce, writing several years later, vividly described the ballet’s climax, which occurred as soon as the sultan leaves to go hunting. Zobeide and the rest of the Harem ladies with their “continuously weaving backbends,”
... bribe the Chief Eunuch to free the slaves. A door opens and out slithers a flock of glistening young men in harem pants and jewelled shackles. Another door opens: more slitherers. A third door opens and out pops Nijinsky. In no time the Shah returns, scimitars flash, and the orgy becomes a massacre out of Delacroix. Zobeide's favorite slave, cut down in midair, falls headlong and thrashes to the floor, Cocteau wrote, 'like a fish on the bottom of a boat.' (338)

Where Fokine's brand of Orientalism was erotic and realistically portrayed, Ruth St. Denis' variety, apparent in her mystical portrayals of various Eastern deities, was spiritual and expressionistic. With a hodge-podge background made-up of bits of ballet, Delstarte, and acrobatics, St. Denis was largely a self-made dancer. She supported herself with acting parts when she couldn't find dancing engagements. It was while touring with the David Belasco Company's production of Dubarry in the early part of the century that St. Denis' "destiny as a dancer sprung alive," as she was later to write in her autobiography. She and a friend were seated at a drugstore soda fountain in Buffalo when she suddenly glanced up and noticed an advertisement for Egyptian cigarettes. Riveted by an image of the Egyptian god Isis in the middle of the poster, St. Denis knew from that moment she would "become a rhythmic and impersonal instrument of spiritual revelation" (qtd. in Shelton 46). St. Denis, however, had always had a mystical bent, which after her "revelation," became a combination of
her Christian Science upbringing and a zealous, life-long interest in Hindu philosophy.

Radha was the first dance to come out of her “conversion” and remained her signature piece. As Radha, the milkmaid and consort of the Hindu god, Krishna, St. Denis—barefoot and resplendent in a scanty costume made of jewels—began by abandoning herself to a seductive “Dance of the Five Senses,” which expressed the sensual joys of human existence. Then, overcome by the futility of the joys of the flesh, she ended the dance seated in the lotus position in chaste, trance-like contemplation. Whether or not audiences understood the religious connotations, that her earthly passion for Krishna symbolized a desire for union with the Absolute, they responded enthusiastically to St. Denis’ beauty and the quality of her dancing. Radha was immediately successful in its first showing in New York in 1906 and led to further solo recitals in London, Paris, Vienna and several cities in Germany. Other Oriental dances quickly followed: The Nautch, The Yogi, The Cobras and The Incense.

Like the other two forerunners of modern dance, Fuller and Duncan, St. Denis became the darling of intellectuals. Yeats and Shaw helped sponsor her first London tour; the American architect Stanford White and Germans Count Harry Kessler and director Max Reinhardt all became
fervent admirers. The Austrian Symbolist poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal became her close friend. The immediacy of her dancing inspired Hofmannsthal's essay "The Incomparable Dancer" published in 1906. Hofmannsthal detected the spirit of modernism in her art and he felt her dances would have been impossible "in an age less sophisticated, less complex than ours." He described her choreography as "thoroughly strange."

It is not seeking for meditation, for being bridged over. It will have nothing to do with cultivation; it will not illustrate, will not elucidate. It presents us with something totally strange, without pretending to be ethnographic or sensational. It is there simply for the sake of its beauty. (qtd. in Shelton 69-70)

Although it never materialized, Hofmannsthal was to collaborate with St. Denis and Max Reinhardt on a new poetic treatment of the Biblical dancer Salomé along the lines of Oscar Wilde's scenario. St. Denis had objected to Wilde's version because it relegated the dancing to a secondary role (Shelton 76-77). As we will see in Chapter One, Salomé was the rage. Dancers as diverse as Anna Pavlova, Maud Allen and Mati Hari brought the archetypal femme fatale to life in vaudeville and on the legitimate stage during the years just before World War I, when the appetite for exotica peaked. It is revealing that the more spiritual St. Denis put off creating her own version until 1933.
The Revolt Against Puritan Morality

From Schéhérazade’s orgy of sex and violence to Radha’s seductive spiritualism, it was clear that as the dance grew into a serious, legitimate art form, it was communicating increasingly subversive messages about sexuality to a generation eager to free itself of Victorian stuffiness. 7 Because the meanings of gestures were more ambiguous than the written word, choreographers as a rule enjoyed greater impunity from censorship than verbal artists did. Nijinsky, for example, could suggest lesbianism and masturbation in L’Après-midi d’un Faune (1912) and a ménage à trois in Jeux (1913), while the censors not only suppressed but threatened to burn every existent copy of The Rainbow for Lawrence’s portrayal of a nude pregnant woman dancing alone in her bedroom.

Isadora Duncan, who never shied away from dancing when pregnant, enjoyed taunting audiences with her freer, uninhibited movement, her scanty costumes and blatant sexuality. Her artistry was always inseparable from her personality. Even before the public saw her perform, they were aware of her well publicized, scandalous life-style, which included two children born out-of-wedlock, bouts of alcoholism and a lengthy flirtation with Russian communism. In the early twenties, Duncan, with her hair dyed fiery red, shocked pr̄m and proper Bostonians by dancing uncorseted and baring a
breast at the climax in response to jeers from the audience. Just to provoke them further, she'd lecture from the stage on the brave new world of Soviet Russia, often accompanied by a belligerent, drunken husband (twentysome years her junior), the poet Sergei Essenin.

Duncan's rebellion against traditional balletic attire was always more moral than aesthetic. The bare feet and loose, free-flowing tunics she made famous expressed her desire to liberate women from all the physical and psychological constraints imposed on them by Victorian society. It is probably no coincidence that the one area the corset affected the most became the focal point of Duncan's new aesthetic and one of Lawrence's central tenets as well. In her autobiography, Duncan refers to the solar plexus, the corporeal home of the soul, as "the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversions of movement are born" (My Life 72). Lawrence called the solar plexus "the great sympathetic center" in which we feel our unity with the universe (Fantasia of the Unconscious 36).

French Symbolism and the Internalization of Dance:
Mallarmé's Non-Woman/Non-Dancing Ballerina

In addition to converging interests and aspirations, modernists also regarded some of the dance's formal properties as desirable models for
new poetry. The French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé was the first to isolate these correspondences in a few influential essays written on dance at the end of the nineteenth century, which were later paraphrased and expanded by his disciple Paul Valéry. Arthur Symons, who wrote endlessly on dancers and dancing, exported Mallarmé as well as other French Symbolists to England, where they were to influence the poetry of Yeats and Eliot. Basically, Mallarmé noticed that the dancer epitomized the modern characteristic of “impersonality” in art and that her movements constituted an unwritten language in some ways superior to the written word. And because her female beauty was objectified into dazzling, evocative symbols, the dancer became the visual incarnation of Mallarmé’s notion of the Ideal.

To fully understand Mallarmé’s attraction to dance, however, it is first necessary to isolate a few characteristics of French Symbolism. Mallarmé worshipped an ideal of gratuitous beauty that was mystical. His ideal or “idée” was similar to the nature of Platonic forms in that it could not be apprehended empirically through the senses. Instead of Plato’s postulate of One Being which transcended all the other forms, Mallarmé’s ultimate reality was Absolute Beauty. In trying to attain his ideal, according to C.M. Bowra, he “convey[ed] a supernatural experience in the language of visible things and therefore every word is a symbol and is used not for its common purposes--but for the associations it evokes of a reality beyond the senses” (5).
Mallarmé thought these symbols should not inform, but suggest—"not name things but create their atmosphere," like music (9). As a result, he became one of the first poets to think of the poem as an autotelic work of art. But after finding that words clung to the narrow meanings of things they signified in the empirical world and remained "impure," Mallarmé went through a crisis in which he stopped writing verse and eventually pre-figured the modernists in harboring a radical skepticism about language.

It was during the same period that he discovered ballet. Even though the form had sunk to the dry, academic dancing at the Paris Opéra, Mallarmé found it a more exemplary Symbolist art than either poetry or music. For one thing, its raw material—the human form—could paradoxically transcend the human in content. The ballerina, wrote Mallarmé in "Ballets" (1886), was not a woman dancing, because she was not a woman and she did not dance. The ballerina was an otherworldly creature who wrote poems with her body and who appeared before us as a totally impersonal vessel teeming with abstract, preliterate suggestions. Her "signature" was her ability to summon up elemental, fleeting visions of "a sword, a cup, a flower, etc.," which resonated with indefinite, mysterious meanings (112). Paul Valéry added later that the dancer's world was "an almost inhuman state," discontinuous from nature. He referred to the dancer as an "it," whose gaze turned inward and seemed "to hearken to itself and only to itself, to see
nothing as though its eyes were jewels, unknown jewels like those of which Baudelaire speaks” (“Philosophy of Dance” 61).

The doctrine of impersonality is perhaps best understood as a variant of what Ortega y Gasset described as dehumanization in art; that is, the tendency in modern art to purify itself by a conscious deformation of reality. Modern art eschews the human in content and the arousal of feelings which are the result of shared “lived experience.” The difference between modernism and the romantic art of the nineteenth, according to Ortega y Gasset, is the difference between Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde, which is a melodramatic outpouring of emotion and a reflection of Wagner’s adulterous affair with Mathilde Wesendonck, and the serene objectivity afforded the listener of Debussy’s music (27-8). Not that the latter lacks “sentiments and passions, but those sentiments and passions evidently belong to a flora other than that which covers the hills and dales of primary and human life” (20). Likewise in poetry, the “poet begins where the man ends.” Mallarmé, according to Gasset, was the first poet “who wanted to be nothing but a poet” and disappeared in his verse as a “pure, nameless voice.” His poetry need not be felt and contains nothing human. “When a woman is mentioned it is ‘the woman no one’” (29).

Mallarmé found his model of impersonality, “the woman no one,” in
the American dancer, Loïe Fuller, who submerged her own personality in abstract shapes. 8 An overnight sensation in Paris in 1892, Fuller was hailed as the creator of a new dance art. Unlike Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, whom she predated, Fuller was less interested in creating steps bound to rhythm than she was in creating a unity where dancing bodies, lights and costumes captured musical phrases. Her ideas about stagecraft and scenic design were ahead of their time. With long sticks hidden in her sleeves, she manipulated billowing folds of fabric into huge airy configurations. From the play of lights refracting off her fabric, Fuller was able to change herself into surrealistic flowers, birds, butterflies, clouds and flames. The figure of the dancer was one second revealed, another concealed. She darkened the auditorium, stripped the stage of decor, and hung it with black chenille curtains, so that the shapes seemed suspended in air.

The French linked Fuller to the art of her time, placing her dance within the context of art nouveau and Symbolism. Toulouse Lautrec made a poster of her, and sculptor Raoul Larche modeled her into an ormolu lamp with her scarfs flying over her head like storm clouds. However, it was the Symbolist critics—particularly Mallarmé, who made the greatest fuss. Mallarmé went to see her perform at the Folies-Bergère for the first time in 1893. The critic André Levinson described him “pencilling in his seat, his
luminous *aperçu*s on the so-called serpentine dances of Loïe Fuller. Since then, the whole world has followed*” (Kermode, “Poet and Dancer” 154). Mallarmé called Fuller’s performance *sui generis*; it was an “artistic intoxication” and an “industrial achievement.” Fuller had the power to create her own ambience out of her dress. This, Mallarmé postulated, would cause an end to the “inanity” of permanent sets, which conflict with choreographic mobility.

Opaque frames, intrusive cardboard, to the scrap-heap! Here, if ever, is atmosphere, that is nothingness, given back to ballet, visions no longer known than scattered, limpid evocation. The pure result will be a liberated stage, at the will of fictions, emanating from the play of a veil with attitude or gesture. (qtd. in Kermode 155)

He saw her dance as “multiple emanations round a nakedness.” Her “statuesque figure strict, upright; *made dead* [emphasis added] by the effort of condensing out of this virtual self-liberation delayed decorative leaps of skies and seas, evenings, scent and foam” (155).

Unlike English and American artists, the French had a tradition of rhapsodizing over dancers: Gautier had his Fanny Elssler; Toulouse-Lautrec, his Jane Avril; Degas, an entire *corps* of anonymous ballerinas. But as Frank Kermode noted, “there is a clear discontinuity between the general admiration for dancers of French poets earlier than Mallarmé and his praise
of Fuller" (157). Before, the human and palpable element counted for much. But in the “new age” of Mallarmé and Yeats, what matters is that the dancer is not a woman; that she is, as Yeats says, “dead, yet flesh and bone.”

The inadequacy of Words and Their “Worn-Out Connotations”

Besides Fuller’s impersonality, the shift in poetics starting with Mallarmé and Yeats was also an indication of a growing sense that, like Mallarmé’s criticism of conventional theatrical sets, the surface of language had ceased to be luminous and had grown opaque. The existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger claimed that language had gone through a “process of deformation and decay” (Bradbury 327). Lawrence called language a “dumb show,” where “all the great words, ... love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, ... were dying from day to day” (WL 84; LCL 58). All that remained were a few arcane fragments, as Eliot said in The Waste Land, to shore against the ruin of the present. The impossibility of revivifying language was best summed up by another Symbolist poet, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, (Ruth St. Denis’ friend), writing a few years after Mallarmé, when he claimed the future lay with a “language which is no language and that until this language [was] found, the only possibility [was] silence” (qtd. in Bradbury 324).
Hofmannsthal was probably unaware that Mallarmé had already found a "language which is no language" in dance. Based on his observations of Fulié and lesser dancers before her, Mallarmé emphasized that dance was a language and an ideal form of communication. Because of her impersonality, the dancer could "suggest things which the written word could only express in several paragraphs of dialogue or descriptive prose. Her poem was written without the writer's tools" ("Ballets" 112). The "illiterate dancer" was an "unwritten body writing" and what she did was more instinctual than what the poet did. Mallarmé exhorted the poet to "humbly place the Flower of your poetic instinct ... at that sorceress' feet ... through her always ultimate veil she will give you back your concepts in all their nakedness, and silently inscribe your vision as would a Symbol--which she is" (65-66).

The dancer's gestures were symbolic in the same sense that Mallarmé wanted words to be symbolic. To use Philip Wheelwright's instructive definition of a symbol, they were both signifiers "standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or not fully given, in perceptual experience itself" (92). But since words obstinately clung still to the things they signified in the outside world, poetry was less spiritual than dance as an incantatory medium for evoking a transcendent reality. To use Wheelwright's schema, words became symbols when they
were “repeated and developed by an individual poet and [had] special significance for that person” or when they acquired new life “by being renewed in fresh contexts” when “passed from poet to poet.” But a dancer’s gestures belonged in Wheelwright’s last category, not a literary symbol so much as “an archetype significant for humanity in general” (92).

In his review of Nijinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*, Jacques Rivière illustrated what Mallarmé meant by the immediacy or primacy of dance writing over literal writing. Rivière compared what Nijinsky had expressed in *Le Sacre* with its articulation in words:

How different this is from their expression through articulated language ... by means of this tangible figure we are brought closer to them [words] and put into their presence in a more immediate manner; we are able to contemplate them before the arrival of language. There is no need of translation; this is not a sign from which the subject must be interpreted. But though our intelligence fails to grasp it, we are there; we are present through our body, and it is the body that understands. A certain predisposition, a certain inner awareness.... Each of the dancer’s gestures is like a word that I could have said ... it is thus that we face this extravagant dance with a peculiar barefaced credulity and with a feeling of intimacy that goes beyond words. (122)

Paul Valéry, Mallarmé’s disciple, also noticed that what the dancer did was a kind of writing. In “Ballets,” Mallarmé had described the dancer:
“before taking a step, she invites, with two fingers, a trembling fold of her skirt and simulates a pen-feathered impatience moving toward the Idea.” Her legs are a “direct instrument of the Idea” (113-4). Likewise, Valéry had Socrates say of the dancers in “The Dance and the Soul” (1921) that their “hands speak and feet seem to write” (295). His Socrates also realized that the mind alone is incapable of deciphering these strange gestures. “A cold eye would without difficulty see her as demented, this woman strangely uprooted, who wrests herself incessantly away from her own form, whilst her limbs—gone mad—seem to dispute earth and air; ... and one of her legs takes the place of her head” (310). What the dancer does is the “supreme essay.... She turns, and all that is visible detaches itself from her soul” (324).

Valéry also drew out the implications of Mallarmé’s linking of poetry and dance through their evocative, “symbolic” language. Both arts, to Valéry, demonstrated “non-usage,” like “the not saying ‘it is raining’” (“Philosophy of Dance" 62). Poetry, in fact, was to prose as dancing was to walking. Poetry, like movement, was not instrumental; it had no end outside of itself. It was an “action that derives from ordinary, useful action, but breaks away from it, and finally opposes it,” according to Valéry (62). For this reason, he concluded, as will Yeats and Williams, that dance was a satisfactory emblem of a desirable poetry.
A poem ... is action, because a poem exists only at the moment of being spoken; then it is in actu. This act, like the dance, has no other purpose than to create a state of mind; it imposes its own laws; it, too, creates a time and measurement of time which are appropriate and essential to it: we cannot distinguish it from its form of time. To recite poetry is to enter into a verbal dance. (63)

What the dancer does in space and time, moreover, was a figure for the poet's creative process. Sometimes the flights of the poet's mind take him too far from "the ground, from reason, from the average notion of logic and common sense," leading Valéry to ask:

What is a metaphor if not a kind of pirouette performed by an idea, enabling us to assemble its diverse names or images? And what are all the figures we employ, all those instruments, such as rhyme, inversion, antithesis, if not an exercise of all the possibilities of language, which removes us from the practical world and shapes, for us too, a private universe, a privileged abode of the intellectual dance? (65)

Besides its evocative power as a symbol, Mallarmé had isolated one more "primitive" characteristic of dance, which was to have repercussions on all four modernists. To Mallarmé, dance was a sacred rite. He called it "l'incorporation visuelle de l'idée," with "idée" referring to his mystical belief in an Absolute Beauty, incapable of being comprehended rationally. Theater per se, he thought too coarse and music too vague. But dance was
the "superlative theatrical form of poetry" and satisfied his craving for a ritualistic (as opposed to realistic) theater. Of all the theatrical arts, it "alone was capable of translating the fleeting, the sudden, even the Idea" (Cook 62). The dance was the "mysterious and holy interpretation" of universal life and of our inmost being (63). The movements of the dancer reflected a cosmic dance of the constellations. Echoing Mallarmé's sentiments a few years later, Eliot would commend Diaghilev's ballets for their simplicity and conclude that what was needed in all art was "a simplification of current life into something rich and strange." 9

Primitivism: The Fusing of Dancer and Dance or Art and Life

Responding to a fragmented, dehumanized, material world, where the word had lost much of its magic, all four writers in this study regarded dance as a paragon of "primitive" wholeness. To use Eliot's phrase, dance fused thought and feeling. It represented art in an undissociated and unspecialized form and, like Mallarmé's "Idée," expressed a truth inaccessible to the intellect alone. Yeats's name for this "primitive" wholeness was "unity of being" (E. & 1 518). The dancer was a fitting symbol since it was impossible to dissociate or differentiate between the dancer and her dance, form and matter, body and soul or any other dualities.

The unity of being expressed in a dance represented several different
levels of experience. For Yeats and Eliot, unity of being was essentially a mystical idea which signified an escape from the temporal world into some timeless realm. In Yeats' *A Vision*, it is the point in the zodiac where two interlocking gyres touch and form a sphere and the soul escapes from its endless round of reincarnations (Pall 114). In "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," unity of being is expressed as that "stretched out" moment when linear "time" is "overthrown" and becomes suspended into a Bergsonian duration (CP 172). In Eliot's *Four Quartets*, unity of being is figured as a dance at the still point of a turning universe where time and eternity intersect.

For Lawrence and Williams, on the other hand, the unity of being scale tipped in favor of the temporal and transient. Specifically, it meant a total moral and ontological acceptance of both the body and the mind. Lawrence associated dance with sex, since they were both mysterious, regenerating rites through which the individual connected to other people as well as the universe. Immediately following love-making with her game-keeper, Connie Chatterley escapes the confines of his hut to dance naked in the pouring rain, abandoning herself to a wild, ecstatic Dionysian dance "with the eurhythmic dance-movements she had learned so long ago in Dresden" (*Lady Chatterley's Lover* 207). Williams, the poet of "no ideas but in things," denied intellectual functions could exist dissociated from sensible
material. The unity of being expressed in a dance, therefore, was an apt epistemological model for his theory that "a thing known passes out of the mind into the muscles."

These modernists found support for their views in the writings of anthropologists, social theorists and philosophers. Though their methodologies and conclusions were often different, they all stressed the psychological wholeness or integration dancing had given ancient man and asked themselves why "primitive" dance rites had become debased in the modern world. Social theorist and sexologist Havelock Ellis, for example, in his essay "The Dance of Life" (1923), provided an overview of how dance functioned in every aspect of ancient life: religion, love, art, work, morals. Waxing rhapsodically, Ellis concluded that dancing was the "loftiest, the most moving, the most beautiful of the arts, because it is no mere translation or abstraction of life; it is life itself" (254).

To philosopher Suzanne Langer, dance was the first art form as well as the "most serious intellectual business of savage life ... it is the envisagement of a world beyond the spot and the moment of one's animal existence, the first conception of life as whole--continuous, superpersonal life, punctuated by birth and death, surrounded and fed by the rest of nature" (190). The "mythic consciousness," according to Langer, did not view the
dance as symbolic because it confused the form's primary illusion with actual reality. This primary illusion she defined as "a virtual [as opposed to an actual] realm of Power," consisting of interacting forces that seem "to move the dance itself." "Free dance movement produces above all (for the performer as well as the spectator) the illusion of a conquest of gravity, i.e. freedom from the actual forces that are normally known and felt to control the dancer's body" (194). Thus, what emanates from the dancer's own body, the "primitive" mind attributes to divine or semi-divine beings who live in a completely autonomous realm.

Why then did people continue to dance when it was no longer associated with magic or religion? If dancing transported ancient man to a sacred state, according to Langer, it transports modern man to a dream realm:

to the knowing psychologist this is the infantile 'world' of spontaneous, irresponsible reactions, wish-potency, freedom--the dream world. The eternal popularity of dance lies in its ecstatic function, today as in earliest times; but instead of transporting the dancers from a profane to a sacred state, it now transports them from what they acknowledge as 'reality' to a realm of romance. (201-2)

The implications of Langer's theory are obvious: the same impulses which led to religion resulted in the birth of art. If dance is a threshold experience
uniting the spiritual with the aesthetic, then what more fitting symbol for the
modernist tendency to deify art?

Langer's aesthetic conclusions were similar to anthropological
investigations made earlier in the century, like Jane Harrison's Ancient Art
and Ritual (1913). Harrison had stressed the primacy of dance
"historically, and also genetically or logically in its inchoateness, its undiffer-
entiatedness" (171). Her specific area of study was the evolution of sacred
dance rites into Greek drama, based on Aristotle's statement in the Poetics
that tragedy originated with the leaders of the Dithyramb or spring festival
associated with the god Dionysus. Harrison concluded that art and ritual
had a common root: "it is one and same impulse that sends a man to church
and the theater" (10). Both arose from unsatisfied desire—either from some
perception or an emotion that did not find an immediate outlet in practical
action (41). In order to insure his food supply for the coming year, for
example, "primitive" man engaged in rituals. "Ritual consisted not in prayer
and praise and sacrifice," according to Harrison, "but in mimetic dancing"
(168).

Nietzsche also detected a common root leading to the origin of Greek
religion and art. But his conception of how dance fit into this scheme was
entirely different than Harrison's. As the Greeks evolved into a secular
society, the efficacy of their dancing increased rather than decreased. In
*The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had postulated that the ancient Greeks gave
meaning to their existence by inventing their gods. These gods lived much
as humans did; that is, they fought, became jealous and suffered misery and
pain. Greek art or tragedy performed the same function; that is, the Greeks
saw it as a mirror which justified human existence. Dance, however, was the
one artistic creation in which humans did not see their mirror images.

Instead, they became that which justified them. Man danced to “feel himself
a god.... He [was] no longer an artist, he [became] the work of art” (37). Now
that all gods were dead, according to Nietzsche, it “[was] only as an aesthet-
ic phenomenon that existence and the world [were] eternally justified” (52,
141).

Paul Valéry, one final advocate of dance’s “primitive” wholeness,
would have agreed with a later hero of Nietzsche’s—Zarathustra, who
danced to ward off his devil, whom he calls “the Spirit of Gravity.” The
equivalent of this devil in the modern world was what Valéry labeled “the
weariness of living” (“Dance and the Soul” 315). Valéry postulated that
man did not originally dance to satisfy religious longings. Rather, he always
danced for impractical reasons. Because man possessed an abundance of
physical energy—more than he needed to satisfy his needs, he discovered
that certain movements afforded him a pleasure “equivalent to a kind of
intoxication” or ecstasy resulting from an expenditure of that energy. The intoxication afforded by dance was an antidote to the Spirit of Gravity or the ennui resulting from “murderous lucidity, inexorable clarity, ... the comprehension of life as it really is” (317).

Perhaps man danced, as Nietzsche thought, “to feel himself a god,” because as Langer said, he mistook the power of his own dancing for supernatural intervention. Perhaps he danced for practical reasons to propitiate the gods and insure the coming of spring and his food supply. Or perhaps he danced for impractical reasons to simply expend some superfluous energy unneeded for survival. For whatever reasons man originally danced, “primitive” dance rituals continued to express some basic, non-verbal truths about the human condition. Given the intellectual climate and the desire to find something real from the past to authenticate the present, it is not surprising that Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence and Williams turned to non-theatrical dance rituals for ethical as well as aesthetic reasons. Responding to a world rendered spiritless by positivism, Yeats went digging into the myths and legends of ancient Celts to unite Ireland with its old beliefs. Rebelling against a mechanized, capitalistic society, Lawrence wanted to revive the dark, underground gods of pre-Columbian civilizations like the Aztecs. He journeyed to several Indian pueblos in the Southwest, like the Hopis', to study their dance rituals first hand. Searching for lost
religious values, Eliot wanted to restore liturgical dancing to Christian rituals like the high mass. And Williams, vehemently opposed to the Puritan ban on dancing in the New World, alluded in Paterson to several varieties of therapeutic pagan dancing, from the fertility rites of ancient Greece to the death rites of American Indians called the Kinte Kaye.

Despite critical neglect, the dance did contribute to the character of literary modernism, whether it was through studying ritualized communal dancing or attending theatrical performances. The latter included those of the Ballet Russe, heralded as a new confluence of the arts--Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk realized, as well as the "art" dances of Loïe Fuller, Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan, the precursors of a radically new language or movement form. 7
Notes

1 Monroe Spears, for example, in *Dionysus and the City* discusses parallel developments in the arts during modernism, including Schoenberg’s atonal music, but never once mentions any of the choreographers involved with the new dance.


3 Since the Romantic period in ballet, when Marie Taglioni first elevated herself in toe shoes in *La Sylphide*, the ballerina has been canonized. The danseur was little more than a porter who moved the ballerina around the stage, enabling her to accomplish acrobatic feats while balanced on one leg *en pointe*. In addition, nearly all the pioneers of modern dance--Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey--were women who not only directed their own companies but choreographed and danced in their own pieces as well. The first men in modern dance to have a controlling voice, like Ted Shawn and Erick Hawkins, came later.

4 Jaques-Dalcroze sent Diaghilev one his most promising students, a young Polish girl Marie Rambert to be Nijinsky’s assistant. Rambert, along with Ninette De Valois, eventually became a founder of the British ballet (Rambert 55-71).

5 Curiously, there was no precedent in Slavic mythology for the sacrifice of the maiden. Nor do universal vegetation rites as depicted in Frazer’s *Golden Bough* offer a precedent for female sacrifice. Like Attis and Osiris, they are usually slain male gods. One of the few times females were sacrificed occurred in Aztec rituals honoring the god Quetzalcoatl, (a theme Lawrence would pursue in his later fiction). In the absence of records, we can only speculate why Nijinsky rewrote mythology for the climax of *Sacre*. Millicent Hodson suggested the female sacrifice might have been a compromise between a shocking, archaic subject and the traditional way to end a ballet, where death of "a young woman, or apotheosis of her spirit is ... the crux of Romantic ballet"
Whether or not the Chosen Maiden was just another version of ballet’s traditional instrument of redemption, the graphic horror of her sacrifice was an indication of how serious the ballet had grown since the Romantic days of *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*, where the demise of female sprites occurred offstage.

6 Fokine’s choreographic innovations included greater expressivity and naturalism in ballet. He liberated the torso and arms from the straitjacket of verticality and roundness. Ancient Egyptians, medieval Arabs and Tartars simply did not move in tutus, toe shoes and the five, turned-out leg positions prescribed in the aristocratic courts of sixteenth century France. Fokine also broke tradition by choreographing more equally featured movements for men and women. He also did away with artificial conventions and acrobatics like the traditional divertissements of the corps de ballet, which functioned as mere decorative flourish. His movements for large groups of dancers moving in wave-like patterns on and off the stage were logically tied to the dramatic action.

7 Where Nijinsky brought Modernism to ballet with *Le Sacre*, he demonstrated with *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* (1912) and *Jeux* (1913), that ballet could also be as deeply personal as any of the other arts. *Faune* was loosely based on the Mallarmé poem in which a faun sees or thinks he sees a group of nymphs in the distance. He pursues them, looses them and then relives the memory of lust, Lesbian passion and frustrated desire. The last image is a startling masturbatory one in which the faun makes an amorous descent on the scarf the chief Nymph has left behind. *Jeux* was a menage a trois for two women and a man which explored ambiguous sexual relations under the guise or metaphor of sport. Nijinsky, according to Arlene Croce, made “the relation between the dancer’s sexuality and the dancer’s art absolute.”

If the trilogy of *Faune*, *Jeux* and *Sacre* has any biographical meaning at all, it is a biography of the orgasm: at first self-induced, later consciously manipulated through the piquancy and perversity of intimate relations, and finally a vast and sweated communal seizure, with death and life occurring together in a shattering rhythm. (267)

8 Fuller was not an isolated phenomenon in dance. Like the choreographer, Alwin Nikolais, and the dance companies, Pilobolus and Mummenschanz, she belonged to a tradition in dance which conceals and
transforms the body into metaphor, as opposed to another like Balanchine's, which sublimates the female form into an etherealized, spiritual creature.

9 The Dial, Aug., 1921.

10 Wagner had argued earlier that poetry and music should cooperate with the arts of the theater to produce new compound forms which would be higher and greater than any of these arts in isolation.
W.B.YEATS AND HIS DANCERS

Yeats’s endless fascination with the dancer in his poetry, prose and plays was not, as mentioned earlier, an isolated phenomenon. While Mallarmé extolled the virtues of ballet at the Paris Opéra and Loïe Fuller’s Symbolist art, across the channel Yeats’s friends at the Rhymer’s Club were obsessed with dancers and their art. Arthur Symons, for one, was a connoisseur of music hall dancers and amended Walter Pater’s famous dictum to read that all the arts should aspire to the condition of dance rather than music. Another friend, Oscar Wilde, in transforming a relatively obscure dancing girl mentioned in the Bible into a remorseless voluptuary of unappeasable appetites in his banned 1892 play Salomé, unleashed a virtual epidemic of treacherous dancing girls.

Though she has sources in Mallarmé, Wilde and Symons, Yeats’s dancer is unique. Frank Kermode, in his extremely perceptive Romantic Image, says the dancer is “one of Yeats’s great reconciling images, containing life-in-death, death-in-life, movement and stillness, action and
contemplation, body and soul” (48). She is also the poet’s “antithetical mask” and possesses what he lacks: an independence from a quotidian sense of time and space and the ability to express concrete images without recourse to language’s abstract sign system. Yeats’s dancer, moreover, is a silent, double-edged Muse, as capable of leading the poet into an orderly measure as she is into a frenzied, off-balance danse macabre. In some poems, the dancer spinning in her “narrow luminous circle” signifies a lost plenitude, which if recovered, results in either psychological, aesthetic or metaphysical wholeness: in short, unity of being (Auto 321). At other times, her violent whirling conveys personal feelings of fragmentation and loss of identity to the poet and cosmically portends an apocalyptic upheaval of civilization.

The dancer was with the poet from the start. As early as The Wanderings of Oisin (1888) and “The Stolen Child” (1886), she was one member of a band of immortals “of the Danaan kind” or Sidhe, who dance in fairyland under the Celtic moonlight by the seashore to express their freedom from the shackles of human time, always with a lonely, wistful human there to witness. The mythical dancers then slip out of sight after 1893 while Yeats was busy creating a national theater (which included dance plays) and making himself into a public poet addressing current political topics and real people. When a single dancer re-emerges in 1912
as a thoroughly modern mortal in “To A Child Dancing in the Wind,” she is still dancing on the seashore unfettered by the reality of time. Heaven, not fairyland, has been designated the “pre-destined dancing place” (CP 159). Starting with “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” (1919) and throughout Yeats’s major period, the dancer and her world become of paramount importance. Dancing is linked to erotic desire and the dancer comes to represent other beautiful women personally and artistically important to the poet like Maud Gonne. Or dancing is linked to the desire for a mystical, ecstatic wholeness and the dancers become anonymous souls purging themselves of the “fury and mire of human veins” by dancing on the Emperor’s marble tiles in “Byzantium.”

Yeats never specifically mentions a desire to be a dancer, but he did leave plenty of hints that he liked to dance. The narrator of an early short story, “Rosa Alchemica,” who bears a striking resemblance to the youthful Yeats as a member of the Golden Dawn Society, tells us he was a good dancer in his youth and “master of many curious Gaelic steps” (Myth 286). Yeats mentions that as a child living in Bedford Park, London, he took dancing lessons from two sisters of a well-known Pre-Raphaelite painter whom he leaves unidentified (Auto 43-44). Even when Yeats was older, during his third American lecture tour in 1914, he took dancing lessons from the Petipas sisters who were boarding his father, John Butler Yeats
(Jeffares 201). In “Discoveries,” Yeats tells us that a side effect of smoking Indian hemp with followers of Saint-Martin was a great desire to dance, which he repressed because he did not know any steps (E & I 281). But he must have held out hope for his daughter Anne, since he commissioned artist T. Sturge Moore to draw the figure of a dancer on a bookplate for her at the age of six (Melchiori 58).

As a dramatist, Yeats was also repeatedly exposed to and influenced by professional dancers. Yeats frankly admitted that his first Noh-inspired dance play, At the Hawk’s Well (1916), was made possible by a young Japanese dancer Michio Ito, who played the Guardian of the Well and directed the other players’ movements and gestures. Yeats, who first saw Ito dance at a party given by Lady Ottoline Morrell, wrote: “no stage-picture made an artificial world; he was able, as he rose from the floor... to recede from us into some more powerful life” (E & I 224). The tragic image Ito projected fired Yeats’s imagination. As a Samurai descendant, he represented aristocracy and statuesque nobility. The way Ito looked in performance—with his face so immobile that personality was deliberately repressed and idea enhanced—became the model for the blank stare on the dancers in Yeats’s poetry.

Not long after the first performance of At the Hawk’s Well, Ito accepted
an offer to bring the play to the United States and left London with Yeats's encouragement. Eleven years went by before Yeats found another dancer to fill Ito's shoes. Ninette de Valois, former member of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe and eventual founder of Britain's Royal Ballet, offered Yeats a tradition of dance opposite to Ito's. Yeats first met Ninette de Valois (née Edris Stannus) at the Cambridge Festival Theater in 1927 after her performance and restaging of his play On Baile's Strand. Immediately taken with the twenty-eight-year-old Irish girl, Yeats arranged for her to run a small ballet school at the Abbey Theater and rewrote The Only Jealousy of Emer, (called Fighting the Waves in 1929) and King of the Great Clock Tower (1934) as dance plays for her to perform in. Following Ito's model, Yeats covered Valois's "most impressive face" with a mask to serve his ideal of anonymity. Valois recalls that her choreography for Yeats was "highly stylized" and that the dances utilized the simplest gestures possible: "with the masks, anything else would have been out of place" (Pinciss 389).

Besides his collaborations with dancers, Yeats helped sponsor Ruth St. Denis's London season and was acquainted with Anna Pavlova and the toast of the French Symbolists, Loïe Fuller (Magriel 230). While he never saw Isadora Duncan perform, he received two letters in 1908 from his father, which were glowing, detailed accounts of meeting Duncan in person and seeing her dancing "on the biggest stage in New York--a figure dancing all
alone. Several people said: Is it not like watching a kitten playing with itself? We watched her as if we were each of us hidden in ambush" (John Butler Yeats 115-116). The qualities J. B. Yeats depicts in Duncan--her independence and introspection while performing alone--sneak into Yeats's composite dancer. The elder Yeats's voyeuristic confession as an observer is especially revealing; it will later creep into the son's observance of the dancer and the longing to forget his solitude and decrepitude by losing himself in the more beautiful, thrilling We of the dance.

Yeats also came into contact with dancers through his close friendship with Arthur Symons. 2 Along with other members of the Rhymers Club, Symons met regularly with music hall dancers after the show for drinks and talk. One place they went was Stewart Headlam's club for clergy and actors. Headlam was a Fabian, Anglo-Catholic and founder of the Church and Stage Guild. The purpose of the Guild was to study theatrical dancing and publicize it as a moral and religious activity. Headlam believed "in the Mass, the Ballet and the Single Tax." He insisted on the sacredness and antiquity of dance and pushed to revive liturgical dancing. Dance, more than any of the other arts, was "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, ordained by the Word of God himself" (qtd. in Fletcher 54). The bible for dance liturgy (and the source of Havelock Ellis's writings) was G.R.S. Mead's The Sacred Dance of Jesus. Yeats, reportedly, attended
Mead's lectures (Copeland 148).

The source of Arthur Symons's interest in dance, however, was more erotic than ecclesiastic. Unlike Yeats, Symons never had a problem differentiating the dancers from the dance, especially the "ballet-girls" as they were called at the Alhambra. Symons called them "Maenads of the Decadence" and reportedly was involved in several passionate love affairs (Fletcher 54). Yeats said of his friend that he "studied the music halls as he might have studied the age of Chaucer" (Auto 304). Symons, unlike Yeats, did not show much interest in "free" dancers like St. Denis and Fuller. He preferred instead the artifice—the painted faces, the costumes, the flare of the gaslights—of ballet: Degas's dancers rather than Moreau's.

But aside from his personal entanglements, Symons was also an astute critic of the dance. In an essay entitled "The World as Ballet" written for The Dome in 1898, he insisted that the dance had a "preeminence among the more than imitative arts" because it symbolized life (347). Dance, furthermore, gave us our primitive instincts back and made us feel whole and undisassociated again.
The dance had the intellectual as well as sensuous appeal of a living symbol, which can but reach the brain through the eyes, in the visual, concrete, imaginative way; ... the ballet concentrates in itself a good deal of the modern ideal in matters of artistic expression. Nothing is stated, there is no intrusion of words used for the irrelevant purpose of describing; a world rises before one, the picture lasts only long enough to have been there: and the dancer, with her gesture, all pure symbol, evokes, from her mere beautiful motion, idea, sensation, all that one need ever know of event. (348)

Symons also exposed Yeats to Mallarmé. Mallarmé’s dancer as an “unwritten body writing” preliterate, elemental visions shares much in common with Yeats’s dancer. Yeats too saw the dancer as a living symbol capable of expressing an ineffable truth, like unity of being, which words could only do through analogy. As Yeats has the Old Man say in the Prologue to The Death of Cuchulain (1939): “I wanted a dance, because where there are no words there is less to spoil.”

Besides the Symbolist fascination, Yeats, like fellow modernists Eliot, Lawrence and Williams, was attracted to dance because of its origins in ancient ritual. Yeats’s interest was both patriotic and religious. He went digging into the myths and legends of the pagan Celts because he felt the creation of a common mythology would help unify modern Ireland.
Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called "the applied arts of literature," the association of literature, that is, with music, speech and dance. (Auto 194)

Yeats also felt the values and exploits associated with the old Irish heroes could push back the tide of materialism and scientific rationalism at the end of the nineteenth century. To Yeats, the ancient Celts, unpreoccupied with "thoughts of weight and measure," turned their passion for nature instead into a sacred ritual of dancing.

They worshipped nature and the abundance of nature, and had always, as it seems, for a supreme ritual that tumultuous dance among the hills or in the depths of the woods, where unearthly ecstasy fell upon the dancers, until they seemed the gods or the godlike beasts. (E & I 178)

A late poem, "I Am of Ireland," succinctly expresses Yeats's view of the patriotic and religious unity underlying ritualized dance (CP 267). The poem is a short ballad in which a voice from Ireland's past--perhaps Cathleen ni Houlihan--exhorts the poet, the "one man alone" in modern times to dance with her in "the Holy Land of Ireland." The poet resists and says the night grows rough, he is too old, and modern musicians make no music for dancing. But the voice persists in seducing and luring him away in
a dance of transfiguration and ecstasy. Dancing here signifies more than physical beauty and love. To dance for Ireland is to transcend individual dancing or personal time and partake in the *anima mundi* or great memory (like Jung’s collective unconscious), where images from Ireland’s past are emotionally sustaining in the present.

The occult, mystical Yeats who attended seances and believed in lunar influences was also drawn to ritualized dance’s ability to produce a trance-like, hypnotic state in its participants, like the whirling dervishes of “Byzantium” who are “Dying into a dance,/ An agony of trance” (*CP* 248). Rhythm could expand consciousness and transport us beyond the threshold of waking life to “prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, ... the one moment of creation.” Rhythm, furthermore, “keeps us in a state of real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols” (*E & I* 159). Rhythm, the narrator asserts in the story “Rosa Alchemica” is the “wheel of Eternity, on which alone the transient and accidental could be broken, and the spirit set free” (*Myth* 286).

If the dance serves a ritualized function in Yeats, the dancer is one of his primary symbols. (Yeats would no doubt admonish us for separating them.) Silently spinning on her axis, she is structurally and
thematically related to all the gyrating cones, spirals, wheels, Plato's bobbins, spindles, winding stairs, mummies wound in mummy-cloth and falcons flying in ever-widening circles in Yeats's poetry. The dancer, moreover, has all the salient characteristics of a Yeatsian symbol. For one, her movements are resistant to paraphrase. According to Yeats, "symbolism said things which could not be said so perfectly in any other way." Symbols gave "dumb things voices, and bodiless things bodies" (E&I 147).

Secondly, her dancing is independent of ethical utility (Kermode, Romantic Image 43).

It is indeed only those things which seem useless or feeble that have any power, and all those things that seem useful or strong--armies, moving wheels, modes of architecture, modes of government, speculations of reason, would have been a little different if some mind long ago had not given itself to some emotion, as a woman gives herself to her lover. (E & I 157)

Most importantly, the dancer, like other Yeatsian symbols, participates in a higher level of existence. What she signifies is not only untranslatable, her mere evocation has a talismatic effect in a poem. She is a human being moving in ways natural for humans. But in the perfection of her body, she is at the same time a superhuman engaged in highly artificial steps.

For Yeats, she has a divine essence; the dancer is the supreme embodiment of unity of being. In his prose writings, Yeats explains unity of
being by drawing an analogy with the Eucharist. "It is still true that the Deity
gives us, according to His promise, not His thoughts or His convictions but
His flesh and blood" in the form of art. "We only believe in those thoughts
which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body" (E & I
235). In dance, there is no disunity of being because it is impossible to
dissociate, split or distinguish between the dancer's body and soul, the
dancer and the dance or sense and spirit in general. ("All thought becomes
an image and the soul/ Becomes a body" CP 164). His "Christ," he tells us,
"is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human
body, Blake's 'Imagination,' what the Upanishads have named 'Self': nor is
this unity distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but immanent,
differing from man to man and age to age" (E & I 518-19).

In another essay, Yeats explains that in Dante's day there was no split
between body and soul; "men attained to personality in great numbers, or
'Unity of Being'.... Then the scattering came, the seeding of the poppy,
bursting of pea-pod" (Auto 291). Even this process was a gradual one. In
the seventeenth century, John Donne could still praise Elizabeth Drury
whose "body thought," since there was yet no complete dissociation
between thought and feeling, as T.S. Eliot was to claim later. 3 But on that
symbolic morning when, according to Yeats, "Descartes discovered that he
could think better in his bed than out of it," body and soul were split into two irreconcilable entities \textit{(Auto 192)}. The dancer, because she symbolized unity of being, was like a shield to protect the poet against what he experienced in the modern world as a "bundle of fragments" (189).

The dancer's inward-looking expression was also a source of fascination for Yeats. For while the body of a dancer thinks, the face, paradoxically, should not. Most dancers are trained to hide the difficulty and effort of what they are doing behind an empty, enigmatic smile. Ballerinas, in particular, have a unique habit of holding their heads almost immobile. From the audience, it looks as if their dancing, like that performed in ancient rituals, has transported them beyond their personal egos into a totally impersonal realm. The dancer in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," for example, looks as though she has put herself into a trance. "For now being dead it seemed/ That she of dancing dreamed." She "had outdated thought./ Body perfection brought" \textit{(QP 171)}. The combination of expressionless face and vital body will come to stand for the "life-in-death" and "death-in-life" of "Byzantium."

Yeats, moreover, looked at the dancer's blank gaze and applied it to the impersonality he wanted to achieve in his own art. For as long as the dance lasts, the dancer cannot be distinguished from it. The poet should
work on the raw materials of his personal life like a choreographer shaping
individual, "personal" bodies into something impersonal and formal.
Whatever the art form, the result should be devoid of character, from
Balanchine’s ballerinas to Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*.

Throughout his prose writings, Yeats tried to explain what he meant
by impersonality. In his *Autobiographies* he asks: “Does not all art come
when a nature, that never ceases to judge itself, exhausts personal emotion
in action or desire so completely that something impersonal, something that
has nothing to do with action or desire, suddenly starts into its place?”
(332). In a BBC broadcast in 1936, Yeats again broached the subject. He
said:

A poet writes always of his personal life, in his
finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be;
... he never speaks directly as to someone at the
breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria
...he is never the bundle of accidents and incoher-
ence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn
as an idea, something intended, complete.
(*E & I* 509)

For Yeats, there is nothing wrong with expressing personal emotions in art,
but like the dancer’s face, they must be made “cold” (*Auto* 45). Character,
he maintains, has nothing to do with beauty and must be repressed.
In the studio we may indeed say to one another, 'Character is the only beauty,' but when we choose a wife, as when we go to the gymnasium to be shaped for woman's eyes, we remember academic form. (E & J 244)

Eliot, who also extolled impersonality in art, thought Yeats became a great poet only in his mature poetry when he attained this "impersonality." "Out of intense and personal experience," according to Eliot, Yeats was "able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of experience, to make of it a general symbol" (Cullingford, Poems 76). But what Eliot and Yeats meant by impersonality in art were not quite the same things. For Eliot, impersonality was the defining characteristic of an autotelic poem. For Yeats, impersonality was a way of ensuring freedom and creativity in a naturalistic, deterministic universe. Impersonality, in short, was synonymous with the wearing of masks: both the literal, stylized masks of his Noh-inspired dance plays and the figurative use of masks in his poetics and poetry.

In the theater, the mask enabled Yeats, as he says in "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," to "substitute for the face of some commonplace player or that face repainted to suit his [the actor's] own vulgar fancy."
A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art; nor shall we lose by stilling the movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body. In poetical painting and in sculpture the face seems the nobler for lacking curiosity, alert attention, all that we sum up under the famous word of the realists, 'vitality.' It is even possible that being is only possessed completely by the dead, and that it is some knowledge of this that makes us gaze with so much emotion upon the face of the Sphinx or of Buddha. (F & I 226)

Yeats's concept of the mask can only be re-capped here: a mask is an image of what we wish to become and the opposite of what we are.

"According to this theme," Richard Ellmann says, "a Caesar is buried in every hunchback and a lecher in every saint" (160). According to Yeats, finding "something hard and cold, some articulation of the image which is the opposite of all that I am in daily life" is a way to guarantee impersonality (Auto 274).

I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed. (306)

Only the "man of science, the moralist, the humanitarian, the politician ... seek to suppress their anti-self [or Mask] till the natural state alone remains" (247).

Yeats was reborn, or at least rejuvenated, as an artist when the
dancer became his antithetical mask. The dancer was the "opposite" of all that he was in "daily life." As Kermode noted, Yeats was incessantly tormented by the choice he had to make between "perfection of the work," which meant leading the isolated, passive existence of an artist (or any contemplative man) and "perfection of the life," or the active kind of existence he coveted in soldiers and statesmen (Romantic Image 23). The labor or cost of perfecting the work turned the artist, even at a young age, into an old "scarecrow," which is why Yeats always drew the artist as a tragic hero "proving life by the act of withdrawing from it" (25). Because the dance is a synthesis of doing and thinking, the dancer was the one artist who escaped a scarecrow fate. Unlike the poet, who "hammered out headachy fancies with a bent back at an ink-stained table" (23), the dancer in perfecting her work -- all those exercises at the barre in front of a mirror--perfects her life in the Yeatsian sense by getting her muscles to think. The more her muscles think, the more beautiful she becomes and the closer she is to attaining unity of being. Self-renunciation, in her case, leads to greater self-realization.

For not only dancers, but all beautiful women with perfectly proportioned bodies, like Dante's Beatrice, according to Yeats, possess unity of being. Obviously, female beauty for Yeats included grace, poise and physical élan. In the poem "His Phoenix," included in The Wild Swans of
Coole, Yeats catalogues beautiful women—both living and legendary—and then compares them to his beloved, who like the phoenix has the power to repeatedly come alive again in his memory. ("I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day" CP 151.) Among the living "phoenixes," Yeats includes two famous contemporary dancers, the American modern dancer Ruth St. Denis, and the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova. He describes St. Denis having "more charm," while Pavlova, from "nineteen hundred nine or ten ... had the cry." But compared to the phoenix the speaker knew in his youth, their beauty is not timeless, so the speaker will grant them only "their day."

One has only to look at the kind of roles St. Denis and Pavlova made famous to realize what type of female beauty Yeats had in mind. Both dancers captivated early twentieth century audiences with their exotic, sumptuous roles as Oriental goddesses and slaves. St. Denis, as noted earlier, rippled her supple arms (insured by Lloyd's of London) all over Europe as the Egyptian Isis, the Babylonian Ishtar and the Hindu Radha. Pavlova, on the other hand, originated the role of the slave-girl, Ta-Hor, in Fokine's Une Nuit de Cléopâtre, which stunned Parisians at the first performance of the Ballet Russe in Europe. After leaving Diaghilev's company to form her own, Pavlova, like St. Denis, toured the Orient, read Rabindranath Tagore's poetry (which Yeats was also familiar with) and
returned with a poetized exotic repertory which included *Krishna and Radha* and *Japanese Dances*.

Interestingly, in the original manuscript of "His Phoenix," Jeaffres shows that Yeats originally alluded to a third professional dancer, the Canadian Maud Allan (157). The dark and comely Allan made a name for herself dancing as an Oriental female who was neither a goddess nor a sacrifice to the gods. Undulating her torso and arms around a grisly papier mâché head, while dressed in a harness consisting of clusters of heavy pearls and little else, Allan created quite a stir with her solo *The Vision of Salomé*, which played two hundred performances at the Palace in London in 1908. Before *Salomé*, Allan had been just another unknown Isadora Duncan clone or "free dancer," sporting a tunic and floating around Europe.

While Allan is omitted in the final version of "His Phoenix," her persona was to become "almost an obsession in the last years of Yeats's life"; he alludes frequently to Salomé in his poems, prose and plays (Melchiori 196). In the first Noh-inspired dance play, *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), the Salomé image is presented at several removes; the young Cuchulain is cursed for his dealings with the "dancers" or women of the Sidhe. In three later dance plays, *A Full Moon in March* (1935), *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1935) and *The Death of Cuchulain* (1937), the
Salomé image is made explicit. In the first, a Queen dances before the severed head of a swineherd/singer which she places on the throne; in the second, another Queen ("wearing a beautiful impassive mask") dances with the severed head of the King placed on her shoulders. In the last play, and Yeats's final word on the dancer, Emer, Cuchulain's wife, dances before his severed head, which instead of a mask is featured as a plain black parallelogram. 4 In the poems "The Hosting of the Sidhe" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," Salomé is associated with the Sidhe or Irish faeries and the wind. Finally in A Vision, Salomé is assigned to the Fifteenth Phase along with others who achieve perfect unity of being.

When I think of the moment before revelation I think of Salomé--she, too, delicately tinted or maybe mahogany dark--dancing before Herod and receiving the Prophet's head in her indifferent hands, and wonder if what seems to us decadence was not in reality the exaltation of the flesh and of civilization perfectly achieved. (273)

Beauty, paradoxically, can be deadly and still remain a symbol of unity of being. Yeats never bothered much with conventional ethics. As we will see, he divests Salomé of her profane trappings so she can bare her soul.

For Salomé, the Bible's most famous dancer, was not really evil to begin with. Her story takes up only eleven lines in the New Testament according to Mark (6:17-28). Herod, (Rome-appointed Tetrarch of Galilee),
married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. Jokanaan, or John the Baptist, publically decried the marriage as adulterous and called Herodias a whore. Herodias wanted John killed, but Herod "went in awe of John, knowing him to be a good man and holy man; so he kept him in custody" (20-1).

Herodias has her revenge when her daughter Salomé danced before guests and so pleased Herod that he offered to give her whatever she asked. Salomé requested advice from her mother who told her to ask for John's head. Salomé is relatively innocent, while Herodias is actually the murderess. And Mark was conspicuously mute on the nature of Salomé's dancing.

Over the years, artists conflated Salomé and Herodias (and threw in a few sisters as well) into one archetypal femme fatale and made her art, or dancing, flagrantly salacious. Dancing before and lusting after the head of John the Baptist, Salomé is the quintessential castrating female who terrorizes male psyches. In Yeats's day especially, "Salomania" raged around Europe and the United States, affecting all the arts. In dance, Allan had spawned a horde of imitators. Salomes executed their grisly movements at opera houses, vaudeville stages and the movies. Diaghilev produced Salomé in 1913, starring Tamara Karsavina with choreography by Boris Romanov and Beardsley-like decor by Serge Soudeikine. Loïe Fuller's La Tragédie de Salomé in 1907 was a show of turbulent lighting.
effects on a series of solos which included her dancing in peacock feathers and playing with two six-foot snakes. After turning down repeated offers to dance the role in Oscar Wilde's play in 1907, the more spiritual, idealistic St. Denis finally consented and staged and performed her own Salomé in 1931.

Even if Yeats had not seen the above performances, he was probably familiar with the French treatment of the legendary dancer through Flaubert's Salammbo, Gautier's Clarimonde and the misty, glittering Salomé paintings of Gustave Moreau. It is also likely he knew Gustav Klimt's imperturbable and gilded Salomé and his Judith with the head of Holofernes. Dancers did not have the image patented. We know for sure, at any rate, he was acquainted with the decadent image of Salomé through Wilde and Symons. Wilde’s Salomé, illustrated by Beardsley and later made into an opera by Richard Strauss, is the epitome of cruelty and desire, a remorseless voluptuary subject only to her own unspeakable appetites: “C'est pour mon propre plaisir que je demande la tête,” she coldly confesses to John Symons, following Wilde’s credo that “nothing succeeds like excess,” added some sisters in his poem, “Dance of the Daughters of Herodias” (1897).

While they are not innately sadistic like Wilde’s heroine, they are the eternal enemy because their beauty is deadly. The poem ends with the speaker’s plea that the sisters not come too close, or he will suffocate in a surfeit of
beauty.

Symons's translation of Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" also had a hand in shaping Yeats's composite image of the dancer. The poem left such a deep and lasting impression on Yeats that he recalled twenty-five years later the day Symons read it to him in the flat they shared at Fountain Court. Mallarmé's Salomé is not so much cruel as she is a narcissistic, "inviolate reptile" in love with her own virginity.

The horror of my virginity  
Delights me, and I would envelop me  
In the terror of my tresses, that, by night,  
Inviolate reptile, I might feel the white  
And glimmering radiance of thy frozen fire,  
Thou that art chaste and diest of desire,

.................................

And all about me lives but in mine own  
Image, the idolatrous mirror of my pride,  
Mirroring this Hérodiade diamond-eyed.  
(Auto 321)

Immediately following the quote from "Hérodiade" in "The Tragic Generation," Yeats makes a revealing connection between Mallarmé's dancer and his own art.
Yet I am certain that there was something in myself compelling me to attempt creation of an art as separate from everything heterogeneous and casual, from all character and circumstance, as some Hérodiade of our theatre, dancing seemingly alone in her narrow moving luminous circle. (321)

As we will see many times in the poems, Yeats's feelings about his role as an artist are reflected in his image of the dancer. In some poems, such as "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," she resembles the romantic/decadent image of the woman-as-destroyer and the poet's desire for her is an intermingling of eros and thanatos or love and death. Out of her spinning, she weaves a violent web which paralyzes anyone who would gaze at her. Whenever this occurs, Yeats has identified with the John the Baptist aspect of the legend. Yeats, as we know, felt the poet had a priestly mission. If John was castrated to honor his God, the artist was likewise forced to sacrifice his life for his art. Too much beauty is overwhelming and renders him mutilated, an "old scarecrow" even at a young age, isolated and estranged from his fellow man.

Yet while the dancer is always destructive, she is not always threatening. As the above passage on Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" makes clear, Yeats often identifies with Salomé rather than her sacrificial victim. His
desire was to create an aristocratic art to express an essentially tragic view of life, as he states: "to create for myself an unpopular theater and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many" (qtd. in Archibald 116). "Like some Hérodiade of our theater," Yeats dons the impersonal, solipsistic mask of the dancer, because like her, his art is aloof and virginal in eschewing all contact with reality.

In identifying with his female dancer, Yeats also wears the androgynous mask of an artist. As such, he is like the Hindu god, the dancing Shiva, who is both male spirit and female matter and another manifestation of unity of being. Yeats was familiar with Ananda Coomarswamy's The Dance of Shiva (1917) and knew that Shiva is also Natraj, the lord of the dancers. In rhythmic motion, he both destroys and creates the world. Salomé, too, both destroys and creates. Like Helen of Troy, her beauty caused one civilization to topple and another to rise in its wake. Most importantly, the dancing Shiva, like the artist and his symbol of art, is beyond such antitheses as male/ female, sacred/ profane, time/ eternity, stillness/ movement, love/ hate and beauty/ death. The dancer has always been, as Yeats says of the mask in general, "part of our being, and yet of our being but as water with fire, a noise with silence" (Myth 332).
The Dance of the “Ever-Living Ones” Under the Celtic Twilight: 1889-1893

Dancing in the early poetry is largely the result of Yeats’s efforts to create a universal Irish mythology. For only the faeries, immortals or ever-living ones, as they’re variously called, outdance time in the early poetic landscape. Their collective dancing is always a ritualized expression of immortality, usually characterized by endless youth, joy, passion and erotic love. Dance, moreover, always appears within a cluster of other central Yeatsian symbols, which remains more or less consistent throughout the collected poems. The faeries, for example, always dance under the moonlight, either by the seashore (or water) or on a mountaintop and rock (or earth). Later, in The Wind Among the Reeds (1899), dance becomes associated with a third natural element, the “luminous wind,” whose blowing becomes increasingly significant as a personal symbol. (Fire and dance are conflated later in the poetry when dance becomes purgatorial, as in “Byzantium.”) The moon, which also evolves into the exceedingly complex symbolism of A Vision, is at this stage the traditional symbol for the imagination, creativity, or the female principle.

Richard Ellmann categorizes dance in the early poems as a “cooperative” symbol, which he defines as auxiliary to or supportive of a
main symbol, such as the rose (63). Dance for Ellmann “represents both the state of fairyland and the state of blessedness, realms not identical but akin” (79). While its meaning in such poems as “Who Goes with Fergus” or “The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland” might be categorized under this rubric, in others like The Wanderings of Oisin, “The Stolen Child,” and “The Hosting of the Sidhe,” the dance is far more complex and less benign a symbol than Ellmann would have us believe.

In Oisin, for example, the poet is equivocal about the “rushing” choral dance of the faeries (CP 375-86). The poem, considered Yeats’s first major work, is based on the universal myth of a mortal's abduction by a god to the other-world. Oisin, son of the mighty Irish warrior, Finn, is picked by the faery goddess Niamh, daughter of the Celtic god of love, Aengus, to be her beloved because she has fallen in love with “Oisin's name” and seeing her, he too falls in love. Together, they ride away on horseback from the mortal world to three enchanted islands--the Isles of Dancing, Victory and Forgetfulness--their sojourn on each lasting one hundred years. Oisin is finally overcome by his yearning to return to Ireland and his Fenian friends, Bran, Sceolan and Lomair:
With whom I hurled the hurrying spear,
And heard the foemen's buckle's rattle,
And broke the heaving ranks of battle!
(122-5)

When Oisin does return, however, he accidentally breaks Niarrh's magical faery spell by touching the earth and finds himself a "creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry" and his pagan friends long "accurst and dead," burning in hell (3.92). The entire narrative is a flashback; the poem begins three hundred years after Oisin's abduction, with Ireland Christian and in the hands of a stern and rather censorious St. Patrick. St. Patrick begins the dialogue by asking Oisin to tell him the story of his three hundred year "dalliance with a demon thing."

The dancing in Oisin, which occurs in Book I, is clearly an activity symbolizing both immortality and erotic love. The immortals on the Isle of Dance, "youths, mighty of limb" and "merry as birds," are always evoked in the throes of a "wild and sudden dance," in which they "mock at Death and Time with glances/ And wavering arms and wandering glances" (274-5). The island itself is a prelapsarian Garden where crimson damask roses bloom in the "sloping green De Danaan sod" by a glimmering, pearl-pale, dove-gray sea. Here "there is nor law nor rule,/ Nor have hands held a weary toil;/ And here there is nor change nor Death,/ But only kind and merry breath" (282-84). As the faeries sing to Oisin,
care cannot trouble the least of our days
Or the softness of youth be gone from our faces,
Or love's first tenderness die in our gaze. (409-11)

In spite of the above, the Isle of Dance or Niamh's home is clouded
with ambivalence. For one thing, it cannot be the land of all hearts' desires
or Niamh would not have sought love in the human world. As Marianne
Moore would say, there seems to be a real toad lurking somewhere in this
imaginary garden: that is, the desirability of eternal life, love,
changelessness and a world free of conflict. Oisin, for instance, is taken to a
hall where the god of love, Aengus,

dreams, from sun to sun,
A Druid dream of the end of days
When the stars are to wane and the world be done.
(218)

The content of his dream, annihilation of the world, is not something one
would normally associate with fairyland. Even the dancers eagerly
anticipate a finale to the cosmic dance as they sing to Oisin:

'the love-dew dims our eyes till the day
When God shall come from the sea with a sigh
And bid the stars drop down from the sky,
And the moon like a pale rose wither away.'
(424-28)

Presumably, when the stars and moon are annihilated and the cosmic
dance ceases, the faery dance will as well. This dance occupies the middle
links on the Great Chain of Being, half way between St. Patrick's God or
prime mover, and the human world belonging to Nature's dance of the
changing of the seasons, of birth and decay. The paradox is that the faeries'
dance transcends nature but only lasts as long as nature does.

There is also a lot of anxious talk about sorrow and sadness in
fairyland. Oisin tells St. Patrick that when he was given a harp and bid to
sing a song of "human joy," a "sorrow wrapped each merry face" and they
wept until some "tearful boy" grasped his harp and threw it away.

And each one said, with a long, long, sigh,
'O saddest harp in all the world,
Sleep there till the moon and the stars die!"
(244-46)

Aengus, later in his speech, says "things grown sad are wicked" and
repeatedly states what a great quality joy is:

And if joy were not on the earth,
There were an end of change and birth,
And Earth and Heaven and Hell would die.
(270-2)

Apparently, the god of love has already forgotten that he dreamed or desired
the above would happen in lines 219-20. Immediately following his speech,
Oisin and the faeries "in a wild and sudden dance/... mocked at Time and
Fate and Chance" (290-91). According to Hazard Adams, their dancing is
either a "symbolic projection" into Aengus's "Druid dream of the end of
days," some kind of "anti-time," or a "ritual forgetting of impending."
annihilation“ (31). At this point, the poet seems either unable or unwilling to resolve the ambiguity.

In a shorter lyric, “The Stolen Child” (CP 18-9), a chorus of faeries also,

foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances.
(16-18)

Dance is directly associated with the moon or creative principle, as the faeries’ dance begins when a “wave of moonlight” “glosses/ The dim grey sands with light” and ends when the moon has “taken flight.” Like Oisín, the poem is about the abduction of a mortal--this time an innocent child--into fairyland. This world is also depicted as both inviting and threatening. The repeated siren call of the faery band, (which significantly changes in rhythm from the body of the stanza), beckons the child to join in the dance and escape from “a world more full of weeping than you can understand” (53). In fact, the first three stanzas build into a seductive image of Arcadia inhabited by carefree, mischievous nymphs and satyrs who address the child as “the solemn-eyed.” But the fourth and final stanza suddenly changes point of view; the warm, familiar human world with its images of domesticity (“the kettle on the hob,” “the brown mice” bobbing “round the oatmeal chest”) is given more weight than the romantic but cold, faery
landscape (46-49).

The possible threat to the human world of ecstatic “wavering arms and glances” among the faery hordes is made more explicit in “The Hosting of the Sidhe,” the first poem in The Wind Among the Reeds (1899) (CP 55). Once again, faeries are featured as an ambiguous bunch. In one line they beckon: “Empty your heart of its mortal dream.” A few lines down they threaten:

And if any gaze on our rushing band,
We come between him and the deed of his hand,
We come between him and the hope of his heart.
(10-13)

In this poem, Yeats collapses all of ancient Ireland into the galloping members of the supernatural host. Caoiite, for example, “tossing his burning hair,” was one of Finn's mighty warriors whom Oisin yearned to return to in the mortal world. Niamh, Oisin’s fairy lover, also re-appears, seducing again with the repeated, incantatory phrase: “Away, come away.” Their “breasts are heaving,” their “eyes are aglow,” their “hair unbound”—the Sidhe seem to heighten or intensify erotic desire, only to frustrate it once it’s aroused.

The link between erotic desire and dance is strengthened in this poem. Although the word “dance” never appears, there is a verbal dance in the whirl of movement and energy generated by participles (“rushing,”
“tossing,” “heaving,” “burning,” “calling,” “Hosting”) and in the frenzied onslaught of a repetitive, trance-like rhythm, where stressed and unstressed syllables are sharply distinguished and the caesuras dividing parallel, syntactical utterances are the only times the speaker is allowed to come up for air out of the whirlwind (6-9).

Yeats appended a lengthy gloss to the poem which explicitly associates the Sidhe with Salomé and the dance:

Sidhe is also Gaelic for wind, and certainly the Sidhe have much to do with the wind. They journey in whirling wind, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages, Herodias doubtless taking the place of some old goddess. When country people see the leaves whirling on the road they bless themselves, because they believe the Sidhe to be passing by. (CP 454)

According to Harold Bloom, the main source for this wind (which becomes increasingly troublesome to the poet) is Shelley’s winds of “destruction-creation, which blow all through his poetry” but especially in his “Ode to the West Wind” (124). Salomé, the daughter of Herodias, is a variation of the romantic/decadent femme fatale. But it was Yeats’s unique achievement to conflate the Sidhe, wind and Salomé into an apocalyptic danse macabre. To be “touched” by the faeries in the vortex of a whirlwind is a symbol of poetic inspiration. But there is too fine a line between inspiration and
madness. Because they “come between him and the deed of his hand,”
their dance thwarts the hero’s action. The same cluster of symbols in the
poem, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” we will see, also leads to a
frenzied vision of chaos and madness. The muse, like Orpheus’s Maenads,
can literally leave the poet feeling fragmented, disoriented--the mind dis-
associated from the heart--as she severs his head and serves it to him on a
silver platter.

The Dance By A Female Soloist: 1912-1919

The faery hordes and Celtic heroes vanished, to be replaced by a
real, solitary female dancer whose relative importance to the symbolic
landscape increases. With her grace, poise and physical presence, the
dancer is also the type of feminine beauty, as “His Phoenix,” written during
this period, makes clear. She is also young, innocent, virginal and dances
“seemingly alone” in a self-contained, narrow “luminous circle.” And like the
immortals’ dance in the previous poems, her movements always express a
momentary freedom from time and space.

Yeats’s first “modern” dancer appears in “To A Child Dancing in the
Wind,” written in 1912 (Jeftares 121). She is supposedly Maud Gonne’s
—daughter, Iseuit, who like her mother had also rejected Yeats’s hand in
marriage. But the reader does not need the biographical gloss to feel the
speaker's longing for the dancer and the quality she represents:

    Dance there upon the shore;
    What need have you to care
    For wind or water's roar?
    And tumble out your hair
    That the salt drops have wet;
    Being young you have not known
    The fool's triumph, nor yet
    Love lost as soon as won,
    Nor the best labourer dead
    And all the sheaves to bind.
    What need have you to dread
    The monstrous crying of wind? (OP 122)

Her dancing and innocence suggest a freedom from time or experience, in this poem symbolized by the “monstrous crying” of the Salomé/Sidhe wind. Unterecker calls the poem “brilliantly versified,” especially in the “astonishing change of pace achieved by the suddenly introduced slow rhythm of the last line” (126). The stately, elegant dance-like rhythm mirrors the theme. At this point in his career, the poet was learning from the dance how to break a line in simple, graceful cadences close to everyday speech.

The subject of “Her Courage,” while not a dancer, is headed for a freedom from time and space, imagined as heaven or the “pre-destined dancing” place (OP 159). Comprising the elegy “Upon A Dying Lady,” the poem was one of seven short lyrics written between 1912 and 1914, which were addressed to Mabel Beardsley, artist Aubrey’s sister (Jeffares 163).
Yeats visited her regularly during the long months when she was dying of cancer. It is appropriate that Mabel's soul will fly to a dancing place or state, since this "Beauty" is portrayed with the same "old distinguished grace," self-sufficiency and innocence that Yeats's dancers possess. For even though Mabel was in her early forties when she died, Yeats has her "playing like a child" with dolls in the poem. He draws her as a surrogate artist and her child-like attachment to images, like Yeats's attachment to his dancers, is her way of imposing a little shape or art on the reality of death. The "pre-destined dancing place," the state in which the soul escapes the wheel of endless becoming or re-incarnation, will become the central image of "Byzantium." But the poet has not yet systematically developed his thoughts about the afterlife, nor is he confident enough about his symbols, and he concedes the limited power of his verse to stay death: "I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made/ Amid the dreams of youth" (2-3).

Another "girl at play," the dancer in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," (written in 1919 and included as the last poem in The Wild Swans of Coole ) takes on pluri-significance and is a harbinger of the great, complex dance poems to come in the next ten years (CP 170-2). All the former resonances, however, are still there: the dancing occurs in a dream state or vision that the speaker, Michael Robartes, undergoes on the "grey rock of Cashel." 7 Dancing is conjoined to the earth rather than wind and
water, but still transpires under the "moon's light." The dancing girl, along
with the immobile images of Sphinx and Buddha who flank her in Robartes's
vision, transcend time and space.

In contemplation had those three wrought
Upon a moment, and so stretched it out
That they, time overthrown,
Were dead yet flesh and bone.
(45-49)

Like her faery predecessors, Robartes's dream dancer is quite physical and
erotic. She flings into his "meat/ A crazy juice that makes the pulses beat,"
causing him to feel "undone/ By Homer's Paragon" (53). Her beauty, in
other words, is powerful enough to bring the walls of civilization tumbling
down like that of her mythic counterpart, Helen of Troy, who "never gave the
burning town a thought" (57).

Yet the dancer also reveals changes occurring in the poet and his
world in the second decade of the century. Yeats had begun work on A
Vision, his attempt to create a theory of personality and history based on the
twenty-eight phases of the moon. For Yeats, the world of appearances was
characterized by conflicts. He agreed with Hegel that every thesis carried
the seeds of its own antithesis. Any antinomian conflict, like that between
the sun and moon, man and woman or life and death, is symbolized by two
interpenetrating, whirling cones or gyres, which are perpetually at war with
each other. On a more abstract level, the two gyres are the one and the many, the natural and supernatural and the objective (what Yeats called primary) and subjective (or antithetical). Together, they form a Great Wheel or sphere, which Yeats represents as the unified reality behind chaotic appearance. Man, in the system, “is forever turning around a wheel during a lifetime, and around a larger wheel in the course of a cycle of reincarnations” (Ellmann 162).

The dancer makes her debut in this poem as the chief representative of the antithetical fifteenth phase when the moon is at its fullest. This phase symbolizes complete beauty, imagination and self-realization. The fifteenth phase is also a non-human or supernatural phase, like its opposite—the primary, objective first phase when the moon is dark. Yeats thought unity of being was possible only in those phases closest to the fifteenth. The dancer in Robartes’s vision, supernatural and ideal creature that she is, achieves the humanly impossible: complete unity of being, where body and soul are one. (“So she had outdanced thought./ Body perfection bought” 39-40).

Her presence in this poem also signals an apocalyptic upheaval of civilization. In A Vision, as noted, she dances at the moment before revelation, when one civilization is violently overthrown by the next. The gyrating cones also symbolize two opposing (primary and antithetical)
civilizations, each lasting approximately two thousand years. Like other modernists, Yeats was convinced the demise of Western, Judeo-Christian civilization was imminent. Although he had left World War I up to the English, like many Irish, the shock of the Easter Uprising in 1916 forced home the reality of violence and made him suddenly aware that out of the destruction, “a terrible beauty is born.” Out of the ensuing chaos (“the frenzy of our western seas”), the dancer’s spinning symbolizes the dawn of a new age.

The dancer, along with the oriental figures of Sphinx and Buddha, suggests the kind of new age the poet was expecting. Yeats often found in Eastern thought and religion what he found lacking in the West. 8 Just as he had turned to the Japanese Noh for his dance plays, Yeats drew on his knowledge of Hindu aesthetics to shape the dancer in Robartes’s vision. Hinduism never rent the body and soul in two as did the Judeo-Christian tradition; the spiritual and sexual do not exist in dichotomous relation. Indian dance is a fusion of religion and art because it has its origins in the god Shiva’s dance of ultimate reality. The Hindu concept of murti, which signifies that the deity is embodied in the human body, sanctions human dancing and makes it divine. The dancer in Robartes’s vision, moreover, has the same serene, blank stare as the dancing god Shiva. “For now being dead it seemed/That she of dancing dreamed” (23-4). The Hindu god’s
face is "neither sorrowful nor joyous, but is the visage of the Unmoved Mover, beyond yet present within, the world's bliss and pain" (Campbell 129). Juxtaposed to Shiva's twisted torso and undulating arms, his head is balanced and still: a synecdoche for the stillness at the center of a fluctuating, illusory universe.

In "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," which immediately follows "Double Vision" in the Collected Poems, Robartes expostulates on the subject of unity of being once again, this time to a real, flesh and blood dancer (CP 175-6). The issue, while serious, is here given a parodic, mundane twist. The two walk through a picture gallery when Robartes stops to focus on a picture of St. George slaying the dragon, the traditional image of male power and female helplessness. Robartes, changing the story a bit, says the knight is really trying to save the lady from herself. For the dragon is abstract thought, which the lady should be eschewing rather than pursuing. Women, in short, should not be educated like men, according to Robartes. Instead, he advises his companion:
Go pluck Athena by the hair;
For what mere book can grant a knowledge
With an impassioned gravity
Appropriate to that beating breast,
That vigorous thigh, that dreaming eye?
And may the devil take the rest.
(19-25)

Beautiful women must not be learned like men because they alone can
provide us with a vision of unity of being, where mind is body and body
mind. Oblivious of espousing a double standard, Robartes proceeds to cite
scholarly sources to prove his argument.

It follows from this Latin text
That blest souls are not composite,
And that all beautiful women may
Live in uncomposite blessedness,
And lead us to the like—if they
Will banish every thought.
(43-6)

Except for the title, there is no mention of the lady dancing as she did
in prior poems. But the poem reveals why she and all dancers in Yeats’s
work are the type of feminine beauty and embody unity of being. Robartes
makes an analogy (which Yeats himself made) between the “eloquent” flesh
of Veronese and Michaelangelo and the thinking bodies of beautiful women.
The latter painter’s depiction of the human body, for example, discloses:
How sinew that has been pulled tight,  
Or it may be loosened in repose,  
Can rule by supernatural right  
Yet still be sinew.  
(34-8)

Dancers also speak with their sinews and they pursue an endless quest of the unattainable: namely, bodily perfection.

The joke is that Robartes also pursues the unattainable: the beautiful dancer of his fantasies. Some critics claim Robartes is Yeats’s alter-ego in the poem and a subconscious working out of the poet’s own fixation on unattainable women like Maud Gonne (Cullingford, “Yeats and Women” 33). It is troubling, nonetheless, to identify the poet with his pompous, blatantly sexist persona, even if they share the same belief in unity of being. But if Yeats is Robartes, at least the poet is capable of subjecting that side of himself to a little self-ridicule. For Robartes’s view of women often leads to his downfall. His attempt to seduce the young dancer with his intellectual agility does not meet with much success as the lady is given the final and contradictory say in the poem. Likewise, in A Vision, Robartes tells us he went to Rome and “there fell violently in love with a ballet-dancer who had not an idea in her head” The relationship was not a success because he tried to change her character. He had not understood that “her coldness and cruelty became in the transfiguration of the body an inhuman majesty;
that I adored in body what I hated in will" *(AV 37-38)*. We also find him in *A Vision* in the National Gallery standing “before the story of Griselda pictured in a number of episodes, the sort of thing he had admired thirty years ago” (qtd. in Cullingford 34). Robartes’s admiration of a pictorial version of Chaucer’s story about a submissive woman and her sadistic husband is revealing. He wants his women to be warm and human, but prefers them to look like frozen, silent images of art.

**Dancing in History, Heaven and Purgatory: 1921-1930**

The dancer’s dragon of abstract thought that Robartes tried to slay in “Michael Robartes and the Dancer” rears its ugly head once more as the “dragon of air” (51) that violently whirls around Loïe Fuller’s Chinese (actually Japanese) dancers on “its own furious path” (53) in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” *(CP 206-10).*

When Loïe Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
It seemed that a dragon of air
Had fallen among dancers,...
(49-52)

It is also a dragon of time. Days now, the poet tells us,
... are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free.
(25-8)

The poem was Yeats's response to the atrocities committed by the
Black and Tans, the English troops sent to Ireland to squash the Irish
Republican Army. More generally, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" is in
the same category as T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land, D.H. Lawrence's Women
in Love, Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and other texts reflecting the
disillusionment experienced in the wake of World War I. Before the War, we
"dreamed to mend/ Whatever mischief seemed/ To afflict mankind" (84-6).
Now the poet realizes

no work can stand,
Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
...........................................................
No honour leave its mighty monument, (35-38)

For the "dragon of air" is also the "levelling wind" that obliterates everything--
love, youth, individual life and entire civilizations (97). Like Loïe Fuller's
elusive dance, all works of art and intellect exist at the vanishing point--from
"Phidias' famous ivories," emblem of Athenian civilization, broken "in bits," to
laws that just a few years ago were "indifferent to blame or praise,/ To bribe
or threat" (10-11). The poet concludes: "Man is in love and loves what
vanishes,/ What more is there to say?" (42-43).
Even in the face of mutability, Yeats seems intent on investigating the shapes of change. But he has done so in a structure in many ways analogous to a Loïe Fuller symbolist dance. If “All men are dancers,” Yeats is the invisible choreographer calling the tune to the “barbarous clangour of a gong” (57,58). When Fuller manipulated billowing folds of silk fabric with hidden wands under her sleeves while she was illuminated from above and below on a transparent platform, the result was a series of trompe l’oeil metamorphoses in which her figure became hidden in shapes which actually went swelling, spiraling and subsiding through space. The rush of kaleidoscopic, curvilinear images she created from nature--clouds, flowers, flames--created quick emotional changes as well, such as delight, mourning, anger. They could be playful one instant, macabre the next. Her images were as insubstantial as dreams and as eerie as hallucinations. She became, in Mallarmé’s words, “the visual embodiment of an idea.” And because the human form was camouflaged by fabrics, colors and lights, Fuller made dance “modern” and achieved impersonality in her art.

The absence of one identifiable speaker in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”--the voice of the poet “lost amid the labyrinth” he has made of the poem--is analogous to the absence of human form buried within abstract shapes (70). Where Fuller imaginatively transformed the human into visual
images, Yeats worked on verbal ones, transforming them, like Fuller, into a phantasmagoria of abrupt emotional turns and tone shifts. David B. McWhirter has pointed out the diversity of moods in the poem, which swing from formal regret, quiet meditation and scathing irony to prophetic fury (45-6). In addition, the most heterogeneous images are yoked together without logical transitions: a natural image will suddenly metamorphosize into a hallucinatory or supernatural one, like Loïe Fuller’s Chinese dancers in section II evolving into the witch-like daughters of Herodias in the climactic danse macabre. Herodias’s daughters had magically materialized out of the garlanded, ghostly riders of the wind or Sidhe, brought back from the earlier poem, “The Hosting of the Sidhe,” and they, in turn, dissolve into the image of Lady Kyteler (the only witch ever tried in medieval Ireland) who lusted after her incubus, “that insolent fiend Robert Artisson,” or Robin, son of Art (128).

The overwhelming sense of violence the poet perceived in his world is reflected in a cluster of “unmanning” imagery in the final section’s allusion to Herodias’ daughters and the severed head:
evil gathers head:
Herodias' daughters have returned again,
A sudden blast of dusty wind and after
Thunder of feet, tumult of images,
Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind;
And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter
All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,
According to the wind, for all are blind.
(117-24)

By luring men into the whirlwind's center, the dancers have the power to decapitate the ones that love them: "evil gathers head," Yeats puns. The poem ends with "love-lorn" Lady Kyteler offering dismembered peacocks (a symbol for Yeats of the annunciation) and "combs of her cocks" (another image of "unmanning") to her demon lover (130).

While not mutilated, other images of isolated body parts seem grotesque when used as synecdoches for the human condition. The phrase "All teeth were drawn" in line 17 (referring to mankind's relative well-being before the War) is linked to "weasels fighting in a hole" in line 32, which is further linked to the four short lines comprising section IV:
We, who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show
The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.
(89-92)

The cluster of images describing mankind as a toothy, sadistic, shrieking rodent is finally dissolved in the “shrieking wind,” which blows everywhere in the poem, leaving behind a trail of destruction. McWhirter calls these image patterns “shape-shifters” or verbal devices “that seem utterly changed each time they reappear” (49).

In this world of constant flux, even customarily stable, centrifugal forces can be deceiving. The moon, for example, “pitches common things about” (4). Even the sun mocks at man's enterprise. It may appear a positive element, since it is figured in the “pretty toys” man thought he had before the War, such as:

A law indifferent to blame or praise,
To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong
Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;
(10-2)

But the sun was previously linked to an image of “golden bees” in line 8, which Thucydides reported were golden brooches that Athenians wore in their hair and an emblem of their advanced artistic civilization (Jeffares 230). So the sun, in destroying beeswax, by analogy, melts down mankind's artistic and intellectual activities. Again we are left with only another
violated, mutilated image: a “stump on the Acropolis,” signifying all that remains of Greek civilization (46).

Besides the eerie, enigmatic imagery, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” resembles a symbolist dance in a still more general sense. Its entire structure is mirrored in the image of Fuller’s whirling Japanese dancers being swallowed up and consumed by a “dragon of air” (51). According to J. Hillis Miller, the shape of the poem is a “whirlwind, “maze” or “labyrinth of the wind,” which constantly whirls around a missing center (Linguistic Moment 325). The missing center is a metaphor for the sense of post World War I loss mentioned earlier, a malaise experienced by the poet and other writers of his generation. (“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,” CP 187). The poem’s circularity is reinforced in such imagery as the “spinning web” (50), the “circle of the moon” (3) and the repeated echoing of words like “round,” “enwound” and “wearied running round and round in their courses” (116). The English “guardsmen’s drowsy chargers” (24) go around and become the last section’s apparitional horsemen, just as Loïe Fuller’s dancers spin around and become Herodias’s daughters.

Increasingly in the later poetry, Yeats saw life as movement and history as a dance of never-ending cycles.

The first seven stanzas of “Among School Children,” like “Nineteen
Hundred and Nineteen," deal with the ravages of chronological time (CP 215-17). Only the idea is brought home more forcibly by the addition of a clearly recognizable, first-person speaker waxing bitterly about his decrepit old age. In his present context, as a “sixty-year old smiling public man” (8) inspecting a convent classroom, he is painfully self-conscious about appearing an “old scarecrow” (32) in the children’s eyes. He also seems troubled and saddened whenever his thoughts drift to the past. The children remind him of his beloved, Maud Gonnie, when she was young and beautiful and of the “Ledaean kind” (29), like Helen of Troy. Where she used to have “that colour upon cheek” and “hair” (22) as the children before him, she is now “hollow of cheek” and devoid of color, as if she coldly “drank the wind” (27) and “took a mess of shadows” to eat (28). The speaker even tries recasting her present image in his mind by comparing it to a Botticelli painting: “Did Quattrocento finger fashion it?” he wonders (26). But an emaciated, spectral image is all that remains of her former glory. Beauty, therefore, is “born of its own despair” because it is doomed to vanish (59). The children also remind him of his former relationship with Maud. In the past, she had told him a “tale” about “a harsh reproof, or trivial event” (11), which had the power to bring them into harmony: their “two natures blent/ Into a sphere from youthful sympathy” (13-4). Now all the poet has are “tales” to tell as a way of coping with her absence. The loss of beauty and love lead him into deeper, depressing musings on the betrayal of maternal love in the fifth
stanza. If the poet's mother were alive and could see the disfigured shape of her son with "sixty or more winters on its head" (38), would she not feel cheated by "the pang of his birth,/ Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?" (39-40). Nor is "blear-eyed wisdom" (60) an adequate compensation for a "bruised" body (58). By the time the greatest philosophers--Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras--penetrated the mysteries of nature, nature had turned them into "old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird" (48).

Then in the final eighth stanza, something miraculous happens. The speaker is no longer aware of himself as old, misshapened and unloved. His earlier self-mocking ironic tone changes into an exalted, triumphant one.

Labour is blossoming or dancing where The body is not bruised to pleasure soul, Nor beauty born out of its own despair, Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil. O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer, Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole? O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, How can we know the dancer from the dance? (57-64)

How did Yeats arrive at this sudden affirmative leap of hopefulness? The typical New Critical explanation begins with a discussion of unity of being symbolized by the "leaf, blossom and bole" of the chestnut tree and the indivisibility of the dancer and dance. 10 The latter, in particular, is an
emblem for a spiritual truth which Yeats felt could not be known apart from its concrete revelation. This interpretation cites one of Yeats's last letters in which he wrote:

Man can embody the truth but he cannot know it.... The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel, but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence.  
(Letters 922)

The New Critical strategy is then to work backwards, culling out image patterns from the other seven stanzas which support unity of being. Unterecker, for example, isolates a series of parallel trinities in the poem: three kinds of worshippers of images: mother, nun and lover; three kinds of feelings for images: passion, piety and affection; three philosophers: Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras; three parts of a tree: leaf, blossom and bole and finally the un-disassociated dance, dancer and music (190). Archibald adds to the list the three locations in the poem: schoolroom, mind (which includes memories, speculations and imagination), and a visionary realm beyond space and time; three Yeatsses: son, lover and public man/artist; three Maud Gonnes: child, beloved and elderly, gaunt woman; and finally three states of reality: art, nature and the ideal (222-3). These trinities, which appear to be antinomies, really function as a unity like the Christian God.

Paul DeMan, in his Allegories of Reading, offers a deconstructive
reading of the last two lines, which he claims disrupts or subverts the underlying continuity the New Critics read into the poem. According to DeMan, the concluding lines are generally read as a rhetorical question that asserts the impossibility of knowing the dancer through the dance. In asking a rhetorical question, Yeats is denying any discrepancy between sign and referent or signifier and signified. \(^{11}\) "it is equally possible," DeMan writes, "to read the last line literally rather than figuratively, as asking with some urgency the question ... how can we possibly make the distinctions that would shelter us from the error of identifying what cannot be identified?....

The figural reading, which assumes the question to be rhetorical, is perhaps naive, whereas the literal reading leads to greater complication of theme and statement" (11). The critic cannot separate the literal, grammatical meaning of the question, the form of the utterance, from its rhetorical performance, since in this poem the two readings cancel each other out. Unity of being, despite the numerous image patterns in the poem which support it, is subverted by the language of the poem, which, according to DeMan, asserts the discontinuity between "signifier and signified."

Yeats's ideas about unity of personality, especially his theory of the Mask, provide yet another reading of the final lines in "Among School Children." "All unity is from the Mask," Yeats wrote, which is a "form created by passion to unite us with ourselves" (AV 82). The antithetical mask is
defined as the opposite of what we are and "the image of what we wish to become, or of that to which we give our reverence" (83). Yeats is purposely vague about naming his own. But since the particular type of mask a man has depends on which of the twenty-eight phases of the moon he belongs in, what Yeats says about Dante is self-revealing, since they both belong to Phase 17. The problem for a man of Phase 17 is fragmentation and lack of coherence in the self. The mask specific to a man belonging to Phase 17 is "simplification through intensity" (142). By intensifying his energy, the man of this phase will become orderly and simple as opposed to complex and fragmented. The problem, however, is that the "Body of Fate," which is characterized by "loss," "works to make impossible simplification through intensity":

The being, through the intellect, selects some object of desire for a representation of the Mask as Image, some woman perhaps, and the Body of Fate snatches away the object. Then the intellect (Creative Mind), which is [best described] as imagination, must substitute some new image of desire... and relate that which is lost. (142)

Dante, for example, first finds Beatrice as an object of desire, loses her and then finds her again as an ideal of beauty and justice. "Dante suffering injustice and the loss of Beatrice, found divine justice and the heavenly Beatrice" (144).
The heavenly Beatrice is to Dante what the dancer is to Yeats. In finding their antithetical masks, both poets attain unity of personality or being. In Freudian terms, Yeats sublimated for lost romantic and maternal love evoked in the first seven stanzas of the poem by creating a substitute image of art. The dancer is a signifier of desire; that is, Yeats's obsession with the image is a result of a deferred and displaced desire for Maud Gonne and the withheld (and harder to document) desire for his mother, Susan Yeats. Yeats's dancer, however, is a significant departure from Dante's Beatrice. With her "brightening glance," the former restores the passion and intensity of a sexual entanglement and offers unqualified acceptance and spiritual nourishment like a mother. No one is excluded from her dance on account of age, intellect or disfigurement. The poet's ecstatic re-union with his mask allows him to unburden himself of paralyzing self-consciousness and to feel vital and immersed in an unknowable, collective Otherness. He feels a sense of unity of being like beatitude, even if it lasts only as long as creating the poem. According to Yeats, this loosing oneself in a passionate, collective "we" is what Synge meant when he wrote:

In a moment I was swept away in a whirlwind of notes. My breath and my thoughts and every impulse of my body became a form of dance, till I could not distinguish between the instrument or the rhythm and my own person or consciousness.... For a while it seemed an excitement that was filled with joy; then it grew into an ecstasy where all existence was lost in the
vortex of movement. I could not think that there
had been a life beyond the whirling of the dance.
(E. 1 332)

The unity of being attained by Yeats through his dancer does not
transcend life or philosophy (represented by Plato, Aristotle and
Pythagoras). The “place” where “labour is blossoming or dancing” (57) is a
far cry from Niamh’s Isle of Dancing in Oisin, a Prelapsarian Garden where
time was barred. Here, trees do get diseased and withered, and dancers
mature into old scarecrows. Dancing, unlike what “Quattrocentro finger” (26)
fashions, is done in time. But in this place, contraries like body and soul,
time and eternity do come together temporarily in a harmonious dance quite
unlike the frenzied, de-centered one which concluded “Nineteen Hundred
and Nineteen.” Here, nature, symbolized by the body, is not denied or
sacrificed to the spirit, symbolized by nuns worshipping images (49-50). In
this place, wisdom becomes attainable in a measure different from that of the
school children in stanza one or the philosophers evoked in six. Greater
than intellect is the wisdom of “simplification” expressed by the dancer.

In “Byzantium,” “simplification through intensity” is translated into a
ritual fire dance (CP 248-9). The poem begins with a gong (echoing the
one which accompanied Loïe Fuller’s dance in “Nineteen Hundred and
Nineteen") striking midnight from the cold, majestic dome of St. Sophia. Immediately, the scene is evacuated of all daytime’s “unpurged images” and night “resonance,” compressed into the images of “drunken soldiery” and “nightwalkers' song.” These sights and sounds include “All that man is/All mere complexities” (6-7). After the “unpurged images” full of the “fury and mire of human veins” are gone (8), an image “bound in mummy-cloth” (11) summons “unpurged spirits” to engage in an eschatological dance in stanza four which will liberate them from the wheel of endless reincarnations and refine them into ultimate essence.

At midnight on the Emperor’s pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.
(25-32)

Kermode thinks the stylized fire image was inspired by Loïe Fuller’s Danse de Feu. Fuller reportedly shook and twisted “in a torrent of incandescent lava, her long dress spouting flame and rolling around in burning spirals” (“Poet and Dancer” 152). One contemporary French writer called her “a nightmare sculpted in red clay. The fire caresses her dress, seize her entirely, and, inextorable lover, is sated by nothing short of
nothingness” (152). But what must have sparked Yeats’s imagination about the dance was the image of Fuller standing unconsumed, smiling enigmatically in the flames. Fuller, as she appeared in *Danse de Feu*, was another example of the living body/dead face—a figure to Yeats, like Byzantine art in general, of a synthesis containing the tension between art and nature. Like the “superhuman” in the poem, Fuller also represented “death-in-life” and “life-in-death” (15-6).

Readings of “Byzantium,” though various, usually fall into one of two camps: the poem is either about the creative process itself, or is an attempt to verbalize a mystical experience. In both interpretations, the dance is primary. Along with the dome in stanza one and the golden bird in three, it symbolizes or stands for the ordering principle in art, as opposed to the fury, mire and complexities of nature. This ordering principle is always changing; for all art (like dance) is never really a finished product or artifact but always an ongoing process in which the artist is inextricably linked to his creation. Yeats, remember, assumes we cannot differentiate the dancer from the dance. According to Edward Engleberg, all the images in the poem are developed in terms of flux and stasis (148). The “blood-begotten” spirits, for example, are purged by “Dying into a dance” (30) or movement, which is also an “agony of trance” (31) or stillness. The flood or tide of the last stanza is broken by the order of the smithies, but what they create—the marbles of
the dancing floor—change their pattern as the sea waves break over them
(“Those images that yet/ Fresh images beget” 38-9). And finally in stanza
five, the arrivals once more of the newly dead riding on the backs of warm-
blooded dolphins “break” the quiet of the city with their exuberant arches
and loops through a generative, “dolphin-torn,” “gong-tormented sea” (40).

Dancing in the poem serves a ritualistic function as well. The intensity
of the experience is emphasized by the repetition of the word “agony” and
the alliterative link between “dying” and “dance.” The heavily-stressed
rhyme-words at the line-breaks mimic the sound of stamping feet: “Dying
into a dance,/ An agony of trance.” Whether this ghostly dance is painful or
pleasurable for its participants is left characteristically equivocal. “Agony
usually denotes pain. But it could be used in the sense of an “agony of
ecstasy” or a transcendent moment of mystical radiance, thus connoting
pleasure. In using such apparent contradictions like the cold-fire oxymoron
mentioned earlier, Yeats is trying to unify all antinomies (life/death,
pain/pleasure) and express in language an experience which fundamentally
eludes it.13

There is a verbal dance in “Byzantium” in the play of its language.
Like those “unpurged spirits” riding dolphin-back between water and air, the
reader is suspended among the endless qualifications of anaphoric images
or the rhetorical device of repeating words in successive clauses:

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
(9-10)

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
(17-8)

Donald Ross has noted how the same images are subject to subtly shifting syntactic emphases as either clauses or appositives and participles:

“complexities of mire and blood” (24), “complexities of fury” (29), “furies of complexity” (37), “complexities of mire” (24) versus “mere complexities” (7), “fury and the mire” (8), “mire of human veins” (8). Verbal echoes, rather than semantic meaning, link images together in the poem and account for their rich associations (Ross 293-305). And just as Fuller created the illusion that her evolving shapes had a will of their own, the images in “Byzantium” appear to have no external agent acting upon them. Instead, they are self-generating: flames beget flames and images beget images. Even the cluster of transitive verbs in stanza four are presented negatively: “no faggot feeds,” “no steel has lit” (26), “no storm disturbs” (27), no flame “can singe a sleeve” (32).

Like Fuller’s unnatural, stylized fire, none of these images signify anything “cut of nature.” “Byzantium,” of all the dance poems, illustrates best
the prose passage in Autobiographies, in which Yeats makes the rather startling aesthetic identification with Mallarmé's Salomé rather than with her sacrificial prophet/victim. The strange, self-reflexive imagery in “Byzantium” is like an “idolatrous mirror” of the imaginary images dancing in the poet's mind. Like “some Hérodiade ... dancing seemingly alone,” these images are (in the poet's words) “separate from everything heterogeneous and casual, from all character and circumstance” (321).

The Poet Grown Old Just Looks At the Dancers:
1930-1938

Dancing in Yeats's final poems no longer resonates with quite the apocalyptic fury it did earlier. Nor does the dancer continue to cast quite as powerful a spell over the poet. The speaker in “Those Dancing Days Are Gone” is gay in spite of resembling a mutilated scarecrow too old and stiff to dance (CP 266). An older Crazy Jane, while envious of a younger couple's passionate dancing, is much more resigned to her role as spectator than the insecure narrator of “Among School Children.” There is, in short, no overwhelming desire of an isolated “I” to join in the dance of a collective “We.” The dancing space has also contracted. Instead of the cosmic settings of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” and “Byzantium,” the dance returns to a private performance on a seashore by a young, mortal female.
As we will see, her dancing is not the pure expression of independence and innocence that it was formerly. In “Sweet Dancer” and “A Crazed Girl,” it signifies a state bordering on madness (CP 296,303).

As the next dance poem after “Byzantium,” “Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks At the Dancers” marks an abrupt change of scene from the holy city’s marble dancing floor and spectral dancers (CP 260). The seventh poem in the “Crazy Jane” sequence is also a dance of death or murder. But dancing, as Jane perceives it, does not break the fury and mire of blood and veins; it symbolizes them.

I found that ivory image there
Dancing with her chosen youth,
But when he wound her coal black hair
As though to strangle her, no scream
Or bodily movement did I dare,
Eyes under eyelids did so gleam:
(1-6)

Jane sees that the couple’s repetitive steps and symmetrical partnering impose a momentary, harmonious pattern onto antinomies like beauty/decrepitude, youth/age and life/death. Above all, she observes that the couple’s sado-masochistic dance represents the sex act. The lovers had “danced heart’s truth” (9). Since male and female were irreconcilable contraries, sex would always be a combination of love and hate or Eros and Thanatos. Because it is ferocious, consuming, noble and powerful. Jane
concludes: "Love is like the lion's tooth."

The speaker in "Those Dancing Days Are Gone" also equates dance with earthly passion. Because he is resigned to leaning "upon a stick" or old age and has "put pretence away" (19-20), he admonishes an unidentified woman to do likewise and to stop dwelling on her past. Like him, she should adopt some greater intrinsic values, which he creates through imaginative activity, like the little jingle he sings to himself after all three stanzas: "I carry the sun in a golden cup, / The moon in a silver bag." The sun and moon, of course, are longtime Yeatsian icons used rather casually in this poem. What the speaker is proposing to his auditor is to face reality, symbolized by the "sun in a golden cup," which means accepting the loss of dancing days or physical prowess, attractiveness, love. But at the same time, she should temper reality with a little imagination, symbolized by the "moon" he carries "in a silver bag," which will keep her from succumbing to an enervating depression. This is the first poem in which Yeats (through his speaker) is at all affirmative about old age. The scarecrow has finally let go of the dancer.

But not for long. Both "Sweet Dancer"(1937) and "A Crazed Girl" (1936) are about Margot Ruddock, who was not a dancer but an actress Yeats had met in 1934 when he was sixty-nine and she twenty-seven. Just before meeting her, Yeats had submitted to the Steinach operation for
sexual rejuvenation. The operation gave him a burst of energy, which he lavished on Margot; he encouraged her to write poetry, introduced her to writers, theater people, sent her to the British choreographer Frederick Ashton for dancing lessons and through his friend, Shree Purohit Swami, converted her to mysticism. They also corresponded frequently (Jeffares,324). A few years after they met, Ruddock suffered a nervous breakdown and tried to drown herself. Yeats related the incident in a letter to Olivia Shakespear dated May 1936:

A girl who is quite a beautiful person...walked in at 6:30...and said she had come to find out if her verse was any good. I had known her for some years and told her to stop writing as her technique was getting worse. She went out in pouring rain...and thought that if she killed herself her verse would live instead of her. Went to the shore to jump in and then thought that she loved life and began to dance. (qtd. in Jeffares 366)

In the two poems Ruddock is memorialized into the ranks of the beautiful dancer archetype, along with the numerous other girls [the poet's] "unremembering nights" held "fast." She is also a tragic figure, like Hamlet, Lear, Cordelia and other dramatic personae who preoccupy Yeats in this last phase. The subject of "Sweet Dancer," the speaker admits, dances to escape from either "bitter youth," "her crowd" or "her black cloud" (4.5.6). But we are not to justify her being taken away by "strange men" and say "she is happy being crazy" (17). Rather, she is happy because she is dancing.
What appears to be madness is really some super-sensual illumination, some incommunicable sense of wonder or glow on her face which is all sweetness and light. According to Hazard Adams, the charge of madness is "an affront to the poet's symbolism, which has frequently identified the dance with the perfect antithetical condition. The happiness is the dance itself; just as gaiety is the mask" (224).

It is fitting that the last dancer to appear in Yeats's poetry is none other than Helen of Troy in "Long-Legged Fly" (CP 339). Although she had frequently been one of Yeats's subjects, like the other two emblematic figures--Caesar and Michelangelo--who flank her in the first and third stanzas of the poem, this is the first time the *femme fatale* dances: "her feet practice a tinker shuffle/ Picked up on the street" (17-8). In the eight lines she is allotted, Helen sums up most of the traits of the Yeatsian dancer. Her likeness to Salomé, for example, is unmistakable. Both stand for the antithetical, subjective fifteenth phase in Yeats's system. Both fulfill their roles as the unthinking and unknowing destroyers of the coldly intellectual civilization that Caesar represents. Helen "thinks ... /That nobody looks" and performs her dance in a "lonely place" in a kind of creative trance purely for her own emotional and physical pleasure (15-16,14). Like all of Yeats's dancers, she is "part woman, three parts child" in her innocence and passivity (15). Helen does not act like Caesar or create like Michelangelo,
but fulfills her destiny just by being who she is. The same simile embedded in a ballad refrain caps her stanza, as it does the others: “Like a long-legged fly upon the stream/ Her mind moves upon silence” (19-20). If by “stream,” Yeats means the traditional metaphor for time, Helen's dance—like Niamh’s and the faeries’ and all the dancers’ in between—is a symbol of immortality. For just as the water strider or long-legged fly gives the appearance of walking, standing or hovering over rather than being immersed in the “stream of time,” Helen suspends time in her silent absorption of the dance.

Conclusion

From Helen of Troy to faery band, the dancer sparked Yeats's imagination for over forty years. Just to enumerate her various permutations is to get some idea of the symbol's richness and importance, for the dancer meant different things to the poet in different periods. His earliest landscapes are peopled with pagan Celts “married to rock and hill” through their ecstatic “unearthly” dancing. When he turned to writing about real people in his contemporary landscape, the dancer became the generic title he bestowed on several of his beloveds, from Iseult Gonne to Margot Ruddock. During the period of A Vision, she became a cosmic dancer, symbolizing absolute beauty and unity of being. She taught him about the value of trance as a vehicle for touching the spiritual world. And from her blank, enigmatic expression, she taught him about impersonality in art.
Sometimes she meant different things in poems written from the same period. Her presence could be fiendish and sinister in one poem, like "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," and beneficial and angelic in the next, like "Among School Children." Or she could be morally indifferent, like the dancer in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" and the Salomé described in A Vision, "receiving the Prophet's head in her indifferent hands." In shaping his image, Yeats sought his inspiration behind the footlights of the European stage and found such luminaries as the "Eastern" mystical dancer Ruth St. Denis and the symbolist Loïe Fuller, to name a just a few. But he also reached beyond the footlights and fused his Western dancer with Eastern aesthetics and mysticism. Like the Hindu god, Shiva, Yeats's dancer is both a creative and destructive force. In her eastern cast, she symbolized the oneness underlying spirit and matter and the unity of permanence behind the world of appearances and flux.
Notes

1 Ito staged At the Hawk’s Well twice in the United States: New York in 1918 and California in 1929. In 1939, he translated the play into Japanese and performed it in Japan where it was regarded as a genuine Noh play and made part of Japan’s permanent Noh repertory.

2 Yeats wrote in his Autobiographies that Arthur Symons had the ability to “slip as it were into the mind of another, and my thoughts gained in richness and in clearness from his sympathy, nor shall I ever know how much my practice and my theory owe to the passages he read me from Catullus and from Verlaine and Mallarmé” (319-20).

3 According to Donne, Elizabeth Drury’s pure and eloquent blood Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinctly wrought, That one might say, her body thought. (Second Anniversary 2.244-46)

4 In his notes to The King of the Great Clock Tower (1935), Yeats admitted borrowing the dance of the severed head from Wilde who borrowed it from Heinrich Heine who probably found it in some Jewish religious legend. Yeats then linked the image to a universal vegetation myth or “ritual of the year: the mother goddess and the slain god” (Variorum Plays 1010).

5 Shiva’s right earring is a man’s; his left, a woman’s. His statue is made up of both a vertical stone shaft and a female, circular horizontal base called a “yoni” or “pitha” (Hanna 110).

6 The first manuscript copy of “The Hosting of the Sidhe” is dated 1893, according to Curtis B. Bradford (Yeats At Work 19).

7 Robartes is a character who escaped from Yeats’s earlier short stories and re-appears in A Vision along with Owen Aherne (Jeffares 49).

8 This is only one reading of the dancer in “Double Vision.” Along with the Sphinx and Buddha, she has inspired differing critical interpretations. For Unterecker, she is a symbol of “order in a partly disordered world”; specifically, “the supersensual equivalent of mundane
ordered things, the image which the artist --seeking form-- copies, the vision which both inspires and justifies him" (156). Ellmann calls the Sphinx, the intellect, and the Buddha, the heart, and the dancing girl, is "primarily an image of art." "She dances between them because art is neither intellectual nor emotional but a balance of these qualities" (Identity 255-56). Bloom, who analyzes the poem in Shelleyean and Blakean terms, concludes that the Sphinx is "knowledge without love" and the Buddha "love without knowledge" and the dancing girl sandwiched in between celebrates "the mystery of incarnate beauty, the triumph of art in Phase 15" (207). And finally, Kermode, who bases his interpretation on Yeats's statements in A Vision, identifies the Sphinx as the "introspective knowledge of the mind's self-begotten unity," the subjective or antithetical; the Buddha as "the outward-looking mind," the objective or primary; and the girl as achieved unity of being or complete subjectivity, which Kermode describes as "the miraculous moment of perfection beyond nature, revelation" (Romantic Image 59).

9 In a letter written to Olivia Shakespear in 1926, Yeats described the poem as his "last curse on old age." In one of the drafts, he attached a note saying : "Bring in the old thought that life prepares for what never happens" (qtd. in Jeffares 251,253).


11 There is a debate in dance theory which undermines DeMan's assumption that the final two lines are generally read as a rhetorical question. Dance theorists have responded literally to Yeats's query about differentiating the dancer from the dance. How much, they ask, does the dancer bring of his or her personal, expressive style (either consciously or unconsciously) to the choreography? Is La Spectre de la Rose the same ballet without Nijinsky's inimitable leap? In other words, is dance autographic (in the sense that the most exact duplication will not count as genuine) or allocraphic (in the sense that it can be replicated by a notational system, independent of the history of production)?

12 For an expanded account of Yeats's relationship to Susan Pollexfen Yeats, the reader is referred to David Lynch, Yeats: The Poetics of the Self. Lynch interprets several of the major poems in light of Yeats's narcissism, which he sees resulting from Susan Yeats's withheld love during a crucial stage in the poet's early development.
George Melchiori has drawn attention to the fire dance’s similarity with another dance ending in a trance in the short story “Rosa Alchemica” published in 1896. The story describes the occult, alchemical rituals of an esoteric sect, like the Golden Dawn to which Yeats belonged at the time. Michael Robartes takes the narrator to a “great circular room” in which the latter engages in an increasingly passionate dance with mortals partnering immortals (“I was able to distinguish beautiful Grecian faces and august Egyptian faces”) and then falls into a swoon. Afterwards, he is told by Robartes that the purpose of the dance was so “the gods may make them [the immortals] bodies out of the substance of our hearts” (Myth 289). The dance, like the one in “Byzantium,” is part of “a universal transmutation of all things into some divine and imperishable substance” (270).

See also “Leda and the Swan,” “When Helen Lived” and “Three Marching Songs” in the Collected Poems.
“A DANCER BEFORE GOD”

For all his reserve, T.S. Eliot was a connoisseur of dance. Admittedly, there are no beautiful dancers adorning Eliot’s poetry as figures of a non-discursive unified sensibility, as there are in Yeats. Moths dance (“The Burnt Dancer”), bears dance (“Portrait of a Lady”), cats dance (“Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats”), but when a woman dances, she is likened to a “Brazilian jaguar” with a “rank feline smell.” Yet Eliot loved the new dance the Russian ballet brought to Europe and was influenced by two of its leading male stars, Vaslav Nijinsky and Léonide Massine, whom Eliot saw respectively in Paris from 1910 to 1911 and London from 1919 to 1924. Nijinsky was a subliminal inspiration for much of Eliot’s verse, just as Massine was a catalyst behind many of his aesthetic speculations.

Nijinsky haunts the early unpublished poem “The Death of Saint Narcissus” (1915), in which a martyr-figure performs a *danse macabre* in the desert while burning arrows pierce his flesh, and although he had missed Nijinsky’s original choreographic score for *Le Sacre du Printemps*, there is an uncanny resemblance between the ballet’s atavistic, dehumanized masses and Eliot’s hordes of automatons blindly participating in *The Waste Land’s* debased rituals. In addition, important images in “The Hollow Men,” “Burnt Norton” and “Little Gidding” derive from ballets which have
become virtually synonymous with the great dancer, such as Petrushka, Narcisse and Le Spectre de la Rose.

In numerous reviews and essays for The Dial and The Criterion, Eliot singled out Massine for exemplifying the virtues of the new ballet. The primary one was the “ impersonality” Massine exuded in performance. Through him, Eliot came to see how the dancer’s impersonality was the result of a self-discipline and self-sacrifice to a three hundred-year-old tradition in which the past existed simultaneously in the present. Through its rhythm and ritual, Eliot also noticed how ballet worked on the unconscious and was capable of tapping the spiritual for art. As a result, it became his ideal model for a new poetic drama.

There was no contradiction between Eliot’s supposed abhorrence of the flesh and his love of the kind of dancing exemplified by Nijinsky and Massine. Their dancing was learned and practiced and not instinctual. It required the memory of reiterated movements and the control and refinement of body gestures. Dance was never an aesthetic end-in-itself for Eliot, as it was in Yeats. It was a spiritual or ritual act through which the individual transcended the limitations of the self and “the potentially destructive knowledge of the abyss within that threatens mortal life” (Feder 16).
Eliot’s published correspondence reveals that he loved to dance himself. He once announced at a dinner party that the only two things he really cared for were dancing and brandy (Bergonzi 34). Frequenting ballet concerts and dance halls, in fact, seems to have been the highlight of his youthful social life. The excitement engendered by the Ballet Russe for many of the intellectuals Eliot befriended while in Paris, like Alain-Fournier and Jacques Rivièrè, may have prompted him to sign up for dancing lessons after he returned and entered Harvard Graduate School (Gordon, Early Years 54). Writing his cousin Eleanor Hinkley in 1915 from Oxford, he confessed that he attended dance halls regularly for the relief that dancing provided from the intellectual rigors of graduate studies. In 1919, Eliot invited Mary Hutchinson, a member of the Bloomsbury crowd, to come dancing “at a place near Baker Street. They teach the new dances and steps, which I don’t know and want to learn” (Letters 275). 1

At one of these dance halls, Eliot met his future wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood, who had been trained as a ballet dancer. He admitted to his cousin that he was attracted to Vivienne because she was liberated: she smoked and “was a very good dancer” (Letters 97). Brigit Patmore, another Bloomsbury member, recalls an incident between the two in the early years of their marriage, which suggests Eliot took Vivienne’s dancing seriously.
They were in a drugstore when suddenly Vivienne decided to ape the Russian ballerina Tamara Karsavina. She rose up on one leg, extended the other in arabesque and held out her arm for her husband to support her. Eliot, not the least embarrassed, “watched Vivienne’s feet with ardent interest whilst he supported her with real tenderness” (Patmore 85-6).

Both the attraction and the tenderness, unfortunately, were short-lived. Because he identified Vivienne as a dancer, his subsequent marital disillusionment and his alleged sexual problems may have spawned the derogatory portrayal of female dancers who make brief appearances in the early poetry. As these poems make clear, Eliot harbored an extreme distaste for the sexual connotations of dance. His female dancers are masters of deceit and artifice and their dancing signifies nothing but sterility and aridness. They easily fit into Lyndall Gordon’s classification of Eliot’s early poetic treatment of women in general as either “Laforguian butts of ironic dismissal” or “butts of a sense of sin” (qtd. in Bush, Modernist in History 14).

Included in Gordon’s first category is the oblique, ironic allusion to Salomé’s dancing before Herod in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (SP 14). Vivienne is not responsible, for the poem was written between 1909 and 1911, a few years before the couple met. But Eliot probably came
across the Biblical dancer several times from his exposure to Yeats, Symons, Mallarmé and Laforgue. The image of decapitation (“Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald]/ brought in upon a platter”) is a parodic objective correlative of Prufrock’s fractured psyche. The power of Salomé’s dancing over him is, he confesses, “no great matter.” It will neither lead to a new religious dispensation (“I am no prophet”), nor resonate with the wealth of artistic associations it did for Yeats. Like the other females in the poem, Salomé poses a threat to his vanity. In unmasking the “bald spot in the middle of [his] hair” or the tell tale signs of mortality, Salomé reduces death to no more than social embarrassment.

Nancy Ellicott’s social dancing in “Cousin Nancy” (1915) is an object of derision rather than fear to the impersonal voice that narrates the poem, and stays completely outside the poem’s experience. Written at Oxford, the poem was one of a series of satirical vignettes on contemporary mores and New England manners, presumably among relatives and people the poet had known in Boston and Cambridge. Cousin Nancy’s flaunting of her ability to do “all the modern dances,” like her cigarette smoking and her domesticating or “breaking” the New England hills with her horseback riding, while meant to convey her Yankee independence and individuality, prove to be barren acts of rebellion.
Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked
And danced all the modern dances;
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,
But they knew that it was modern. (CPP 17-8)

In the last stanza, Eliot borrows a line from George Meredith’s “Lucifer in
Starlight” and alludes to Matthew Arnold and Ralph Waldo Emerson as a
mock-angelic “army of unalterable law.” “Matthew and Waldo” keep “watch”
on Nancy, although not as *voyeurs* but as some dead books on “glazen
shelves” adorning the room in which she dances. The frivolity of her
dancing is highlighted by their grave, intellectual guardianship of Victorian
culture. Their graveness, in turn, is punctured by reducing them to their first
and middle names, and their frozen watch over Nancy on “glazen” or
tarnished “shelves” proves ineffectual. Short on foresight, they could not
“see” the consequences of their liberal sanctioning of self-expression, which
resulted in what Lawrence was to call the “bouncingly copulative” social
dances of the twenties.

The association between sterile female dancers and modernity
continues in Eliot’s allusion to Russian ballerina “Grishkin” in the 1918 poem
“Whispers of Immortality” (*SP* 42-3). Grishkin, a seductive, high-class
prostitute, is Eliot’s harshest indictment of a female dancer. Like the Salomé
image in “Prufrock,” Eliot deflates Grishkin’s “deadliness” by turning it into a
pun the seventeenth century was fond of making between death and the climax of the sexual act. Her portrait in the second half of the poem follows a dramatic rendering of what Eliot referred to in "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) as the seventeenth-century's unified sensibility: Elizabethan and Jacobean poets like Webster and Donne could feel their thoughts or, conversely, think through their senses. Because they could do so, they knew the senses' limitations. Modern men, however, are "out of joint" with themselves as well as with the past. They are thus reduced to the "scampering marmoset" or monkey, which is instinctively drawn to Grishkin's "maisonette" to experience le petit mort at the hands of the "couched" and ready to pounce "Brazilian jaguar." Grishkin's trap is based on the deceitful cultivation of cosmetic allure. Her "friendly bust" (compared to Webster's "breastless creatures under ground") is "uncorseted." It holds out the "promise" only of "pneumatic bliss" for the speaker, who is blind to the "pneuma" or soul in her body. Her "Russian eye/ Is underlined for emphasis" to create an illusion of beauty, where the realistic eyes on the corpses in the first half of the poem have decayed into "daffodil bulbs." "Abstract Entities/ Circumambulate her charm" in a parody of the notion that metaphysical perceptions can only be arrived at by physical experience.

The poem is even more interesting for what it reveals about the poet's divided sensibility at the time. Neither his published correspondence nor his
biographers reveal the reason for Eliot's deeply felt repulsion toward "Grishkin," who was Serafima Astafieva in real life. Astafieva was a Maryinsky-trained graduate of the Ballet Russe who settled in London and opened a leading ballet school in 1914. Most of the younger, English members of the Company, (like Anton Dolin and Alicia Markova), received their training from her. Pound was responsible for introducing Eliot to Astafieva. He had also directed Eliot to the nineteenth-century poet Théophile Gautier for the style of this poem. The irony is that in copying Gautier, Eliot characteristically ignored the French poet's influential essays on the contributions of romantic ballerinas Carlotta Grisi and Fanny Elssler to the ballet tradition. 2 Even Pound, years later in his Pisan Cantos, took offense with Eliot's negative portrayal of the Russian dancer.

Grishkin's photo refound years after
with the feeling that Mr. Eliot may have
missed something, after all, in composing his vignette.
(LXXVII 73-5)

In contrast to Eliot, Pound commended her as a transmitter of the ancient tradition of dance.

So Astafieva had conserved the tradition
From Byzance and before then. (LXXIX 178-9)

On the other hand, the male dancer in "The Death of Saint Narcissus," is morbidly self-absorbed yet treated sympathetically
(Facsimile 92-7). Narcissus is like Prufrock in his solipsism, but unlike the earlier protagonist, he is an aspiring prophet who tries to turn this liability into an asset before God. As both dancer and sacrificial artist/prophet figure, Narcissus conflates Salomé the aggressor with the Baptist, her passive victim. Narcissus, we are told, had been "struck down" by the knowledge of his own beauty and "could not live men's ways" and so became a "dancer before God" instead. Instead of dancing joyously to celebrate God like the Biblical David, Narcissus danced for the pleasure/pain of God's arrows penetrating his bleeding flesh. In the end, he turned "green, dry and stained/ With the shadow in his mouth," ultimately becoming a "dancer to [instead of before] God."

Originally an unpublished poem Eliot wrote sometime between 1914-15, "Narcissus" was among the many verses Eliot had originally planned to include in The Waste Land that Pound either cut or radically revised. Eventually, the prophet/dancer evolved into a more impersonal larger work as the prophetic voice in the desert in lines 26-30 of "The Burial of the Dead" section. This voice invites the reader to "Come in under the shadow of this red rock," and experience the shadow as "fear in a handful of dust" (SP 51-2). An androgynous figure capable of expressing simultaneous points of view, Narcissus became the prototype of the prophet Tiresias. The final
image of his dryness--"the shadow in his mouth"--became, of course, one of the poem's major motifs.

"Narcissus" departs significantly from the style of Eliot's earlier poetry. It is unusually graphic, sensuous, passionate and devoid of the Eliotic ironic commentator who regards individual frustration from a detached intellectual point of view. This speaker is more the Barker at a freak show, exhorting us at the beginning of the poem to:

Come under the shadow of this grey rock  
Come in under the shadow of this grey rock  
And I will show you a shadow different from either  
Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak, or  
Your shadow leaping behind the fire against the red rock:  
I will show you his bloody cloth and limbs  
And the grey shadow on his lips. (1-7)

We are challenged to leave behind the Ovidian Narcissus and witness something different than our own shadows or even those ordinary shadows cast by all living things which greet the day or seek warmth by the fire at night. These shadows under a rock recall Plato's allegorical cave, whose inmates were chained to chairs with their backs facing the cave's bright opening. Their mistaking the shadows of things projected on the wall in front of them for the things themselves was an analogy for the way we perceive the objects of the physical world. The speaker calls our attention to "the grey shadow on [Narcissus'] lips," suggesting that Narcissus was self-deluded in
thinking he could reach God through his dancing or his beauty and that he died unsanctified. Dancing "before God" may have been the ultimate narcissistic projection of himself. On the other hand, by exhorting us to witness shadows different than ones caused by the natural world, the speaker may be appealing to a higher level of reality: the "truth" about Narcissus, who in "his bloody cloth and limbs," resembles a martyred Christ-figure.

With the second stanza, the speaker drops the imperative voice and simply describes events in the past, which lead up to Narcissus' desert dance. Narcissus, we are told, was so self-absorbed that everywhere he went nature only served to reflect back to him the beauty of his body parts.

... the wind made him aware of his legs smoothly passing each other
And of his arms crossed over his breast.
When he walked over the meadows
He was stifled and soothed by his own rhythm.
By the river
His eyes were aware of the pointed corners of his eyes
And his hands aware of the tips of his fingers. (9-16)

When Narcissus walked in the city, he saw other people reduced to their sexual parts. He "seemed to tread on ... convulsive thighs and knees" (20). So he escaped and secluded himself in the desert, where he could dance and sensually enjoy the feel of his body moving smoothly as a unit, with nothing to distract him from the pleasure of auto-eroticism.
John Mayer points out in the next few stanzas how Narcissus in the
desert "literally becomes a world to himself by undergoing a series of
metamorphoses that recapitulate the world's evolution" from plant and fish to
bi-sexual human animal (156).

First he was sure that he had been a tree
Twisting its branches among each other
And tangling its roots among each other.

Then he knew he had been a fish
With slippery white belly held tight in his own fingers,
Writhing in his own clutch, his ancient beauty
Caught fast in the pink tips of his new beauty.

Then he had been a young girl
Caught in the woods by a drunken old man
Knowing at the end the taste of her own whiteness
The horror of her own smoothness,
And he felt drunken and old. (22-33)

According to Mayer, the tree and fish, alien to the desert, are like "mirages"
in that they image what Narcissus desires the most: "the intensification of
pleasure in his own 'clutch'" (156). The language--"twisting," "tangling,"
writhing"--grows increasingly violent and auto-erotic, resulting in the
projection of Narcissus' bi-sexual fantasies, in which he simultaneously
experiences (as both old man and young girl), the antithetical roles of
violator and violated. Unlike his greek prototype, Narcissus experiences his
metamorphoses while he is still living.
In addition to the Greek myth, Narcissus conflates several other sources. Lyndall Gordon suggests Eliot drew on the following religious models: the second century Bishop of Jerusalem who hid in the desert for several years, Saint Augustine and his trials in Carthage, and Saint Sebastian who suffered martyrdom at the hands of archers (Early Years 91). Other critics have suggested literary echoes from Hulme’s “Conversion” and Herbert’s “Affliction.” Mayer thinks Eliot based the character on Paul Valéry, a poet whom he respected and of whom he wrote: “he reminds us of Narcissus gazing into the pool, and partakes of the same attraction and the mystery of Narcissus, the aloofness and frigidity of that spiritual celibate’ (qtd. in Mayer 153). ³ Grover Smith argues that the poem “seems unrelated to Valéry’s treatment of the Narcissus theme, but it may have some source in Fokine’s Narcisse,” which Eliot saw in Paris in 1911 (35).

The most interesting gloss comes from David Bernstein, who argues Eliot modeled his character on the tragic life of the Russian ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky (“Story of Vaslav Nijinsky” 71-104). The germ of the poem, according to Bernstein, was planted when Eliot saw Nijinsky in the title role of Narcisse several years earlier. Bernstein links the pointed corners of Narcissus’ eyes with Nijinsky’s most striking feature: his almond-shaped, Oriental eyes. He draws a parallel between Narcissus’ metamorphosis into a young girl raped by an old man and the young Nijinsky’s stormy
homosexual liaison with the much older impresario Serge Diaghilev. Nijinsky’s reputed religious fanaticism and his preoccupation with Tolstoyism (which intensified after he was fired from the company by Diaghilev for eloping with a Hungarian ballerina) are connected to Narcissus’ religious yearnings. Nijinsky also referred to himself in his Diary as a “dancer to God.” Finally, Bernstein links the last two lines of the poem, which refer to Narcissus as a vegetable-like corpse (“green, dry and stained”) who “could not live men’s ways,” with Nijinsky’s catatonic withdrawal from life while still in his twenties. He never recovered, spending the rest of his life institutionalized until his death in 1950.

Bernstein admits that the only snafu in his argument is chronology; if, for instance, “Narcissus” was written in 1915 as many critics claim, Eliot could not have known about Nijinsky’s schizophrenia, which occurred in 1917. Since even Eliot could not remember exactly when he wrote the poem, Bernstein proposes that “Narcissus” was written after 1915. He suggests that since so much of the shorter poem found its way into The Waste Land, it is entirely plausible that Eliot wrote both of them while undergoing psychiatric treatment for depression in a Swiss sanatorium in 1921. Nijinsky had also lived in Switzerland for two years before his commitment to a Swiss sanatorium. Thus, claims Bernstein, Eliot could easily have been privy to gossip about the great dancer. He concludes that
Eliot’s “undergoing psychiatric treatment for a depression brought on by ... his tormented view of the post-War world about him, might have intensified his curiosity about a man who had ... succumbed to this vision and retreated into a more beautiful and peaceful world of his own” (“Story of Vaslav Nijinsky” 101).

When Eliot saw the Ballet Russe again in London in 1919, Léonide Massine had replaced Nijinsky as Diaghilev’s dancer, choreographer and lover. Eliot’s interest in Massine, whom he mentioned repeatedly in his critical writings up to the mid-1920s, together with his zealous commitment to the Russian company, lend credence to Bernstein’s speculations. Eliot’s correspondence reveals that his hectic juggling of a full-time position at the bank with writing verse and criticism, did not hinder him from attending the Ballet Russe, often on successive nights—with or without Vivienne. Usually he accompanied members of the Bloomsbury group. 4 From January to July of 1919, Eliot saw Massine perform his choreography for The Three-Cornered Hat, La Boutique Fantasque and The Good-Humoured Ladies. In the summer of 1921, before Eliot left for Lausanne to complete The Waste Land, he saw Massine’s re-staging of Nijinsky’s choreography for Le Sacre du Printemps. In a letter dated April of 1922, after seeing the Ballet Russe at the Coliseum, he wrote Mary Hutchinson that he thought Massine “more brilliant and beautiful than ever.... I quite fell in love with him. I want to meet
him more than ever, and he is a genius" (Letters 523). Two months later, after Hutchinson arranged a meeting between the two, Eliot wrote back to her expressing his gratitude and the hope that he would soon see Massine again (529).

Even after Massine broke with Diaghilev to form his own company, Eliot extolled the dancer’s virtues. Chief among these was what Eliot saw as Massine’s “impersonality,” the same quality Mallarmé had isolated in the ballerinas of the Paris Opéra and Loïe Fuller’s abstract shapes, and Yeats in Japanese dancer Michio Ito’s immobile expression. Mallarmé’s dancers, we recall, were not women but vessels filled with abstract, preliterate suggestions. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot had already defined the ideal poet as an impersonal vessel of literary tradition, one who has “not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium.” His progress as an artist is “a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (SE 7-9). Ironically, Eliot found his ideal poet in the dancer Massine, who extinguished his own personality within an international, four hundred year old tradition of ballet. In “Dramatis Personae” (1923), Eliot called him the “greatest actor in London ... the most completely unhuman, impersonal and abstract.” Eliot added that “the difference between the conventional gesture of the ordinary stage, which is supposed to express emotion, and the abstract gesture of Massine, which symbolizes emotion,” was enormous.
In his 1924 essay, "Four Elizabethan Dramatists," Eliot must have been thinking of Massine when he wrote:

Any one who has observed one of the great dancers of the Russian school will have observed that the man or the woman whom we admire is a being who exists only during the performances, that it is a personality, a vital flame which appears from nowhere, disappears into nothing and is complete and sufficient in its appearance. It is a conventional being, a being which exists only in and for the work of art which is the ballet.... The differences between a great dancer and a merely competent dancer is in the vital flame, that impersonal, and, if you like, inhuman force which transpires between each of the great dancer's movements. (SE 95)

Massine no doubt influenced Eliot's admiration for the discipline of dance, which he had already equated with religious ascetism in "Narcissus." Like the Catholic Church, the ballet's tradition and unified point of view gave a direction and sanction to the individual's self-sacrifice. In one issue of The Criterion, Eliot exhorted the public to continue supporting Diaghilev because it "was necessary that there should be one ballet, and one school to supply it, and one man at the head of it" [emphasis added].

In "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" (1928), speaker "B" re-iterates that the strength of ballet lies in its tradition and training. It is "an askesis ... which ascends for several centuries ... any efficient dancer has undergone a training which is like a moral training." "E" (or Eliot) agrees and adds that the dance is "a system of
physical training, of traditional, symbolical and highly skilled movements. It is a liturgy of very wide adaptability” (SE 34-5).

The ballet was important to Eliot for other reasons besides the impersonality and moral training of its dancers. He perceived a spiritual dimension in the art that was similar to Mallarmé’s view of the dance as a sacred rite: “the mysterious and holy interpretation of our innermost being” (Mallarmé 63). Eliot tried to account for the sense of awe and terror that the ballet was capable of evoking in the audience, or what he was to call the modern ballet’s sophisticated and simplified metamorphosis “of current life into something rich and strange.” 7 Thinking that primitive man must have experienced some of this mystery too when he danced, Eliot turned to the study of anthropologists like Jane Harrison, who were interested in the relationship between art and rituals and the basic impulses in man that gave rise to both. As a result, Eliot was convinced that “primitive” dance or ritual was not only the source of ballet: it was the origin of all art and religion.

Eliot’s basically anthropological view of dance became integral to other ideas he had been formulating about the mystical similarities between immediate experience and “primitive” experience, the continuity of past and present, and the nature of the unconscious. From Bradley, for example, Eliot derived the notion that our world comes to us as a finite center of immediate
experience, which we subsequently separate and fragment into objects, selves, emotions and thoughts. He interpreted Bradley’s notion of immediate experience as an intense feeling of unity, a stillpoint arrested out of time that was similar to Yeats’s notion of unity of being or Virginia Woolf’s “exquisite moments of being.” For Eliot, such “moments” or “unities” were mystical in nature and gave fleeting intimations of the Absolute, which Eliot interpreted in Bradley’s system as “God.” According to William Skaff, Eliot was thus able to identify immediate experience with a “primitive” consciousness, which lives on in modern man as part of his unconscious (66-7).

From his readings in psychology, Eliot derived a theory of the unconscious that he tied to dance. Basically, he thought the unconscious consisted of three interrelated and overlapping categories or dimensions: physiological, psychological and metaphysical. The physiological unconscious was that area where bodily functions like the circulatory and neurological systems operated without our being aware of them. One dances, for example, because of an innate sense of rhythm located in the nervous system. The neurological system, however, is that part of our physiology directly related to brain activity, and therefore related to thoughts and emotions. Thus the physiological dimension was continuous with the psychological unconscious. For Eliot, the latter did not consist of the Id or
repressed sexual deviant impulses as in Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Eliot's unconscious was a variation of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, a repository of universal myths and symbols. Eliot added that this unconscious was not only collective, but historical; the deeper one dug, the more "primitive" the experience latent there. At the deepest level, one would re-cover the undifferentiated wholeness and unity of immediate experience, which Eliot characterized as the metaphysical unconscious.

James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* also convinced Eliot that the past was continuous with the present in the unconscious. Eliot described Frazer's work as both "a collection of entertaining myths and ... a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation." Frazer's hero-gods had undergone violent deaths and resurrections at a sacred place from which they would continue to exercise their powers at festivals that annually re-enacted their death and re-birth. In this way, Osiris, Attis and Adonis, who were originally vegetation gods, ensured an order or continuity in nature, as well as in society. Eliot understood the rituals associated with them to be similar to the ritual eating of Christ during the Eucharist. He postulated that the death/rebirth myth was innate and formed part of the structure of the psychological unconscious, just as dance was innate in the physiological part.
Eliot synthesized the relationship between dance rhythms and religious impulses in an article entitled “The Ballet,” written for The Criterion. Anyone who wishes to understand the “spirit” of dancing must start by examining dance in “primitive” tribes or amongst developed peoples like the Tibetans and the Javanese, he wrote. He must also consider the evolution of Christian and other liturgy. (For is not the High Mass—as performed, for instance, at the Madeleine in Paris—one of the highest developments of dancing?) And finally, he should be able to track down the secrets of rhythm in the (still undeveloped) science of neurology. 9

What the critic should not do is try to give logical reasons for the origin of dance. In another essay, Eliot criticized Dr. W.O.E. Oesterley’s study of “primitive” religious dances because its author fell into “the common trap of interpretation, by formulating intelligible reasons for the primitive dancer’s dancing.” Oesterley had claimed that “the origin of the sacred dance was the desire of early man to imitate what he conceived to be the characteristics of supernatural powers.”
It is equally possible to assert that primitive man acted in a certain way and then found a reason for it. An unoccupied person, finding a drum, may be seized with a desire to beat it; but unless he is an imbecile he will be unable to continue beating it, and thereby satisfying a need (rather than a 'desire'), without finding a reason for so doing.  

Eliot implies that the origin of ritual dance cannot be interpreted as a logical or practical "need," since the origin is prior to interpretation or reason. Primitive man beat his drum because of a pre-logical "desire" to do so.

Primitive man had responded to the rhythm in his body by participating in a collective mystical experience. Eliot thought that since the artist was somehow closer to the "primitive" than his contemporaries, he could re-integrate or unify dance rhythms and rituals into another art form and stimulate once again the dormant religious impulses residing in modern man's unconscious. The poet could achieve this because of his "auditory imagination," which Eliot defined in a later essay as the "primitive," prelogical instinct for "syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling" (UPUC 111).

During the period Eliot was formulating his ballet-inspired theories on rhythm and ritual in the late teens and early twenties, he had begun to work them out poetically in *The Waste Land* in 1921 and was to do so again in
"The Hollow Men" in 1925. The rhythmic stylization of one ballet in particular he had seen that summer inspired him to write a highly rhythmical, ritualistic and dramatic poem, which would capture the spirit of the modern ballet by simplifying contemporary life into "something rich and strange." As mentioned previously, Nijinsky's original choreography for Le Sacre du Printemps had vanished with his dismissal from the company, and Eliot frankly admitted that he was disappointed with Massine's more romantic choreography. 12 But in Stravinsky's music, especially its dissonance and abrupt juxtapositions of modern and folk material, Eliot found an example of the way in which the complexities and banalities of contemporary existence could be made significant by an artist's tapping the primeval drum. Just as Stravinsky presented a true interpenetration of the present and the past in his metamorphosis of "the rhythm of the Steppes into the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other barbaric cries of modern life," The Waste Land would impose the fertility myth on the "unreal" city of London and extend it spatially in time back to the linguistic beginnings of western civilization.13

Bernard Bergonzi has detected the ballet's influence on specific passages of The Waste Land. He thinks the hyacinth girl, Madame Sosostris and Mr. Eugenides "have something of the sharpness of outline of
figures in a modern ballet” (92). He also thinks the preponderance of
latinate verbs in the typist/clerk passage conveys “a fine sense of controlled,
stylized movement, which develops with the vigorous formality of the modern
ballet” (101). Yet there really are no pure dance images in The Waste
Land. Instead, there are many instances of what Audrey Rodgers and David
Bernstein label as anti-dance imagery or danse macabre, like the “crowds of
people, walking round in a ring” (56) and the “crowd of living dead flow[ing]
over London Bridge,” (62) in “The Burial of the Dead” or the “hooded hordes,
swarming/ Over endless plains” (369-70) in “What the Thunder Said”
(Bernstein, “Dance in Four Quartets” 230-61; Rodgers 23-38). To Rodgers
and Bernstein, these debased rituals are symptomatic of Eliot’s pre-
conversion futility and despair and are opposed to the positive image of
dance which surfaces after his religious conversion in 1927. If we turn once
again to Eliot’s critical comments on dance during this period, we will see he
provided his own explanation of The Waste Land’s debased rituals. In a
review of a dance book for The Criterion, Eliot had questioned the value of
reviving the Sword Dance, “except as a Saturday afternoon alternative to
tennis and badminton for active young men in garden suburbs.... For you
cannot revive a ritual without reviving a faith. You can continue a ritual after
the faith is dead—that is not a conscious, “pretty” piece of archæology—but
you cannot revive it.”
Eliot continued his depiction of faithless ritual in “The Hollow Men,” which, according to David Ward, is “verse consciously designed as ritual” (144). The image of straw men in the first section, (“We are the hollow men/ We are the stuffed men”), is a corruption of the divine effigies made from straw mentioned in Frazer, which were used to propitiate the gods in ancient vegetation rites. In section two, the “deliberate disguises /Rat’s coat, crowskin, crossed staves” suggest the fertility rites practiced by the Morris Dancers mentioned in Jesse Weston, whose members carried staves and included a clown in “a costume of animal skin” (Southam 157). In the poem’s final section and its conversion of the children’s game of “here we go round the mulberry bush” into “here we go round the prickly pear,” the image of circularity may be, as Ward suggests, an analogue for the inadequacy of life in general (144). Bernstein sees the parodying of the children’s dance, “itself a debased version of what was once probably a sacred rite of spring” like the Maypole dances, as “the fullest expression of danse macabre in Eliot’s verse.” He calls it a “ritual of despair, ... a sterile ‘fertility rite’ in a waterless desert where nothing will grow but the grisly cactus” (“Dance in Four Quartets” 232-3).

According to Paul Fussell, “The Hollow Men” is the most important poem employing what he calls the “gestic symbolism” in Eliot’s early verse. Related to debased rituals, these arrested or vacant gestures are
correlatives of a psychic condition, the "dissociation in the individual sensibility," which results because of "a disconnection between the intention and embodiment of intention" (209). Such symbols in "The Hollow Men" include the aimless and meaningless circling "round the prickly pear" at "five o'clock in the morning" and the hollow men's failure of vision, which results from a discontinuity between will and the physical means through which intention is consummated. Opposite of those who with "direct eyes" have "crossed" over to a higher reality, the hollow men are "sightless" and like Narcissus see only deceptive shadows, which block the "true" path or purpose of life.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow. (SP 80)

Eliot's devotion to the ballet is also evident in this poem. Valerie Eliot claimed that the poet's "hollow" or "stuffed men" were really inspired by the marionettes in the Ballet Russe production of Petrushka, which Eliot saw in Paris with Nijinsky in the title role (Southam 155). Nijinsky/Petrushka's "human" soul imprisoned in a sawdust body and his impossible love for the Ballerina are correlatives of the hollow men's impotent desire and psychological disintegration. The inhabitants of this dead land, for all their
emptiness, are still “Trembling with tenderness” with “lips that would kiss” (SP 79). Remembering Eliot’s dictum that one should “take a form of entertainment and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art,”16 it is entirely plausible that Petrushka’s disjointed, mechanical gestures went into forming the condition of the hollow men as “paralysed force, gesture without motion” (SP 77). In both poem and ballet, the failure of the self to achieve an existential freedom results in an utter sense of futility and despair.

The specters of both Nijinsky and Massine return in the Four Quartets, where the dance image flits in and out of three of the four poems to convey an elusive, ineffable experience that words alone are incapable of expressing. Dance is both “the way up” (eternity) and “the way down” (time). The dance always appears in conjunction with the particular element associated with each poem. In “Burnt Norton” (1936), for instance, the dance is an airy flight of molecules “figured in the drift of the stars” (54). In “East Coker” (1940), it descends to the earth and goes the way of all material, mutable things into “flesh, fur and faeces” (7). In “Little Gidding” (1943), the dance is apotheosized and fused to the purgative, “refining” fire that destroys in order to create. Instead of a phoenix rising from the ashes, Eliot alludes to Le Spectre de la Rose, the ballet Nijinsky made famous because of his spectacular leap from a bedroom window.
At the beginning of “Burnt Norton,” the “footfalls echo[ing] in the memory” or the ritual pattern of the rose garden presage the dance that will begin in the second movement.

So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern
Along the empty alley, into the box circle. (31-2)

Hugh Kenner thinks that the “box circle” suggests a theater as well as a hedge, and that the “lotus” which rises in the pool filled with “water out of sunlight” in the next line “moves rather like a ballerina of Diaghilev’s” (252). Because of Eliot’s use of a stage metaphor elsewhere in the Quartets, Bernstein agrees, but substitutes the ballerina for Nijinsky who, we recall, Eliot saw in the title role of Fokine’s ballet Narcisse in Paris in 1911 (“Dance in Four Quartets” 239). Bernstein thinks the final image of Narcissus sinking into the pool (through a trapdoor in the stage), with a huge flower rising in his place, “may well have been among the early memories which echoed in the mind of the poet when he visited Burnt Norton in 1934, transforming the formal garden there into a theater, the concrete pool a stage flooded with the recollection of a large papier mâché flower rising quietly through its surface at the end of a romantic little ballet he had seen more than two decades before” (239).

“So we moved” also echoes line 56—“We move above the moving
tree"--in the lyrical stanza which begins the second movement.

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.
The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
Appeasing long forgotten wars.
The dance along the artery
The circulation of the lymph
Are figured in the drift of stars
Ascend to summer in the tree
We move above the moving tree
In light upon the figured leaf
And hear upon the sodden floor
Below, the boarhound and the boar
Pursue their pattern as before
But reconciled among the stars. (47-61)

Several critics have read these lines as a sustained echo of the elaborate
cosmic dance which underlines Sir John Davies' sixteenth-century poem
“Orchestra" or "A Poem of Dancing" (1596). Using the conceit of a dance
allowed Davies to seamlessly move back and forth between abstract
concepts and concrete images. Dance was the natural and proper activity of
every level of being, moving harmoniously in a hierarchically ordered
universe, which was itself depicted as a great dancing wheel, with love or
stillness at its unmoving center or hub. And just as the stars and spheres
revolved in a perpetual dance around heaven's "axle-tree," love danced in
every human pulse and vein (stanzas 36, 64, 106).

The "garlic and sapphires" passage in "Burnt Norton" also depicts a
rhythmic design throughout the universe, with close correspondences between different levels of being: mineral, vegetable, animal, human and planetary. The continuity and repetition of physical existence, which is figured in "the circulation of the lymph" and "the dance along the artery," is paralleled in space by the cycle of constellations or the "drift of the stars." Continuity or circularity is also reflected in time; the rhythmic coursing of human blood is reflected in the rising "sap" of the tree in summer as seasons cycle. The "inveterate scars" of human wars mirror on a higher level the perpetual pursuit of the "boarhound and the boar" on the "sodden floor/Below." The star-shaped "sapphire" mired in the mud in the first line is "reconciled among the stars" at the end. The order or design of this sensual world, however, is more unstable than the Elizabethan world view depicted in "Orchestra." Eliot's passage begins with two sentences, but thereafter the grammatical units, like the images, tend to collapse into each other, with no punctuation except for a comma until the end. 

The wedge-shaped "garlic" and clotted "axle-tree," when joined with the "moving tree," also "point" to the next stanza's abstract image of the stillpoint at the center of a "modern" wheeling universe.
At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (62-71)

Certainly, the seriousness of this passage moves beyond Davies’ “light muse” into the realm of metaphysics or mystical experience. The style alone suggests Eliot used dance to evoke a transitory, ephemeral experience which could not be described by a normal vocabulary. Ronald Bush characterized it as “a rushing current of oxymora and negatives,” where “the lines live in paradoxes and progress by the notion of contradiction” (202).

Within the ten lines, there are eight negatives, counting the “neither/nor” pairs once. The stillpoint passage is also rhetorically characterized by what Adam Ross described elsewhere as Eliot’s use of *litotes*, “a figure of speech in which an affirmative is expressed by a negation of a contrary” (49).

Unlike the vertical movement of the preceding stanza, the pattern here is centripetal. The repetition of words, phrases and half-lines rotates around a non-dimensional, non-temporal “still point.” The “still point” is a figure for what Eliot had earlier referred to as “immediate experience”: an increase in consciousness with a concomitant feeling that time has been momentarily suspended.
The dance at the stillpoint has been interpreted by numerous critics. Some have heard its Dantean echoes, especially in the “Paradiso”’s vision of God as “a brilliant point of light where all time is present and about which nine choirs of angels, impelled by divine love revolve at varying speeds” (Bernstein, *Four Quartets* 248-9). Others, like Morris Weitz, have focused on its thematic implications as a meditation on time and timelessness. According to him, Eliot held a Christian, neo-Platonic theory of time, which was “essentially an Immanence doctrine according to which the Eternal or Timeless is the creative source of the flux or temporal.” The flux is real “but its reality is derived from and sustained by the more ultimate reality of the Eternal” (Weitz 142). (“Only through time time is conquered” 90). Weitz argued further that Eliot equated the stillpoint with Heraclitus’ logos, which he then interpreted as a symbol of the Christian God or Incarnation. God as the stillpoint was a variation of the Greek concept of an Unmoved Mover, One who does not move Himself, but was the source of all movement. Hugh Kenner, moreover, compared the stillpoint to a wheel, “the exact center of which is motionless, whatever the velocity of the rim” (254). More specifically, Eliot’s stillpoint resembles Yeats’s Great Wheel or the image of unified reality pictured as two interpenetrating, gyrating cones in *A Vision*. Eliot merely substituted the abstract image of the stillpoint for Yeats’s dancer (who, in representing the fifteenth stage in his system, signified an escape
from time or the cycle of endless re-incarnations).

In the fifth movement of "Burnt Norton," the distinction between eternity and time shifts into a discussion between the eternal Christian Word and the trials and tribulations of the poet who must traffic in ephemeral time-laden words. Words, like music, are only air molecules dancing in time and measure. "Only by the form, the pattern,/ Can words or music" (140-1) attain the ideal of a "music heard so deeply/That it is not heard at all" (210-1) in "The Dry Salvages." Like Christ in the desert, the poet is distracted from seeing this pattern by earthly temptations, imaged in the "crying shadow in the funeral dance" (157). The funeral dance is the opposite of the stillpoint dance and anticipates the impersonal funeral dance of time in "East Coker" II, which belongs to no one, "for there is no one to bury" (112). The funeral dance or danse macabre also recalls the earlier debased rituals or anti-dances in The Waste Land and "Hollow Men," which were played out on a worldly desert of spiritual values. It resonates also with an earlier poem in which the subject, Narcissus, performed a deathly desert dance before God because "he could not live men's ways" and willfully exchanged the torments of an illusive temporal world--the "disconsolate chimera"--for a more beautiful, private vision of eternity.

Following closely upon the heels of the funeral dance is the marriage
dance in "East Coker" I, which signifies fertility, rebirth—"the coupling of man and woman" in harmonious "concorde" with the natural world (44). Where Eliot in "Burnt Norton" II bowed to an Elizabethan authority on dance, he here quotes directly from a Tudor one: his ancestor, Sir Thomas Elyot, whose treatise *The Boke Named the Gouernour* (1531) equated various types of dancing with moral and social virtues.¹⁹ In "East Coker," "daunsinge, signifying matrimonie" is:

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A dignified and commodiois sacrament.
Two and two, necessarye coniunction,
Holding ech other by the hand or the arm
Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,
Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
Mirth of those long since under the earth
Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons
The time of the seasons and the constellations
The time of milking and the time of harvest
The time of the coupling of man and woman
And that of beasts. (24-45)
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Keeping time orders the universe, so that both men and beasts are in step or "reconciled among the stars." Unlike the meaningless circling of the waste landers and hollow men, the peasants' going "round and round" has purpose: "necessarye coniunction." Eliot's choreographing of this pagan dance to the incantatory rhythms of "Ecclesiastes" illustrates his long-held view of the "primitive" element at the heart of all liturgy.
Yet if we want to see the ancient couples dancing to the “weak pipe and drum,” the speaker warns us twice “not to come too close” (22). The image of these shadowy, sixteenth-century figures dancing in concentric circles around a bonfire (or “heart of light”) in an open field on a midsummer’s eve proves just as elusive as the experience in the rose garden. The archaic spelling from The Gouerneur, according to B. Rajan, is “subtly foreign to its context and accentuates” the unreality of the scene.  

The laughter of these dancers, according to him, is not spontaneous. It is “the mirth of those long since under the earth, a gesture cut off from the experience which gives it validity” (Eliot: A Study of His Writing 83). Those who keep time to the rhythm of their bodies, Eliot implies, keep time to the rhythm of a wheeling, transient universe.

Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death. (46-7)

The speaker’s abrupt swing in tone from one of enchantment to somberness indicates that for him the natural or sexual order is a fragile one. Instead of rebirth and fertility, the mutability scale tips in favor of death and decay: “Dung and dust.” The marriage dance ultimately goes the way of the funeral one. “The dancers are all gone under the hill,” we are told in the second movement (100).
Eliot’s evocation of the sexual connotations of dance only to “bury” them a few lines later suggests he never completely overcame his prudish attitude toward the body—especially when half of those dancing “bodies” belonged to women. Lyndall Gordon likened Eliot’s grave summation of the marriage rite as “dung and dust” to the “stern voice of denial” of “the Puritan killjoy in Hawthorne’s tale, who rebukes and breaks up the nuptial frolics in ‘The Maypole of Merry Mount’” (New Life 98). While Gordon’s judgement is harsh, Eliot’s language in this section betrays a certain ambivalence about even benign fertility rites. The speaker quotes Elyot, who wrote for a class of aristocrats on the moral virtues to be gained from dignified dancing, and then presents us with a picture of peasants, heavy in “clumsy shoes,” engaging in a lot of brusque fumbling with their mates. Their dancing is not nearly as graceful as the midnight dance of the “Jellicle Cats” in Old Possum’s Book of Cats.

By fusing dance with a purgatorial image of fire, Eliot tried in “Little Gidding” (1943), his last quartet, to reconcile “East Coker”’s earthy, timebound dance with “Burnt Norton”’s airy eternal one. While treading “the pavement in a dead patrol” at dusk during a London air raid, the speaker in the second movement meets a “compound ghost,” who informs him of the bitter disillusionments attendant on old age and the despair awaiting in hell for the unrepentant.
Critics have dismantled this compound ghost into several representative “voices” of literary tradition (like Davies and Elyot), usually with Dante at the forefront. Yet the refining fire that melts away the dross of imperfections in a dance also recalls the flames of Yeats’s “Byzantium,” in which “blood-begotten” spirits—“Dying in a dance./An agony of trance”—purged themselves of all “complexities of mire and blood.” For both poets, dance served to order or reconcile such opposites as pleasure/pain, motion/stillness, time/eternity and to express in language a mystical experience which eluded rational discourse. For Eliot, this fiery dance is more moral than aesthetic, since it burned away the imperfections of selfish love (“Attachments to self and to things and to persons” 152), leaving the soul free to experience the divine love he associated with Christ.

Paul Valéry, another poet Eliot respected, may also be a part of Eliot’s compound ghost. There are non-Christian, metaphysical implications to the dancer’s refining fire, especially as it builds on the previous image of dance as the stillpoint or intersection of time and timelessness. Eliot was probably familiar with Valéry’s dialogue “The Dance and the Soul” (1921), in which
Valéry had Socrates equate the dancer with a flame. The dance was capable of evoking "the moment itself" (like the privileged moment of Eliot's immediate experience), which was neither the past nor the future, but the instant, which the dancer like the flame rendered visible to the eye.

And flame, is it not also the proud, ungraspable form assumed by the noblest destruction?--What will never happen again happens magnificently before our eyes! --What will never happen again must happen in the most magnificent manner possible! (Valéry 320)

In the third movement of "Little Gidding," the dancer and the flame are transformed into another image of the rose. Woven from the element of purifying fire, the rose was a Dantean symbol suggesting the fusion of opposites in a lovers' knot (Traversi 210). According to Helen Gardner, John Haywood suggested to Eliot that he revise line 184 -- "To summon the spectre of a Rose" -- into "ghost of a rose" instead. Eliot refused and wrote back to Haywood that he was specifically thinking of the ballet he saw in Paris (one based on a poem by Gautier), in which Nijinsky had made his famous leap (Composition of Four Quartets 202). According to Gordon, the utter abandonment of Nijinsky's leap demonstrated to the poet the "tension between individual tumult and the discipline of set form" (New Life 125). When asked how he executed it, Nijinsky used to say that once he was up in the air, he forgot to come down. But when he did alight, it was
always in one of the five prescribed positions of classical ballet.

The image of dance in “Little Gidding” V is a reworking of the language problem in “Burnt Norton” V. Now the poet emerges victorious over the slippery, finite words of the funeral dance through his harmonious reconciliation of opposites within the medium of poetry. The marriage of formal and colloquial, archaic and neologic, (“The common word exact without vulgarity,/ The formal word precise but not pedantic”) results in: “The complete consort dancing together” (221-3). Thus dance is finally an emblem of successful poetic composition.

“The complete consort dancing together” is also an apt description of how the image in Four Quartets re-capitulates and unifies Eliot’s entire thoughts and feelings on dance. In “Burnt Norton” II, his conjectures about the innate appeal of rhythm to the physiological unconscious are illustrated in the “trilling,” singing blood and the “dance along the artery.” In the same movement, the mystical experience of the timeless moment, which Eliot had equated with Bradley’s “immediate experience,” is figured as the dance “at the stillpoint of the turning world.” In the fifth movement, St. Narcissus’ dance of religious purification in the desert is abstracted into the impersonal image of “the crying shadow of the funeral dance.” “East Coker” I transforms the empty, vacant rituals of The Waste Land and “Hollow Men”
into the more purposeful (though still imperfect) marriage rites of sixteenth-century peasants. The impersonality and askesis Eliot saw in Massine and Nijinsky's art, finally, underlines "Burnt Norton"'s cosmic dance as well as "Little Gidding"'s purgatorial one.
Notes

1 In 1958, after Eliot married his second wife, Valerie Fletcher, and brought her with him to visit Harvard, he confessed to some Cambridge reporters that he might take dancing lessons again as “I have not danced at all for some years.” The Eliots, in fact, were the only “adults” among the invited faculty and their guests to make an appearance at a late-night undergraduate ball (Gordon, New Life 256).

2 Gautier exerted a tremendous influence on the course of ballet in Paris in the 1840’s and 50’s as the critic of La Presse. He was an ardent admirer of the ballerina Carlotta Grisi and wrote the libretto of Giselle, the quintessential romantic ballet, expressly for her.

3 For further sources of “Saint Narcissus,” see Grover Smith (34-5) and Gottlieb (54-6).

4 References to Massine and the Ballet Russe are in The Letters 292, 319, 523 and 529.


10 “The Beating of a Drum” 12.

11 In the September 1918 issue of the Egoist, Eliot concluded a review of Wyndham Lewis’s novel Tarr with the following observation: “The artist I believe is more primitive, as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries, his experience is deeper than civilization, and he only uses the phenomena of civilization in expressing it” (106).

12 For proof that Stravinsky’s music, like Frazer’s Golden Bough, expressed the continuity of the “primitive” with the modern, Eliot only had to
glance at the “savages” sitting next to him during the London production, whom he had to poke with the point of his umbrella in order to refrain them from jeering. In Massine’s choreography, however, he found no interpenetration of past and present. According to Eliot, it only evoked ... “primitive ceremony.... The Vegetation Rite upon which the ballet is founded, remained, in spite of the music, a pageant of primitive culture” (The Dial, Oct. 1921: 453). How different Eliot’s reaction would have been had he remained in Paris in 1913 and seen Nijinsky’s choreographic innovations (like the spastic, “unballetic” movements of his depersonalized mass), we can only speculate. Since the ballet caused such an uproar among the French intelligentsia, it is likely that Eliot was familiar with Jacque Rivière’s two essays for the La Nouvelle Revue Française, which vividly described the modernity of Nijinsky’s ballet and the horror of its violence (Howarth 235-6). Eliot would have applauded what Rivière described as Nijinsky’s anti-romantic movement vocabulary, especially the latter’s rejection of individualism and a transcendent idealism: According to Rivière: Nijinsky’s movement closes over the emotion; it arrests and contains it.... The body is no longer a means of escape for the soul ... but by the very resistance that it offers to the soul, becomes completely permeated by it (qtd. in Garafola, “Vaslav Nijinsky” 22).


15 According to Mildred Meyer Boaz, Eliot saw Petrushka in 1910 with Rivière, and continued to subscribe to his La Nouvelle Revue Française, which devoted several seminal articles on Nijinsky’s ballets (218).


17 Eliot had singled out Davies in 1926 essay, including him among those poets who “had that strange gift,...for turning thought into feeling” (On Poetry and Poets 136). Eliot himself had a natural affinity to the Elizabethan world view exemplified in Davies’ poem, one which seamlessly moved from abstract concepts to concrete images. For a more elaborate discussion of Davies’ role in “Burnt Norton,” the interested reader is referred to Salamon, “The Orchestration of ‘Burnt Norton I’” 50-65; Bernstein, “Dance in the Four Quartets” 230-61 and Blamires 18.
18 In a totally different reading of this passage, Michael Beehler
suggests that “the drift of stars,” since it is unstable or moving, is a “parodic
figure of the infirmity of reconciling patterns.” He interprets the dance as a
figure for the liberating, differential energy of language that refuses to be
fixed in any determined pattern. The dance, like the image of fire as a
“liberating openness and unreadability in “Little Gidding,” “frees words from
any pure essence of literal meaning” (129, 143).

19 For an elaboration of Elyot’s treatise, the reader is referred to
Major, “Elyot’s Moralization of the Dance” and Salamon, “A Gloss on
‘Daunsinge’: Sir Thomas Elyot and T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets” (27-36; 584-
605). Salamon draws out the differences between Eliot’s attitude toward
dance in “East Coker” with his namesake’s humanist treatment in The Boke.
Major contrasts Elyot’s emphasis on the moral virtues of dance with Davies’
more aesthetic approach in The Orchestra.

20 According to Linda Salamon, T.S.Eliot used Elyot’s words in this
passage as conscious archaisms to evoke the past and “give it a gracious,
honorable meaning.” But he also knew the effect was “patently dated.” For
Salamon, anyone acquainted with The Governor would know the shadowy
figures are not Elyot’s aristocratic dancers.

   His courtly couples move in handfast pairs at a
   stately pace down a late medieval hall to the tune
   of shawm and rebeck, not pipe and drum... loam
   feet and rustic laughter are not dignified, the coupling
   of man and woman is not a sacrament, feet rising and
   falling are not commodious but vaguely ominous.
   (“A Gloss on ‘Daunsinge’” 599)

21 The two most striking Dantean echoes in this passage are from
Canto XV of The Inferno, where Dante meets his former mentor Bruno Latini,
and Canto XXVI of The Purgatorio, where he meets the spirit of Provençal
poet Arnaud Daniel, who accepted the fire of Purgatory and was thereby
incorporated into the dance or measure of love. In Dante’s vision, those
closest to God were the most active; the angels danced around God imaged
as a brilliant point of light while the devil was encased in a cake of ice from
the waist down and rendered immobile.

22 Much earlier, in the 1917 poem “A Cooking Egg,” Eliot had alluded
to Weber’s music-- An Invitation to the Dance-- for Le Spectre.
DANCING WITH THE “GREATER, NOT THE LESSER SEX”

Beginning with his first novel *The White Peacock* (written between 1906-1911), all but three of Lawrence’s nine lengthy novels contain dance scenes.¹ The naturaistic depiction of traditional social dances from his early “Nottingham” period, which included *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and the story “The White Stocking” (1907), are not, superficially at least, distinguishable from comparable scenes in the novels of Lawrence’s English predecessors like Jane Austin and George Eliot. Yet even at this stage, dance is thematically significant for the tension it evokes between the social classes and the sexes. With *The Rainbow* (1915), Lawrence tried in his middle period to capture in a heightened tone and highly expressionistic style, the impersonal, unchanging, “inhuman” state of his characters while dancing. Several of the dance scenes enact Yeats’s insight about the impossibility of differentiating dancer from dance, as the individual loses his ego to the “greater inhuman will” contained in the dance. The middle period also marks the emergence of what Langston Elsbree described as “the compelling mythopoeia of the woman dancing alone” (“Lawrence” 4). She is treacherous, like Yeats’s dancer, but for altogether different reasons. While the language is more subdued in *The Rainbow’s* sequel, *Women in Love* (1920), its three major dance scenes are psychologically complex and

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reveal intricate, shifting relationships between the characters. Finally, in two novels from Lawrence's last period, The Plumed Serpent (1926) and Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928), the focus is on the mythological implications of dance as an impersonal rite of rebirth for the individual and the community.

Dance, like sex, was important to Lawrence because its physically expressive, non-verbal gestures constituted "blood-knowledge" or "phallic consciousness," two terms he used interchangeably to mean sympathetic awareness, instinct, intuition, "all the vast vital flux of knowing that goes on in the dark, antecedent to the mind" (SCAL 90). What one knows through the body "overwhelms, obliterates, and annuls mind-consciousness. Mind-consciousness extinguishes blood-consciousness, and consumes the blood" (91). Lawrence felt the two forms of consciousness were inherently antagonistic in man and that duality was our "cross."

But modern man, according to Lawrence, had made the burden unduly heavy by actively favoring his mental life over the instinctual life of the body. Lawrence dramatized this imbalance in his fiction as a breakdown in the relationships between the sexes. Because many of Lawrence's characters cannot connect to each other through a spontaneous give and take of sympathy, they resort to the only means they have: mechanically exerting their wills over the other. Often the will to control, without the
guidance of the instincts, results in a total loss of control. Hermione’s “rationalizations” before she smashes Birkin’s skull with her lapis lazuli sculpture is an extreme case in point.

Dance in the major fiction served mainly a therapeutic function; it was a means of redressing the split between mind and body (also referred to in his essays as the dichotomy between “being” and “knowing” or the “sympathetic” and “voluntary” impulses in man). His more unbalanced characters are confronted with their repressed urges, like the will to control, which rise to the surface in the impersonal dance. For them, the dance is likely to be a destructive force: Ursula’s figurative “annihilation” of her lover Skrebensky in *The Rainbow* or her sister Gudrun’s diabolical dancing in front of a herd a cattle in *Women in Love.* For Lawrence’s more mature characters, those who are willing to let go of their egos, the dance is likely to be creative: Kate Leslie’s initiation into “phallic consciousness” or Connie Chatterley’s homage to it with her rain-soaked fertility rites in the sacred wood surrounding Wragby Manor.

**Biographical Background**

Unlike the other three modernists, Lawrence’s nomadic existence, living far away from European centers of culture, precluded much contact with theatrical dancing. There are only two occasions on which Lawrence
crossed paths with contemporary dancers and the second was indirectly. The first was at an Armistice party in 1918, in which members of the Bloomsbury group hobnobbed and foxtrotted with Diaghilev, Massine and Lydia Lopokova (the future Mrs. John Maynard Keynes). David Garnett recorded that Lawrence was still in such a funk over the war that he sat on a sofa by himself and hardly spoke to anyone (Nehls 478-9). Shortly afterwards, Lawrence left England for good, settled briefly in Florence and struck up what was to become a notorious friendship with Maurice Magnus, an eccentric German/American who lived extravagantly, committed suicide and left his debts for his friends to settle. Magnus had been Isadora Duncan's manager and became the model for Mr. May, the dubious theatrical manager in Lawrence's novel The Lost Girl. 3

Magnus' connection with both Duncan and Lawrence was not a total coincidence, as more than one critic has noted an affinity between these two unlikely contemporaries. Raynor Heppenstall referred to Duncan as "the female counterpart of D.H. Lawrence in literature" (Copeland 276). To Sandra Gilbert, Duncan's frequent image of herself as the Magna Mater or "potent Griselda" was mirrored in Lawrence's "frequently articulated ideas about the primacy of maternity" (Balbert and Marcus 131). The image of floods flowing in great waves is Lawrence's most prevalent figure for the creative female principle in the universe, just as wave images pervaded
Duncan’s dances and writings. Both artists, moreover, glorified the body and shared an anatomical view of human psychology. Standing still for hours with her hands folded beneath her breasts, Duncan discovered that the solar plexus reflected the spirit’s vision and was the “central spring of all movement” (Kendall 66). To Lawrence, the solar plexus was the “great, magnetic or dynamic centre of first consciousness,” which through the mother’s navel, enforce[d] in the fetus a sympathetic relation with the cosmos (Fantasia 221). Duncan and Lawrence were also propagandists and self-exiles, who prophetically denounced their places of birth and sought sustaining images in past cultures: Duncan among the ancient Greeks, Lawrence with the Aztecs and Etruscans.

Even if Lawrence never mentioned Duncan, there are enough references to other contemporary choreographers in his fiction to suggest he was well aware of the new art. In The Lost Girl (1920), for instance, Mr. May (or Magnus) engages a dancer for Houghton’s Pleasure Palace who bears a remarkable resemblance to symbolist dancer Loïe Fuller. Miss Poppy Traherne, “a lady in innumerable petticoats,...could whirl herself into anything you like, from an arum lily in green stockings to a rainbow and a catherine wheel and a cup and saucer” (132). Miss Poppy creates her own sets by manipulating fabric: like Fuller, she “twirl[ed] till her skirts lift[ed] as in
a breeze, rose up and became a rainbow above her now darkened legs." (136).

However, the first "real life" dancer to make a significant appearance in his fiction was none other than Lawrence's father Arthur, who became the model of the dark, dancing miner Walter Morel in *Sons and Lovers*. Arthur Lawrence was inarticulate, could hardly write and never read anything but the newspaper, but by all reports was a lively, accomplished dancer. According to Keith Sagar, Lawrence recalled that his father once ran a dancing class and that the only time he ever heard his mother praise his father was for his dancing (*Art of D.H. Lawrence* 15). Arthur inherited his ability from his father, John Lawrence, who was also known for his graceful step (*Meyers* 11). There were no dancers, to be sure, on the novelist's maternal side. The daughter of a ruined lace manufacturer and pious Congregationalist, Lydia Beardsall inherited her family's puritanical disdain of this idle pastime.

In all likelihood, Lydia discouraged her frail youngest son from dancing as well. As an adult, Lawrence never mentions in his letters taking dancing lessons or attending dances, as Yeats, Eliot and Williams do. But we are treated to a vivid portrayal of how Lawrence fancied himself dancing through Rupert Birkin, his alter-ego in *Women in Love*. Birkin dances on
three separate occasions, always alone and joyously, like a satyr in a rapid quirky movement "he had all to himself" (85). Ursula is "fascinated by the sight of his loose, vibrating body, perfectly abandoned to its own dropping and swinging," yet felt it was an "obscenity, in a man who talked as a rule so very seriously" (160). The differences between Birkin's uninhibited dancing and that of another biographically related character, Cyril Beardsall, the first person narrator in Lawrence's first novel, are revealing. In *The White Peacock*, Cyril's dancing typifies his provincial Midlands middle-class aspirations as well as his Pre-Raphaelite tastes. He performs the socially acceptable forms with a refined, well-bred aplomb, but with none of Birkin's inimitable style or freedom. Cyril, we will see shortly, is more important as a commentator on the dancing of others.

In addition to the fiction, Lawrence often wrote about dance in his travel sketches. In fact, where Eliot fancied himself a ballet critic, Lawrence became a cultural dance historian, trotting around the globe, observing the communal dances of pre-industrial cultures and comparing them favorably with the gyrating, "jazzing" and "bouncingly copulative" popular dances of his own day. In "The Dance," published in *Twilight in Italy* (1916), two Englishwomen dance with Italian peasants and express, according to critic John Foster, "a bipolar unity between 'southern' Dionysian power and a Northern Europe, which is working out its last consequences of Christianity"
(184). In another essay, Lawrence mentions how he had been struck with a fleeting "sense of religion" watching the "utter dark absorption" of naked men performing the "so-called devil dances in a far-remote jungle in Ceylon" (Selected Essays 183). But it wasn't until he came to America and saw the dances of the Southwest Indians that he experienced a permanent sense of religion as an "uncontrollable sensual experience, even more so than love" (Phx 144). In three essays published in Mornings in Mexico (1927), Lawrence, drawing on Jane Harrison's Ancient Art and Ritual, underlined the differences between the European view of spectacle, which included dance and drama, and the Indians' dance rituals. Finally, in "Making Love to Music," written between 1927-29, Lawrence unfavorably compared the anti-sexual, mechanical dances of modern Europeans and Americans, like the Charleston and tango, to an ancient tomb painting in which an Etruscan woman illustrated unity of being as she "dance[d] her very soul into existence" (Phx 166).

**Warming Up: The White Peacock, Sons and Lovers and "The White Stocking"**

While lacking the complexity of later novels, The White Peacock has three major dance scenes that outline the thematic uses Lawrence was to make of dance. Even at this early stage, dance became the focus of division
between the sexes and between what Lawrence felt was natural and what he considered bourgeois. Sometimes associated with a vital playfulness among the characters, dance at other times is used as a weapon in the service of sexual domination and class discrimination. In addition to theme, the dance contributes to a cluster of images associated with the white peacock of the title, which Lawrence took from Aubrey Beardsley’s illustrations for Oscar Wilde’s Salomé. In the play and especially in the drawings, white peacocks are associated with the decadent femme fatale dancer.4

The White Peacock focuses on a love triangle between a simple farmer, George Saxton, and the hyper-cultivated Lettie Beardsall, Cyril’s sister, who ultimately rejects George and marries the son of an industrialist, Leslie Tempest. (Cyril has a relationship with Emily, George’s sister, which is also doomed to failure.) Lettie is alternately attracted and repelled by George’s bulging biceps, masculine independence and exuberant polka dancing and he, in turn, is swept away by her dazzling talk and cultural accomplishments, such as her ability to play the piano and dance the minuet. George, with his easy male grace and beauty, is the forerunner of such prototypical Laurentian males as Walter Morel, Oliver Mellors and Don Ramón Carrasco. His affinity with nature is stressed in the mowing scenes where Cyril remarks on the gracefulness of George’s scything: “he swung
with a beautiful rhythm from the waist.” Cyril admits “there was something exceedingly attractive about the rhythmic body” (93). Lettie is “lissome” and “by nature graceful” too, but unlike George she is willful and follows the dictates of her mind rather than her instincts and is, therefore, Lawrence’s first fatal woman.

The first dance scene, which takes place in the wheat fields under a full August moon, reveals the relationships among the five main characters. The moon, which will form an important symbolic cluster with dance in The Rainbow, makes Lettie feel like doing the polka. Leslie, characteristically, hates the polka, so Lettie does a “flying” whirl, “hissing through the dead leaves,” first with Cyril, then with George. Cyril thinks the polka is “innate in one’s feet” (102). The polka is certainly an appropriate form for a pastoral setting, since it transcends class barriers and is free of rules and restrictions. Caught up in the dizziness of whirling, its participants surrender their individual egos to escape to an impersonal level of pure sensuality.

According to Cyril,
[Lettie and George] spun around the grass.
...he leaped, sprang with large strides, carrying
her with him. It was tremendous, irresistible
dancing. Emily and I must join, making an
inner ring. Now and again there was a sense of
something white flying near, and wild past us.
Long after we were tired they danced on.
At the end, he looked big, erect, nerved with
triumph, and she was exhilarated like a Bacchante.
(102)

The next dance occurs inside the Saxton house and enacts the
mounting sexual and social pressures the couple feels. This time George
initiates the dance and proceeds to overwhelm Lettie by whirling her around
his living room until she collapses from exhaustion. The rest of the family
watches anxiously as George’s “eyes glowed like coal” and “he was panting
in sobs.” Lettie, however, has her comeuppance and discomfits George by
forcing him to display his clumsiness in a minuet, a dance he is not familiar
with. According to Cyril, she “put him through the steps.... It was very
ridiculous” (149). As opposed to the closed-form of the polka, the minuet
(which went through a brief revival at the end of the nineteenth century) was
an open-form performed mostly among the upper classes (Rust 78-9). With
its delicately planned geometry of dance steps, it was also the quintessence
of dignity and formality. There was no room for individual variation,
embellishment or creativity. Lettie, showing off her cultural refinement,
dominates the rest of the scene and bullies Cyril into taking her through two
other intricate, “set” forms—the valeta and mazurka. Then she condescends to teach Emily how to dance.

In the last dance scene in the novel, George surprises Lettie at her twenty-first birthday party by announcing that he’s been to Nottingham to learn such upper-class forms as the mazurka, valeta and minuet. Lettie is impressed but tells him “it’s too late.” She confesses she can’t help expecting “things.” She was raised to expect them: “We can’t help ourselves, we’re all chessmen” (177). Foreshadowing Connie Chatterley’s unhappy marriage, Lettie tragically splits herself off from physical life by marrying non-dancer Leslie (the forerunner of Clifford Chatterley) for the mental and social life he offers. Tormented by his passion for Lettie, George eventually destroys himself with alcohol.

As a dancer, Lettie is also obliquely associated with the novel’s references to Beardsley’s illustrations of Salomé and her white peacocks. According to Robert Gajdusek, Lawrence alludes to white peacocks thirteen times (193), although the first overt mention of them is not made until late in the novel and then by a minor character, the gamekeeper Annabelle, another prototype of the “virile” Laurentian male. While Annabelle is seated with Cyril in a church graveyard, a peacock with a voluptuous neck and rich tail “glimmering like a stream of coloured stars” perches on the bowed head
of a stone angel. Annabelle cries out: “That’s the soul of a woman—or it’s the devil” (*WP* 210). The bird reminds him of his first wife, the Lady Crystabel, who got “souly,” meaning she steeped herself in culture and idealisms, refused to have children and eventually got bored with her “good animal” Annabelle. When the bird defecates on the bowed head, the gamekeeper is certain. “Just look!” he said, ‘the dirty devil’s run her muck over that angel. A woman to the end, I tell you, all vanity and screech and defilement” (210).

In both the novel and Beardsley’s drawings, the white peacock is a symbol for the predatory female. But Cyril makes an interesting reversal of Salomé’s traditional connotations, which will have important ramifications for Lawrence’s subsequent novels. After Annabelle relates the story of his first marriage and how his masculinity was violated, Cyril suggests that they at least concede the “whiteness” of the female peacock or pea-hen, implying the color’s sterility, rather than its traditional association with purity. Unlike the Salomé who was deadly because of her excessive beauty and handed down to Yeats through Wilde and Beardsley, Lawrence’s dancers are treacherous when they think and, as Annabelle says, fail to be “good animals.”

Once Lettie makes a split between her mind and body by marrying Leslie, she too is cloaked in peacock imagery.
She let her cloak slide over her white shoulder and fall with silk splendour of a peacock's gorgeous blue over the arm of the large settee. There she stood, with her white hand upon the peacock of her cloak .... She knew her own splendour, and she drew up her throat laughing and brilliant with triumph. (330)

In the earlier polka scene between Lettie and George, Cyril's observation of "something white flying near, and wild" was no doubt one of the thirteen white peacocks noticed in the text. In the dance scene where Lettie used her mastery of sophisticated steps to show her superiority to George, Cyril had compared her to another femme fatale, Carmen, the heroine of Gautier's poem, Mérimée's novella and Bizet's opera. Lettie danced elegantly, he admitted, but with a little of "Carmen's ostentation--her "dash" and "deviltry" (150). Another oblique association between Lettie and white peacocks occurs when Cyril introduces George to Beardsley's illustrations. George is convinced that if a tryst can be arranged later in the day on which he shows the pictures to Lettie, she will consent to drop Leslie and marry him instead. George, reacting to the erotic element in art nouveau, makes a subliminal identification of Lettie with Salomé, but is blind to the dazzling whiteness of her peacocks. Because she had been out shopping all day for "white" things for her wedding to Leslie, the magic moment George desired is never consummated.
The next fatal women Lawrence drew—the possessive, Jocasta-like Gertrude Morel of Lawrence's most autobiographical novel, *Sons and Lovers*—was a puritan who shunned dancing. Possibly in unconscious deference to his mother, who was the model for Mrs. Morel, dance is often alluded to, but mostly absent from the text. While not a major theme, it continues to epitomize the conflict between the sexes and social classes. The association between dance and the vital force in nature, hinted at in the pastoral polka dancing between George and Lettie in *The White Peacock*, is strengthened in Lawrence's third novel. This force is free, individualistic and indeterminate and runs counter to a deterministic force operating in society, which includes the physically crippling environment of the mines and the emotionally crippling Oedipal relationships between Mrs. Morel and her sons, not to mention her sober Protestant background.

Ironically, it was the sensuous dimension of dance which caused the middle-class Mrs. Morel to "slip and fall" into the lower classes by marrying a miner. In "The Early Married Life of the Morels," she notices Morel dancing at a Christmas party and is drawn to the "subtle exultation like glamour in his movement."

Gertrude herself was rather contemptuous of dancing; she had not the slightest inclination towards that accomplishment, and had never learned even a Roger de Coverly. She was
puritan, like her father, high-minded and really stern. Therefore the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her. (SL 10)

Dance also functions in the narrative to signify a reversal in the Morels' relationship. Because she "was too much his opposite," after one year of marriage, Mrs. Morel becomes thoroughly disillusioned. Morel's dancing soon becomes a sign to her of his lack of moral and intellectual fiber. Because "she was superior" and "could not help it," the neighbor ladies enjoy taunting her about Morel's past prowess as a dancer. They tell her about the dancing classes he ran in the Miners' Arms' club-room for five years and how "it was thronged every Tuesday, and Thursday, an' Sat'day--an' there was carryin's-on, accordin' to all accounts." The narrator comments: "This kind of thing was gall and bitterness to Mrs. Morel" (13).

Through a combination of factors--his own weakness, his wife's "casting him off," the physical conditions at the mines--Morel's "sensuous flame" is extinguished early in the marriage. But it is re-kindled in his eldest son William, who "in spite of his mother," inherits his father's passion for dancing. At the same time, he inherits his mother's middle-class aspirations
("getting on") and is encouraged by her to look down on his father as a brutish failure. Gertrude lavishes William and her younger son Paul with the displaced erotic passion withheld from Morel. "She saw him a man, young, full of vigour, making the world glow again for her" (47). "Almost, he was like her knight who wore her favour in the battle" (79). William is not resilient enough to withstand (as Paul will) the crippling effects of this Oedipal attachment and the "split" he makes between his mind and body eventually kills him.

As in the Moreis’ early relationship, references to dance punctuate the narrative of William’s fate and inevitable decline. Like Paul’s death in the story “The Rocking-Horse Winner,” William’s pneumonia and death is ascribed to some eerie, supernatural cause, as if he were being punished for a transgression against his mother that included his dancing and sexual disloyalty. After a succession of “flames” come to the house asking for William, Mrs. Morel tells him to keep away “those brazen baggages you meet at dancing-classes” (53). She leaves the house rather than have to face her son costumed as a Highlander for a “fancy-dress ball,” even if the ball is a sign of William’s upward social mobility (54). As William grows more successful, earning thirty shillings a week in Nottingham, the conflict between his mother’s ambitions and his father’s dancing begins to take a toll. We are told that he was studying hard and growing serious. But
"something seemed to be fretting him. Still he went out to the dances and the river parties" (54). Then when he is earning £120 a week and living in London away from his mother, William meets a girl at a dance and becomes engaged. The empty-headed "fribble" Lily, whom William nicknames "Gypsy" (perhaps a reference to Carmen) is his mother's antithesis. He writes to her then only "of the dances to which he went with his betrothed."

When he brings Gypsy home at Christmas to meet the family, she talks about "London, about dances" (115,117). William admits she is shallow but for "some things," he confesses he can't do without her (131). The narrative winds up William's short life with a postscript. He had predicted to his mother that if he should die, Gypsy would quickly forget all about him. Two months after he does, Mrs. Morel receives a note from her stating: "I was at a ball last night.... I had every dance--did not sit out one" (141). With William dead, dancing is never mentioned again in the Morel household.

In the story "The White Stocking," which Philip Hobsbaum described as "a masterpiece in a naturalistic mode" (24), dance is the source of tension in a love triangle. The heroine Elsie Whiston is a flighty, "pretty little thing," and "flicking her small, delightful limbs" is a modern Maenad (CSS 244). Her stolid, middle-class husband Ted does not dance, but is the solid rock from which "she took [her] giddy little flights into nowhere" (250). Sam Adams, their former boss, is Pan to Elsie's nymph and their dancing together
releases powerful forces, which, like George's polka dancing and Morel's "sensual flame," cannot be managed socially.

The structure of the story is a triangle. In Part I, we find out that Elsie has been receiving Valentine's Day gifts for the last two years from Adams, including a white stocking she had pulled from her drawer, mistaken for a handkerchief and carried in her purse the evening of Adams' Christmas ball. Part II is a flashback to that evening, in which Elsie, unmarried, is accompanied by Whiston, but dances almost every dance with Adams. Part III returns us to the present Valentine's day. Elsie puts on both white stockings and, in front of Whiston, to whom she is now married, dances "slowly round the room, kicking up her feet half reckless, half jeering in ballet-dancer's fashion" (261). Taunting him with her movements, Elsie becomes the first of several females in Lawrence's fiction to defy the male and dance her will to be separate. Whiston responds by knocking her down. The story ends with one of Lawrence's ambiguous reconciliations.

Because of its publishing history, "The White Stocking" demonstrates how dance had crystallized in Lawrence's thought to become a significant part of his "metaphysic." The story was originally written in 1907 and then revised three times over the next several years. Keith Cushman notes that for the final version of the story included in The Prussian Officer (1914),
Adams' character was changed from "a rather gross old roué" to a dapper man of forty, exuding animal magnetism and that the dance scenes between him and Elsie were greatly expanded and intensified (155). These scenes prefigure the ones in Lawrence's mature fiction in several ways. For one, the impersonality expressed in their dancing is linked to Lawrence's notion of "phallic consciousness" or carnal knowledge. As Cushman says, the dance scenes "could easily be a description of sexual intercourse." "Adams does not speak to Elsie, and his eyes have 'nothing to do with her'.... In the dance Adams and Elsie have celebrated the cosmic energies of the universe together—but they have not attempted to know each other" (156). While the story's naturalistic style belongs to an earlier period, a pattern of flood imagery in the dance passages presages the dance scenes in The Rainbow as well as the love scenes in Lady Chatterley's Lover. Dancing with Adams, Elsie is carried by "a kind of strong, warm flood" (CSS 252). In their next dance, which is even more erotic, "Elsie seemed to swim out of contact with the room into ... another denser element of him." "The room was...like an atmosphere, ... under the sea" (254). In The Rainbow, we will see Ursula, dancing with Skrebensky at her uncle's wedding, carried away by "one great flood." The room "under the sea" in the story becomes in the novel a "vision of the underworld" (R 318). When Connie Chatterley reaches an orgasm with her gamekeeper, "it seemed she was like the sea, nothing but dark waves rising and heaving" (LCL 163). In all these
instances, the image of liquefaction is a correlative for the mind's dissolving into the body through either dance or actual sex.

Dance Therapy:
The Rainbow and Women in Love

In the earlier two novels, Lawrence had found in the dance a way to express the conflicts he saw between males and females, mothers and sons, society and nature, mind and instincts. Reading Harrison's Ancient Art and Ritual in 1913 confirmed his belief that what is expressed in a dance is some greater inhuman will or realm of experience beyond personality and self. 5 Around the same time, Lawrence came into contact with Italian Futurism, which convinced him that what the modern novel needed was a more impersonal, fluid conception of character than that of the "stable ego" handed down from the nineteenth century. But before he could implement his new ideas about character or transform the non-verbal experience of dance into prose, Lawrence needed a more expressive style than the naturalistic one of his earlier fiction. We saw its partial development in "The White Stocking." In addition to a highly allusive pattern of imagery, Lawrence was also to devise a rhythmical, incantatory prose based on what he described in the "Forward" to Women in Love as "the continual slightly modified repetition" (Phx II: 276). The new language, the impersonal (or
what Lawrence was to call the “allotropic”) view of character and the emphasis on dance as a ritual in which one passed beyond “daytime” consciousness and entered the realm of the “Unknown,” characterize the great dance scenes in *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920). No longer conditioned by their pasts, the characters are now responsible for rectifying imbalances of love and power or reason and instinct, both within themselves and in their relations with others.

*The Rainbow’s* three dance scenes—the corn-harvest *pas de deux* between Will and Anna Brangwen, Anna’s naked solo while pregnant and the moonlit *danse macabre* between Ursula and Skrebensky—illustrate how Lawrence adapted *Ancient Art and Ritual* and the futurists to his “metaphysic.” Harrison’s thesis, we recall, was that art and ritual arose from the same impulse: unsatisfied desire. Originally, art was purely a function of ritual and did not have independent status. Harrison tried to isolate the moment in the cultural development of Greece when the sacred dance of the vegetation cults ceased to be the “thing done” (or “dromenon”) by the whole community and became instead drama and formal religion. When this happened, the community became the audience rather than the participants. Occasioning this separation was a combined loss of faith in the efficacy of ritual and the influx of a historically-oriented culture (Homer’s Heroic Age).
that put its faith in the power of the individual rather than in the collective energy of the group.

Lawrence rued the split between ritual and art. Instead of focusing on what was individual, he plunged deeper to evoke the non-human, “unconscious” bodily self within his characters, especially his females. Lawrence’s desire to capture what was eternal and unchanging behind a woman’s smile bears a remarkable resemblance to the morally indifferent blank stare on Yeats’s dancer, who, we recall, was “dead yet flesh and bone.” But in the famous letter to Edward Garnett, written from Lerici, Italy in 1914 while he was writing *The Rainbow*, Lawrence linked his theory of impersonality to the chemical notion of allotropes and what futurists like Marinetti were calling the “physiology of matter.”

... that which is physio--non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element--which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent.... Because what is interesting in the laugh of the woman is the same as the binding of the molecules of steel or their action in heat: it is the inhuman will, call it physiology, or like Marinetti--physiology of matter, that fascinates me. I don’t so much care about what the woman feels--in the ordinary usage of that word. That presumes an ego to feel with. I only care about what the woman is--what she IS--inhumanly, physiologically, materially--what she is as a phenomenon.... You mustn’t look in my novel for the old stable ego--of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the
individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we’ve been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon).  (CL I: 281-2)

The most obvious way Lawrence uncovers the “carbon” in his characters in The Rainbow’s first dance scene is by replacing their proper names with common nouns and pronouns, thus stripping them of their individual identities. While they are courting, Anna and Will Brangwen engage in the simple activity of stacking corn sheaves. Their gestures, however, have a solemn, ceremonial quality and rhythmical pattern which feels more like a dance than a farmyard chore. According to A.M. Brandabur, this scene is analogous to the “dromenon” or “thing done to regenerate fructifying power,” described in Ancient Art and Ritual (286). Their ritualized movements while harvesting are organically tied to the greater rhythmical cycles in nature. The hypnotic repetition of slightly modified phrases which describes their movements replicates in language the structures of creativity in nature.

But Anna at first is not so willing to surrender her ego or “diamond” to become mere carbon. Instead, she tries to control the dance by keeping Will at a distance. “And always, she was gone before he came. As he came,
she drew away, as he drew away, she came” (R 123). Gradually, the rhythm of their separate actions, conveyed in short sentences, modulates into longer, cumulative ones, which reach a crescendo when the couple meet face to face with their sheaves.

And the whole rhythm of him beat into his kisses, and still he pursued her, in his kisses, and still she was not quite overcome. He wondered over the moonlight on her nose! All the moonlight upon her, all the darkness within her! All the night in his arms, darkness and shine, he possessed of it all! All the night for him now, to unfold, to venture within, all the mystery to be entered, all the discovery to be made [emphasis added]. (124)

One could actually dance to the highly alliterative, incremental repetitions of the slightly varied prepositional phrases in this passage.

The hint of an imbalance in their relationship is intensified in the next dance scene, where Anna is big with baby, dancing alone to Will’s “nullification.” “When there was no one to exult with, and the unsatisfied soul must dance and play, then one danced before the Unknown” (183). The Unknown is the life-force or unknowable unconscious, which is “by its nature, unanalyzable, undefinable, inconceivable” (Fantasia 15) Ideally, in a healthy marriage, the sexual act is a pas de deux into the Unknown. But Will’s overweening need to possess and dominate Anna, together with her tendency, which we saw in the first dance, to insist on her separateness,
cause Anna to sidestep her husband and allow herself to be transported to this fourth, mystical dimension alone through ecstatic dancing.

At first, Anna's dancing before her bedroom mirror on a Saturday afternoon is conveyed as a positive celebration of fertility. Her movements are "fine," her limbs are "fine" and her face is "rapt and beautiful." Anna's swaying "like a full ear of corn, pale in the dusky afternoon" links this dance to the earlier one and its images of fertility (184). But when Anna realizes Will is watching, she repeats the dance: only this time she uses it as a means of dominating or controlling a fearful husband. To say Will over-reacts to Anna's dancing would be understatement. Like Salomé, she renders him impotent with her dancing. He is "obliterated." Just the way the firelight bounces off her limbs makes him feel like "he was being burned alive"... "at the stake" (184).

It is not Salomé, however, who Anna harkens unto, but David dancing naked before the Lord.
All the time she ran on by herself. She liked the story of David, who danced before the Lord, and uncovered himself exultingly. Why should he uncover himself to Michal, a common woman? He uncovered himself to the Lord.

Who was [Will], to come against her? No, he was not even the Philistine, the Giant. He was like Saul proclaiming his own kingship. (183)

In “The Crown,” an essay written during the The Rainbow’s gestation, Lawrence mentions David’s “dancing naked before the Ark,” to the exclusion of his spouse, “asserting the oneness, his own oneness, the one infinity, himself, the egoistic God, I AM” (Phx II: 380). The Ark that David danced in front of was the “Womb” and “the darkness which “builds up the warm shadow of the flesh in splendour and triumph, enclosing the light” (369). But David was “too feeble in sheer spirit” to conceive and remained sterile (380). Lawrence saw him as one of those warirer kings who “seek to pass beyond all relatedness, to become absolute in might and power,” but deficient in love. And “they fall inevitably” (380). Because he was imbalanced between flesh and spirit and power and love, David wore a crown of “sterile egotism” (380). For Lawrence, it took two people in a dance of “pure relatedness” to achieve unity of being (373).

Anna shares David’s “flesh” egotism because of the child in her womb. Lawrence implies that Anna would not have needed to dance or
“exult” her pregnancy were it not for Will’s imperfections. Nevertheless, without an adequate partner, her dancing, like David’s, is ultimately narcissistic and leads to her own infertility of spirit. Like David, Anna will not dance beyond the threshold of the womb to be spiritually reborn in the Unknown. Like Moses, she stands forever looking out on Mt. Pisgah, but is never permitted entrance into the Promised Land. But if “she were not the wayfarer to the unknown,” the narrator tells us afterwards, “still her doors opened under the arch of the rainbow” (R 196). Just as the covenant that God promised David passed on to David’s son Solomon (who, being untainted by blood, was allowed to build Israel’s Temple), so Ursula in the next generation will pass beyond the threshold of her mother’s domestic contentment. After several futile attempts to find self-realization, Ursula will see a sign or promise of spiritual regeneration in the form of a rainbow at the end of the novel.

But first, Ursula too must partake in a ritualized dance. Preceding her lesbian encounter with Winifred Inger and the forays into a “man’s world ... the world of daily work and duty” and “higher” education, Ursula has a passionate encounter with her lover Anton Skrebensky. When she is in her late teens (the same age as her mother was when she was courted by Will), Ursula dances with Skrebensky at her Uncle Fred’s wedding, in the same corn fields of the Marsh farm, under the same full harvest moon. But instead
of initiating them into the mysteries of the Unknown, as it did her parents, the harvest dance leads Ursula and Skrebensky to sterility and destruction. In contrasting the two scenes, Lawrence was charting the loss of efficacy in ritual which had occurred by Ursula’s generation. Because the gulf had widened considerably between the intellect and instincts in this modern age, Ursula’s dictatorial impulses are deeper and more repressed than her mother’s. When they are released, her dance proves far more demonic and potent as well.

Ursula’s dance also passes through two phases. In the first, which occurs at dusk, Ursula’s repressed aggressive side rises to the surface, and her dance with Skrebensky becomes a tug of war between two resistant wills. “It was his will and her will ... two wills locked in one motion, yet never fusing, never yielding one to the other” (318). In the second stage of her dance, she tries to suppress the “male” in Skrebensky. A full moon comes up and so do Ursula’s autoerotic impulses. She offers herself to the moon, which in Lawrence’s cosmology is female. “[Ursula] wanted the moon to fill in to her, she wanted more, more communion with the moon, consummation” (319). The language suggests a sexual union, but one which foreshadows Ursula’s lesbian relationship and excludes Skrebensky. As Paul Rosenzweig suggests, Ursula finds in the moon “an appropriate
external correlative of herself and her needs, and she temporarily assumes
the powerful qualities she has previously ascribed to the moon" (217).
“She was cold and hard and compact of brilliance as the moon itself, and
beyond him as the moonlight was beyond him” (R 320). Acting as the
moon’s agent, its cold light gives her the power of a “steel blade” with which
she must destroy Skrebensky and the other party-goers who are “dross” and
“loadstone” and weigh on her like “a blind, persistent, inert burden” (319).

In addition to being female, the moon for Lawrence was “the centre of
our terrestrial individuality in the cosmos. She is the declaration of our
existence in separateness” (Fantasia 162). What Ursula emphatically
expresses in her dance is a need to define her space as a separate
individual. The need for “separateness” balanced with its antithesis--
“relatedness”--is a Laurentian virtue, what Birkin will call “star polarity” in the
next novel. But at this stage in Ursula’s life, the need to remain separate is
excessive and absolute, as the violent impulses released in her dancing
testify. She wants to “destroy” Skrebensky.

Looking at him, at his shadowy, unreal, wavering
presence a sudden lust seized her, to lay hold of
him and tear him and make him into nothing. Her
hands and wrists felt immeasurably hard and strong,
like blades. He waited there beside her like a shadow
which she wanted to dissipate, destroy as the moon-
light destroys a darkness, annihilate, have done
with.” (321)
Since Lawrence thought every individual was comprised in different
degrees of both male and female, Ursula, in rejecting the male in
Skrebensky, denies her own humanity. When she awakens from the trance-
like conditions of the dance to ordinary "day consciousness," she is horrified
by her behavior and attempts to "deny with all her might" her
aggressiveness. "She was good, she was loving" (322). In the rest of the
novel, Ursula undergoes more non-dance rituals, trying to redress the
imbalance of antinomies within her. But she won't be prepared to surrender
her personal ego to a third principle or force that transcends dualities until
her relationship with Birkin in the novel's sequel.

Compared to that used in The Rainbow, Lawrence's language in the
three major dance scenes in Women in Love is not quite as exaggerated or
expressionistic. Neither is the allotropic level of character Lawrence
uncovers in the dance as elemental as it was in the former novel. The
reason for this is fairly obvious. The Rainbow's heavily repetitive and
rhythmic prose mirrored the continuity of a culture (marriage, sex, birth and
death among the Brangwens) that was both settled and changing. Women
in Love, on the other hand, is a synchronic rather than diachronic text. As
Tony Pinkney observed, "The Rainbow is about a place that passes through
time, whereas its successor is about a time that passes through places—the
Midlands of the Brangwens, the London of the Pompadour café, the Alpine
landscapes of the later chapters" (96). The characters in the latter novel are too highly aware of their complex, "modernist" experiences to be swept under by a prose that has "the inarticulate feel and stuff of unconscious process" (96). In short, if the characters in The Rainbow were carbon, the ones in its sequel are coal, or the next stage higher in the evolutionary process toward full self-consciousness.

The greater complexity of Woman in Love, however, is unified by a structure that has, according to Mark Schorner, "a more immediate relationship to the art of dance than to the traditional art of fiction." (54). Instead of a linear, temporal progression, the text, to use Lawrence's terms in the "Forward," "pulsates to and fro" between the "shifting allegiances" (Schorner's phrase) among four major characters engaged in two frictional relationships: that between Ursula Brangwen and Rupert Birkin, which emerges out of conflict into the possibility of redemption through a new synthesis, and that between Gudrun (Ursula's sister) and Gerald Crich, which degenerates into a battle of dominance and possession and ends in death. Lawrence also presents the relations of the two sisters and the two men to each other. The shifting allegiances within the quartet are repeated and varied in relationships formed with minor characters.
The first dance scene, which occurs among the guests at Hermione Roddice's country estate Breadalby reveals both the characters' complex internal states and their intricate relationships with each other. As a counter to the endless talk or "rattle of artillery" about politics and sociology, Hermione insists on a dance to be executed in "the style of the Russian Ballet of Pavlova and Nijinsky" (WL 84). Gudrun and Ursula mime the Biblical story of Naomi and Ruth, both figures of female vulnerability. We are tacitly reminded by Ursula's role as Naomi ("her men ... dead," standing "alone in indomitable assertion, demanding nothing") that she has just left Skrebensky in the former novel and has tried (not too successfully) to go it alone in a man's world (84). Gudrun, who plays the daughter-in-law Ruth, is fundamentally loyal but often jealous of her sister's self-sufficiency. As Keith Alldritt says, "[Gudrun's] outlook is conditioned above all by her propensity to disallow and thus thwart her responses and to withhold commitment" (166). In the dance her feelings of inadequacy come to the surface. She "clung with heavy, desperate passion to Ursula, yet smiled with subtle malevolence against her" (84). Perceiving Ursula's "dangerous helplessness," Hermione's anxiety that Ursula will steal Birkin's affections away from her are not unfounded. For Birkin sees in Ursula's dancing a "rich ... dangerous power" and "a strange unconscious bud of powerful womanhood" (85). On the other hand, Gudrun's "female, subterranean recklessness and mockery," as Elsbree observed, arouses the battle instinct in Gerald, the same instinct
which makes him both “coldly efficient in business and promiscuous in love” (“Lawrence” 21).

After the ballet, the two men reveal an essential contrast in their inner natures by joining the women in an improvisatory dance to Hungarian music. As the most conventional of the four major characters, Gerald’s feet “could not yet escape from the waltz and the two-step,” but he “was marvelously exhilarated at finding himself in motion ... feeling his force stir along his limbs and his body, out of captivity” (85). Where Gerald’s dancing is derivative but powerful, Birkin’s is spontaneous: “a purely gay motion, which he had all to himself” (85). His dancing also reveals a chameleon nature, capable (as Gerald is not) of breaking loose from the scheme of values imposed on him by his environment. Birkin will always go his own way in the novel, which is why Hermione watches him with impotent rage, hating him for his “power to escape, to exist, other than she did” (85). It is appropriate that Hermione, totally willful and incapable of acting upon her impulses, is the only one to abstain from dancing.

In the next dance scene, Gudrun practices her Dalcroze movements on a shore, while Ursula sings. Dalcroze, also called eurythmics, was at the time an experimental system of translating rhythm into bodily movements, devised by the Swiss musician Jaques-Dalcroze and taught at his Institute in
Hellerau outside of Dresden beginning in 1912. Lawrence, who was probably familiar with eurythmics through his German wife Frieda, regarded Dalcroze's universal gestures, compared to ballet's highly stylized ones, as organically connected to a natural setting. Connie Chatterley, as we will see, performs her eurythmic movements in the rain in a denuded remnant of Sherwood Forest. But there is a mechanical quality to Gudrun's movements which goes against the grain of the vital force in nature. Beginning with some "pulsing and fluttering" gestures, she works herself up into the type of atavistic, convulsive movement of Nijinsky's Dalcroze-inspired choreography for the dehumanized masses in Le Sacre du Printemps. Ursula's "eyes laugh" watching her sister and at the same time flash a "yellow light," "as if she caught some of the unconscious ritualistic suggestion of the complex shuddering and waving and drifting of her sister's white form, that was clutched in pure, mindless, tossing rhythm" (157-8).

Like Ursula's in the former novel, Gudrun's dancing is a demonic release of pent up sexual and aggressive urges, revealing what she "IS as a phenomenon" and not according to a "certain moral scheme" (CL I: 281-2). Eliseo Vivas classified this dance as a "constitutive symbol," which he isolated in Lawrence as "a complex situation or scene ... which gathers the significance of events preceding it and illumines the scenes or situations which follow. Yet it also develops a kind of self-contained intensity which
gives it a stature almost like that of an independent poem, a powerful revelation" (281). For example, Gudrun's dance "gathers the significance" of Hermione's ballet in that it dramatizes again Gudrun's jealousy over Ursula's self-sufficiency and her own feelings of emptiness. Gudrun began her movements on the shore with the "desolating, agonized feeling that she was outside of life, an onlooker, whilst Ursula was a partaker" (157). But her attempt "to throw off some bond" with her dancing doesn't fill up the void or bring her any closer to life (158).

In the second phase, Gudrun dances perilously close to a herd of cattle that she spies. Their brute power both scares and excites her. She confuses and stuns the cattle with her hypnotic movements, artistically manipulating them as elements in her dance fantasy. The dancing now becomes a "constitutive symbol" of an earlier scene in which Gerald violently compelled his horse at a railway crossing. The cattle, belonging to Gerald, are a synecdoche for his maleness. Gudrun, jealous of Gerald's masculine will and the social world of position and power he epitomizes, merely appropriates for herself the possibilities for aggression she had discovered watching him brutally mistreat his horse. Gerald, hearing the cattle, rushes in and tries to stop her dance by insisting on the herd's danger. Gudrun, intoxicated by her violent gestures, responds by striking
him in the face. Her act of dominance looks ahead or “illuminates” the “final blow” to Gerald at the end of the novel.

Gerald, with his urge toward self-destruction, is smitten with love for Gudrun after this dance. Similarly, the start of Gudrun’s affair with the German artist Loerke, and her eventual break with Gerald, occur when she dances the regional *Schuhplattel*, while the two couples holiday in the Tyrol in the novel’s penultimate chapter. According to dance historian Joan Lawson, this Alpine courtship dance was notable for “the extraordinary way the man snaps his fingers, slaps his thighs, buttocks, heels, knees and cheeks and claps his hands to achieve an extremely complex syncopated rhythm of sounds as he dances wildly in front of or around the girl” (115). The man also emits wild yells and if he has strength enough, lifts his partner high over his head whenever the music reaches a crescendo. The male’s imitating a cock during mating season was a vestige of the *Schuhplattel*’s origins as an animal dance.

The *Schuhplattel* in the novel signifies a ritual prelude to one last shifting of loyalties among the characters. Immediately following the “bestial” dance, Birkin takes Ursula up to their room to perform an unspecified sexual act that is new to her. Afterwards, Ursula reflects that degrading “things were real, with a different reality.... Why not be bestial and
go the whole round of experience?” (403). Ursula's submitting to Birkin's “act of corruption,” (which most critics think is anal sex), signifies her growing trust of Birkin and his ideas about “star equilibrium.” Birkin is “self-responsible.” His dancing and subsequent behavior, more than his fancy speeches, prompted in Ursula the realization that authentic freedom comes from an untainted bodily awareness of the self through its physical rapport with another. After this episode, Ursula and Birkin mutually decide they've had enough of the sterile “snows of abstraction” and leave for a warmer climate.

During the *Schuhplattel*, Gudrun resolves to leave Gerald, and shortly after the dance she forms a new alliance with the rat-like Loerke. Like Hermione earlier, Loerke is singled out by his non-participation in the dancing, since he too is a manipulative creature devoid of spontaneity and instinctual awareness. Loerke feels sulky and “pettish” sitting all by himself, since “he very much wanted to dance with Gudrun” and he jealously regards his youthful homosexual companion Leitner, who does dance with her (401). Gudrun next dances with a German professor, who, in reminding her of “a mature well-seasoned bull,” connects her choice of partner to the earlier scene with Gerald’s cattle. She can’t stand him “critically,” but physically enjoys “being tossed up in the air, on his coarse, powerful impetus” (401). When Gudrun eyes Gerald dancing and exulting in his
power over the professor's daughter, "as if she were a palpitating bird, a fluttering, flushing, bewildered creature," she is suddenly shocked with an "involuntary" insight into his character: Gerald was "naturally promiscuous" (403). Incapable of giving love, yet demanding and needy of sex, Gudrun realizes Gerald would always use women and bend them, like his horse, to his own will. Gudrun is hollow at the core and just as incapable of giving love, but she is a survivor who reads in Gerald's body language the warning that one of them "must triumph over the other" (403).

**Pan Dancing:**

*The Plumed Serpent* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

The destructive impulses that rose to the surface when the Brangwen women danced and revealed their allotropic states in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are absent in the dances of Lawrence's last two novels. Leaving behind a dead life and a dead marriage respectively, Kate Leslie and Connie Chatterley enter into the dance ritual with a burning desire to let go of their "old stable egos." Unlike the earlier heroines, Kate and Connie are conscious of the cause of their malaise, which is the ever-widening gulf between "being" and "knowing" that exists in the social order. Both utter the same oath to themselves before they partake in the dance: "Ye must be born again!" As a result, they are able to achieve an immediate, mystical
communion with the Unknown or "greater sex" and reach a further stage in the regenerative process. Where the earlier focus had been on either the character's relationships to others or his or her own "essential" self, the emphasis on dance in these two novels is to restore "the old broken impulse that connects [the individual] to the mystery of the cosmos again" (PS 138).

The most significant dance scene in *The Plumed Serpent*, in addition to signaling Kate Leslie's individual redemption, serves a therapeutic function for the entire community. The communal dance around a drummer in "The Plaza," Chapter Five, forms an important part of a radical social/religious movement started by two leaders--Don Ramón Carrasco and General Cipriani Viedma--to revive the cult of the ancient Aztec god Quetzalcoatl and to rid a revolutionary-torn Mexico in the early 1920's of Europe's moribund Christianity. This dance is neither Aztec nor Mexican, but an imaginative projection of several dances Lawrence had seen by Indians while living in Taos, New Mexico in 1924. *The Plumed Serpent* was written before the revival of national dances presented by the Ballet Folklórico de Mexico and Lawrence probably never had the opportunity to see a native dance while he lived in Mexico, let alone an Aztec one. He sacrificed verisimilitude for the animistic spirit he felt that the dance rituals of the ancient Aztecs must have shared in common with their Indian neighbors to the north.
Because they express many of the same concerns as The Plumed Serpent and are significant dance documents in their own right, it is worth turning briefly to Lawrence’s description of these Indian dances in his essays before analyzing their composition in the novel. For example, in “Indians and Entertainment,” Lawrence applied what he had read in Harrison ten years before to Indian dance and ceremony. The Indians, he concluded, had a radically different concept of the dramatic than Europeans. When the Indian dances around the drum, it has “none of the hardness of representation.... It is a soft, subtle being something” (50). In dance, the Indians were participating in a natural wonder, not imitating it; and yet to Lawrence, their dances were “perhaps the most stirring sight in the world” (50). So-called “civilized” men, in contrast, enjoy sitting in the theater like little gods, detached from the spectacle presented before them. The round dances of the Taos Indians, however, were not spectacles because there were no spectators; like the ancient Greeks described in Ancient Art and Ritual, the Indians did not distinguish between audience and participant. Nevertheless, Lawrence admitted “it [was] still a long step from the Indian’s ceremonial dance to the Greek’s early religious ceremony” (MM 51). Where the Greeks had some “specified deity ... to whom the ceremony was offered” and who was the “essential audience of the play,” the Indians had “no conception of a defined God ... But all is godly” (51-2).
In another essay, Lawrence connected the Indians' sense of godliness with "Pan," which he associated with "primitive," elemental forces that could be both benign and malevolent (Phx 22-31). In pointing out the word Pan’s etymology, Lawrence saw the paradox in the Greeks transforming "that which is everything" into a concrete "grey-bearded and goat-legged" god associated with dancing and lust. Then the Christians came along and turned the minor god Pan into a fallen devil with cloven hoofs, horns and tail. Yet while all this was going on in Europe, the "true" Pan was alive and thriving in the New World. The aboriginal Americans experienced the ineffable Pan all the time in their living relationships with trees, flowers, animals, the sun, moon, stars and everything else in the cosmos. If Lawrence, in fact, had been familiar with the Iroquois Indians, he might have borrowed their word "orenda," the supernatural energy inherent in everything.

In "Dance of the Sprouting Corn" and "The Hopi Snake Dance," Lawrence described the pantheistic consciousness he saw underlying the Indians' dance rituals. For three days at Easter, the Santo Domingo Indians call "from the heights and from the depths" the cosmic energies that produce their corn, in a ritual of participation rather than invocation. Their dance consists of two straight lines with "one woman behind each rippling, leaping
male ... subtly tread[ing] the dance, scarcely moving, and yet edging rhythmically along” with a branch of green pine tree held in her hands and everything swaying to the incessant beat of a drum (MM 56). At the same time, the naked Koshare with their faces painted black weave in and out of the lines, making fine gestures with their hands, “calling something down from the sky, calling something up from the earth ... to meet in the germ-quick of corn, where life is” (59-60).

The Hopi Snake Dance, on the other hand, has none of the Corn Dance’s “impressive beauty.” Compared to Anna Pavlova’s dancing with the Russian Ballet, the Snake dance is nothing more than a “circus turn” (MM 62). But there is an underlying religious purpose to the monotonous foot-stamping and chanting among twelve priests from various ages, who dance with rattlesnakes and pythons dangling from their mouths. Just as Lawrence’s fictionalized characters danced in order to right an imbalance, the Hopis dance in order to put themselves into balance or “relation with the vast living convulsion of rain and thunder and sun” (65). Their dancing enacts a desire for greater potency from the powers that give life: the “dark, lurking, intense sun at the center of the earth, ... which you can no more pray to than you can pray to Electricity” (63,65). By conquering their fear of the snakes, who live closer to the dark sun at the earth’s dark center, the Hopis send them back into the ground with a message of tenderness and power.
While modern men conquered the “dark sun” or “Dragon of the Cosmos” with scientific mechanical principles, the Indians sought conquest by “means of the mystic, living will that is in man” (65). Because our gods are “gods of the machine only,” we no longer have famines, but a “subtle dragon stings us in the midst of plenty.” Lacking any sense of awe for our universe, which the Hopis expressed in their dance, “the strange inward sun of life” fails us and “we die of ennui” (65).

It is obvious that Lawrence had the Hopi’s dance rituals in mind while writing *The Plumed Serpent*. Kate Leslie, with her children grown up and her Irish patriot husband recently dead, decides at age forty to come to Mexico, because in Europe she had been slowly dying of ennui and magic deprivation: “the dragon of degenerated or incomplete existence” (PS 59). Despite her feeling that the country was oppressive, sinister and threatening, she decides to remain for awhile, but leaves the corruption of Mexico City for Lake Sayula after reading a newspaper account about the return of the ancient gods reported in that area. Kate recalls that Quetzalcoatl, the leader, was a fair-faced, bearded god associated with the Morning Star or Venus. “Quetzal” literally referred to a tropical bird and “coatl” was a serpent or snake. Unlike the white peacock associated with an imbalance of spirit or intellect in Lawrence’s first novel, Quetzalcoatl was lord of the “above and below” (both spirit and soul), and an imaginative embodiment of the powers
the Santo Domingo Indians summoned in their corn dance. Mere mention of Quetzalcoatl’s return is enough to renew Kate’s hope that mystery in life still exists.

The most significant dance scene in the novel occurs right after Kate moves to Lake Sayula. Sitting in the plaza one Saturday evening, she sees a bonfire, hears the sound of a tom-tom and feels “that timeless, primeval passion of the prehistoric races,” which she had also felt with the “Red Indians” in Arizona and New Mexico (117). The men of the Quetzalcoatl movement, wearing white calzones, red sashes, ceremonial emblems and naked from the waist up, gathered there to inform the peons about the expected coming of the god and to teach them the ancient ways of dancing. After chanting their hymns, the leaders began treading their “soft, bird-step” into the earth, revolving like a wheel around the drummer and fire. Then the peons and their women joined in an outer ring wheeling in the opposite direction, with the same “soft, down-sinking churning tread” (128). Kate, who wanted to remain out of “contact,” is compelled finally by her own blood into the dance. Holding the fingers of an anonymous peon, she submerges her individuality, race, background and for a few brief moments becomes one with humanity. The creative power of the ritual illuminated the mystery she lacked in her old life. In the dance, she finds the life-affirming force of the procreative Pan.
The outer wheel was all men. She seemed to feel the strange dark glow of them upon her back. Men, dark, collective men, non-individual. And herself, woman, wheeling upon the great wheel of womanhood.

Men and women alike danced with faces lowered and expressionless, abstract, gone in the deep absorption of men into the greater manhood, women into the great womanhood. It was sex, but the greater, not the lesser sex. The waters over the earth wheeling upon the waters under the earth, like an eagle silently wheeling above its own shadow. She was not herself, she was gone, and her own desires were gone into the ocean of the great desire. (131)

According to James Cowan, the inner and outer circles of the dance symbolize both the Hopi’s “dark sun” and the regular bright one (103). Cowan, furthermore, thinks the “dark sun” is the central symbol in the novel of phallic consciousness or intuitive awareness (101). Because the two circles move in harmonious counterpoint to each other, the rebirth of the ancient religion, represented by its god of above and below—Quetzalcoatl or the “plumed serpent”—signifies an “integration of the sensual and spiritual” (103).

Much of the imagery in the above passage is more Laurentian than Hopi/Aztec. The figure of concentric circles formed by the dancers, for example, was not new to this novel. The basic design of the ecstatic polka dancing within the Edenic, English Midlands setting of The White Peacock.
we recall, also consisted of an inner and outer ring. L.D. Clark points out that Lawrence presented the Indians by “metaphor and other analogy,” according to his literary tradition and his “interest in the psychology of renewal” (“Lawrence and the American Indian” 364). The “ocean of the great desire,” for example, is the “metaphor” of rebirth we’ve seen earlier in *The Rainbow*’s dance passages, just as water will be associated again with both the dance and sex in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

In the last evocation of dance in Lawrence’s fiction, Constance Chatterley undergoes a rain-soaked baptism in a bawdy “eurythmic” dance in Wragby Wood, her husband’s ancestral estate and a remnant of the ancient Sherwood Forest. While taking up less than a page of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, it sums up the meaning of dance in Lawrence’s fiction. Connie’s dance connects her to the cosmic rhythms the Hopis had summoned in their desire for rain and a plentiful corn harvest, as well as to the “unseen lord” that pregnant Anna Brangwen had paid homage to in front of her mirror. Like Kate Leslie’s re-awakening, the dance marks off a stage in Connie’s regeneration through “phallic consciousness,” or her ineffable, sympathetic knowledge of and relationship to a vital, living universe.

In addition to her growing sensual awareness, Connie’s dance marks a stage in her rejection of the sterile life of the mind represented by her
husband Sir Clifford and his “cronies” at Wragby Hall as well as the encroaching, ugly, mechanized world represented by the blighted Teversall collieries. The dance occurs in the novel’s pastoral center, after she has visited with the gamekeeper Mellors in his hut during a thunderstorm. While there, Mellors goes into a lengthy diatribe against the whole “modern lot”—workers as well as industrialists—who were “killing off the human thing and worshipping the mechanical thing” (203). Connie tries to dispel Mellors’ despair by threading forget-me-nots into his genital hair. After informing him of her plans to conceive his child, Connie has a “creative flash” and runs outside to celebrate in the rain her anticipated fertility.

... She slipped on her rubber shoes and ran out with a wild little laugh, holding up her breasts to the heavy rain and spreading her arms, and running blurred in the rain with the eurythmic dance-movements she had learned so long ago in Dresden. It was a strange pallid figure lifting and falling, bending so the rain beat and glistened on the full haunches, swaying up again and coming belly-forward through the rain, then stooping again so that only the full loins and buttocks were offered in a kind of homage towards him, repeating a wild obeisance. (LCL 207)

The gamekeeper, stripping off his clothes, follows her. They make love on the sodden path and afterwards twine more flowers in each other’s pubic hair and perform a mock-heroic marriage between “John Thomas” and “Lady Jane,” the gamekeeper’s euphemisms for their sexual organs.
It is significant that the ritual elements of the chapter--Connie’s eurhythmic dance, the mock marriage and the body-flowering--were added to the third and final version of Lady Chatterley’s Lover. (In the first two versions, Connie merely runs through Wragby Wood with her lover trailing behind.) Lawrence’s intention was to underscore his life-long concern for mankind’s re-integration with the life force in nature. In “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover,” he had written:

_We must_ get back into relation, vivid and nourishing relation to the cosmos and the universe. The way is through daily ritual, and the re-awakening. _We must_ once more practice the ritual of dawn and noon and sunset, the ritual of the kindling fire and pouring water, the ritual of the first breath and the last. (Phx II: 510)

This “means a return to ancient forms” from “a long way” back before Plato, Buddha and Jesus taught us “that the only happiness lay in abstracting oneself from life, the daily, yearly, seasonal life of birth and death and fruition, and in living in the ‘immutable’ or eternal spirit” (510-11). Writing to Connie in the final chapter of the novel, Mellors argues that “the mass” of men should “be forever pagan,” ... that they should “learn to be naked and handsome” and to “dance the old group dances” again; that they should acknowledge “the great god Pan” as their “only god ... forever” (LCL 281).

But Lawrence was not advocating a return to “primitive” ways or the practice of pagan rituals. After describing an Apache dance ceremonial in
another of his essays, he admitted that he could not “live again the tribal mysteries [his] blood has lived long since: “My way is my own, old red father; I can’t cluster at the drum any more” (Phx 99). But by opening himself up to the spontaneous feel of nature’s larger rhythms within our bodies, he could recapture through an imaginative experience, the magical correspondences “primitive” and ancient man felt toward their universe. He could, as a result, achieve a needed psychic rebirth.

Connie Chatterley is, finally, the apotheosis of all the women dancing alone in Lawrence’s fiction. She is neither too cerebral like Lettie Beardsall nor too willful like Elsie Whiston, Anna, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen. Therefore she does not need to dance out her defiance of the male. She resembles more Lawrence’s evocation of the Etruscan lady pictured dancing on an ancient tomb in “Making Love to Music,” who was “going gaily at it, after two-thousand-five hundred years, ... just dancing her very soul into existence” (Phx 166).
Notes

1 The Trespasser, Aaron's Rod and Kangaroo are the only three novels which do not have dance scenes. The Lost Girl and Boy in the Bush do, but they are not significant enough to be treated separately.

2 Lawrence first mentions “phallic consciousness” in a 1915 letter to Bertrand Russell in which he states his belief in “another seat of consciousness which exists in us independently of the ordinary mental consciousness” (CL 393-4). Birkin in Women in Love calls it the “great dark knowledge you can't have in your head.... It is death to one's self--but it is the coming into being of another” (36). Other references to the term are in “Study of Thomas Hardy” (Phx 398-516), “A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover” (Phx II: 487-518) and Fantasia of the Unconscious.

3 For Lawrence's account of his friendship with Magnus, the reader is referred to his “Introduction to ‘Memoirs of the Foreign Legion’” (Phoenix II: 303-361).

4 In Beardsley's “The Peacock Skirt,” for example, Salomé wears an elaborate headdress made of peacock feathers, and in this picture as well as “The Eyes of Herod” an actual peacock appears.

5 In 1913, Lawrence wrote a friend from Lerici, Italy, requesting some books. “I love travels and other raw philosophy and when you can lend me books about Greek religions and the rise of Greek Drama, or Egyptian influences--or things like that--I love them. I got a fearful lot out of a scrubby book Art and Ritual--one of the Universal Knowledge Shilling series. It is stupidly put, but it lets one in for an idea that helps one immensely” (CL 250).

6 The classic José Limón's The Moor's Pavane immediately comes to mind by Schorer's analogy. The dance, a powerful distillation of Shakespeare's Othello, consists of a quartet, like Women in Love, whose members move across the stage in symmetrical and shifting patterns which analogue their shifting loyalties to each other.

7 Dalcroze claimed he gave his students musical experience rather than musical knowledge. The emphasis on the felt rather than the known would have appealed to Lawrence's metaphysic.
According to Vivas, bulls are "semiotic symbols throughout many cultures of male potency, of fruitfulness." Why Gudrun attacks emasculated "bullocks" is one of those "fascinating, but obscure" elements in Lawrence's symbolism, that does not lend itself entirely to rational explanation (Vivas 245).
“ONLY THE DANCE IS SURE”

“A poet should take his inspiration from the other arts too,” William Carlos Williams wrote Kay Boyle in 1932. After confessing to her that he’d lost interest in Picasso, Williams brought up the subject of dance (SL 133). The painters, after all, were not the only artists to influence Williams. He had been enthralled in his student days by Isadora Duncan’s dancing and was to enjoy a longtime, mutually productive relationship with Martha Graham. From the early imagistic poems of the late 1910s to the “variable foot” experiments in the 1950s, the dance became a prominent image in Williams’ poetry and remained one of his favorite figures for the imaginative process, which knit the disparate, “broken” fragments of modern life into a luminous, fleeting wholeness.

Dance was an apt reconciling figure for Williams for several reasons. For one, it was an ideal model of unity of being. Williams would have agreed with Yeats that we cannot know the dancer from the dance. Movements and gestures were universal for him, but they could not exist outside of the concrete, human body. In Kora in Hell, Williams made dance his central figure for the way “a thing known passes out of the mind into the muscles” (Imag 74). Years later in Paterson, it remained one of his favorite
ways of expressing “no ideas but in things” (6). On a purely ethical level, dance refuted the body/soul dichotomy the Puritans attributed to man’s nature.

According to Joseph Riddle, Williams was attracted to the dance because it was both “motion and form,” as well as “objective, intimate, and situational, since its rhythms depend[ed] on intensely composed relations” (Shaken Realist 55). Like the other three modernists, Williams saw the “primitive order” in dance, which for him enabled the finite self to realize itself through relation. The dance existed at a “pre-reflective” level of consciousness. “Anterior to consciousness,” Riddle explained, “it [took] place in a world of innocence, its form dictated not by a prescribed choreography but by improvisation stimulated by the response of the whole self to another or thing” (55). Poetry, like dance, was the “form/ of motion” for Williams, and what that form revealed was “the idea of the good in the intimacy of self and things” (57). The bad, on the other hand, was anyone or anything which alienated or divorced us from persons and things, such as the Puritans, who denied their senses and cut off their relationship to the natural world by regarding its mysteries and miracles as signs of God’s will.

Williams’ use of the dance was related to other frequently used topos, like sex, marriage, the city, which also signified a gathering, flowering, or
place where lines intersected and the disparate interpenetrated into the "white light of understanding" (SE 122). A man and a woman, say, came together in a dance, but the two did not melt into a Yeatsian Oneness, nor did their dancing tap something as exclusively sexual as Lawrence's phallic consciousness. Rather, their dancing, touching or contact defined or discovered a third relationship or identity like Dr. Paterson's: "Say I am the locus/ where two women meet" (III: i, 110). In the early Imagist poems, Williams projected this geometric idea into concrete things like the angle made by an attic or a ship's prow. Whenever he danced at the fulcrum of these triangular sites, his self-intoxication was heightened even more.

Two archetypal dance rites based on fertility myths are discernible in Williams' poetry, through which the isolated self created an identity by connecting with people and things in the material world. The first is ecstatic, Dionysian dancing (like Lawrence's pantheistic dancing), which intimately related the poet to nature in the early poems. Then again through a Dionysian letting go, the responsible, middle-class doctor got to "know" his hidden, libidinous self, most often imaged as a lusty, dancing satyr. In contrast to the Dionysian, a generalized pattern of dance suggesting the Kora or Persephone vegetation myth also evolved, which related the self to others. More orderly and harmonious than the Dionysian, the Kora pattern was another variation of Williams' female principle.
Williams' equation of poetry and dance as the "form of motion" had other implications besides the social and epistemological (CP 339). Just as Suzanne Langer defined the dance as a realm of interacting forces emanating from the dancers' bodies as they moved through space, the poem for Williams consisted of distinct but interrelated words or particles which interacted with each other on a blank page like objects in an electromagnetic field.¹ Williams' words set down on the white space of a page behave like dancers drawing together and apart as they move through the blank space of a stage. J. Hillis Miller called the visual relation between words in Williams' poetry "the juxtaposition of energies" (Six Poets 43). The poem, in other words, like the dance, imitated (but never copied) the never-ending movement and change which permeated the universe.

A 1953 poem entitled "The Artist" epitomizes Williams' attraction to the dance as a field of action or process rather than finished product.
Mr. T
  bareheaded
    in a soiled undershirt
his hair standing out
  on all sides
    stood on his toes
heels together
  arms gracefully
    for the moment
curled above his head.
    Then he whirled about
  bounded
into the air
  and with an entrechat
    perfectly achieved
completed the figure.
    My mother
    taken by surprise
where she sat
  in her invalid's chair
    was left speechless.
Bravo! she cried at last
  and clapped her hands.
    The man's wife
came from the kitchen:
  What's going on here? she said.
    But the show was over.

(PB 101)

For Williams, art is obviously not the thing made—for whatever figure the
dancer makes vanishes even as he dances it—but the making itself. Mr T, in
his "soiled undershirt," is obviously a far cry from Yeats's well-proportioned
female dancer, symbol of empyrean beauty. But if dance suggested a noun
to Yeats, it functioned more like a verb to Williams. As a late poem states:

    The dance! The verb detaches itself
    seeking to become articulate. (PB 120)
The beauty of this verb is that it never quite manages to complete its action. It is forever "seeking," like those lovers on Keats' urn who remained forever young.

Williams himself loved to dance and claimed that were it not for his own gracelessness, he would have become a dancer. "Dancing is all the exercise my legs need," he wrote his parents from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1904 (SL 5). He enjoyed watching professionals dance and often snatched time away from a hectic schedule to attend dance concerts in New York. Where Yeats and Eliot across the Atlantic were absorbed in Oriental dance and Russian ballet, Williams was particularly interested in the flowering of an indigenous art form--American modern dance. During the period in which Williams was just beginning to rebel against a transplanted European poetry, Isadora Duncan had already achieved notoriety for her outspoken, thorough rejection of an aristocratic European tradition in ballet.

Williams' interest in dance began after watching Isadora Duncan perform in New York in 1908. He wrote his brother Ed that her performance had made his hair "stand on end." Best of all, he continued, "she [was] an American, one of our own people, Bo, and I tell you I felt doubly strengthened in my desire and my determination to accomplish my part in
our wonderful picture” (Breslin 31). Just as Duncan had replaced the strain, stress and artificiality of ballet's movements with natural ones emanating from her body, Williams would renounce learned literary conventions in order to return to a spontaneous creative source from which these conventions had sprung. Where Duncan explored movement from the inside out, Williams would attempt to get “the mind turned inside out in a work of art” (Kora 75). Where other Americans were scandalized by her scanty costumes and the improvised look of her dancing, Williams felt that her performance was “the most chaste, most perfect, most absolutely inspiring exhibition” he had ever seen. In the same letter to Ed, he included a sonnet addressed to Duncan that was full of artificial “literary” diction and convoluted syntax (“your deft step hath e'er conferred”) obviously written before he had found an American idiom closer to actual speech patterns. But the last two lines are interesting for the way Williams confirms Duncan's own Whitmanesque vision of America dancing:

        I saw, dear country-maid, how soon shall spring  
    From this our native land great loveliness. (Breslin 31)

Many years later, it was Williams' turn to inspire the dance movement through his conviction that “nothing is good save the new” (Imag 21). American arts in general had to incessantly re-invent their forms and languages. Trailblazers like Martha Graham began creating a radically freer
language of movement, which they re-invented with every new piece of choreography. Less elusive than ballet, this new American dance descended deep into the unconscious to express movement which was pedestrian and plain, rather than beautiful and sublime.

But if his closer artistic affinities were with modern dance, Williams remained open to other forms of dancing. His attendance at a performance of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe in New York in 1916, in fact, prompted one of his most famous poems on dance. The image of the poet as a mythological satyr dancing "naked, grotesquely" in front of his mirror in "Danse Russe" (1917) was inspired by Nijinsky's narcissistic, pagan faun (CP 86-7). Substituting his "north room" or attic in Rutherford for the ballet's Greek pastoral setting, Williams wed the latter's "universal" connotations into a "local," mundane family drama. The "north room" was the busy doctor's retreat or sanctuary, an American, middle-class version of Yeats's aristocratic tower at Ballyhee, in which Williams stole time away from a growing family and hectic practice to write poetry.

If I when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
Above shining trees,--
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
"I am lonely, lonely,
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so!"
(1-14)

When the speaker cries out from the attic’s lofty height that he is
“lonely,” he celebrates the isolation an artist needs if he is to unify the
demands of an inner, domestic world of sleeping wife, baby and servant with
the outer world beyond “the yellow drawn shades.” Enclosed within the
intimacy of his womb-like, triangular space, the poet’s being expands
outward. “Waving [his] shirt round [his] head,” he apes the sun,

    a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,--

as life-giving center of the universe. By narcissistically admiring the
movements of his “arms,” “face,” “shoulders, flanks and buttocks” before a
mirror, Williams’ persona achieves a further sense of unity, in being both the
creator and observer of his dance.

The differences between Williams’ satyr and two other narcissistic
dancers we’ve seen are revealing. Yeats, in identifying with Mallarmé’s
Salomé, made an analogy between her inviolate, isolated virginity and his
own art, which was separate and unrelated to anything in the world outside. The satyr's mirror, however, in re-presenting or imitating the outer world, fuses life and art. To use Williams' terminology, his imagination is both whore and virgin to reality.

In contrast, when Eliot's Narcissus regarded himself in the mirror, he deconstructed himself into body parts, which no amount of "clutching," "piercing" and "burning" could render whole again, finally causing him to turn his dance over to God, that most inscrutable of choreographers. Williams' satyr, however, is the "happy genius" of his own ecstatic dance for several reasons. Unlike Narcissus, his dancing puts him harmoniously in touch with his real, sensuous nature. The speaker of "Danse Russe" is a satyr in the same sense that Aaron Burr was "immoral as a satyr" for going against the Puritan habit of "denying joy and maiming others." "The world is made to eat, not leave," Williams explained, "that the spirit may be full, not empty" (JAG 205). Williams was to describe this condition again in Kora when he wrote: "Imperceptibly your self shakes free in all its brutal significance, feels its subtle power renewed" (Imag 68). The speaker in "Danse Russe" is also a "genius" in being an original, self-created talent, not one of those poets, like Eliot or Pound, "content with the [literary] connotations of their masters" (Imag 24). In parodically echoing Nijinsky's mythological creature, the poet is also a "genius" in the sense of being the
tutelary, pagan spirit of his place, his “north room” and his “household.” And finally, punning on the word “genius,” dancing in his triangular, hallowed site makes him a genus or point where all lines meet.

Williams also found a verbal analogue for the dance in this poem's rhythmical devices, especially its alliteration, (“sun,” “shining,” “singing,” “softly”) and assonance, (“baby,” “Kathleen,” “flanks,” “face”). Despite the cosmopolitan title alluding to the Russian ballet in French, the form of “Danse Russe” is closer in spirit to the developing modern dance. Like the latter’s break with ballet, Williams’ style reduced what was obviously beautiful about the English sonnet to a stripped-down, “barefoot” local version. Instead of the traditional sonnet’s formal rhyme-scheme, the unit of syntax “If I,” initiates a series consisting of three conditional subordinate clauses. Then separated by a wide space, the traditional turn in thought or moral expressed in the concluding couplet is exchanged for a rhetorical question: “Who shall say I am not/ the happy genius of my household?” Parodying the metaphysical sonnet’s customary, artificial conceits of sighs and tears for an idealized beloved, “Danse Russe” becomes a self-reflective lyric celebrating self-love and self-expression. “We do not live in a sonnet world,” Williams explained in a later essay (qtd. in Cushman 104). So, unlike Pound, he would not teach “classic dancing” to “modern language” (SL 132).
Another early dance poem, “Ballet,” has nothing directly to do with heavenly, ethereal sprites rising on their toes in relevé (CP 92-3). The irony of the title rather reflects Williams’ attitude about any kind of idealism that aspires “upwards,” especially religion, Puritan striving, or the Protestant work ethic. Ascent is the direction of transcendence, but focusing on one direction alone leads to inertia, immobility and finally death in this poem. This “lonely” speaker, gazing upwards, accuses a “great gold cross/ shining in the wind” of being “weary” and “frozen with/ a great lie” that renders it “rigid as a knight/ on a marble coffin.” Even a robin

    untwisting a song
    from the bare
    top-twig, (93)

is weary from laboring too much. The descent, we are reminded in a later poem, beckons too. Passion, energy -- life itself comes from the ground where we are in direct touch with our physical perceptions. The speaker implores the robin to come down from his winter perch to “the middle/ of the roadway,” where

    we will fling
    ourselves round
    with dust lilies
    till we are bound in
    their twining stems! (93)

As Sherman Paul astutely noted, “Ballet” is in the shape of a dance or
pirouette, which imitates the cyclical processes in nature. “The dance that
[the speaker] imagines will bring in the day and the spring creates life out of
the dust, out of death” (Music of Survival 69-70). “Ballet” imitates cyclical
movement, or more precisely “twining,” through continuous line
enjambment, a technical/visual device Williams often employed in his verse.
One sentence, for example, continues through the above five lines without a
pause at the line breaks.2

In “January Morning,” the self merges with nature once again, this
time as a result of dancing on a sea voyage (CP 100-4). A young doctor
“alone” is “dancing with happiness” enclosed within the protective, talismatic
angle made by a ferry boat’s prow, like the beams formed by the attic in
“Danse Russe” and the intersecting lines of the cross in “Ballet.” The poem
is about a ferry trip Williams took home to New Jersey after apparently
staying up all night on duty at a New York City hospital (Schmidt 65).
Williams subtitled the poem “Suite” to account for the fifteen short stanzas
composed of things he saw or imagined on his way home. The poem’s
cataloguing or naming of isolated, commonplace phenomena is figured in
the young doctor’s exuberant dancing and the forward motion of the prow; it
releases the immanent power buried underneath the dead, winter surface of
“curdy barnacles and broken ice crusts.” As a result, the entire physical
world is re-animated in the prow’s wake: “Long, yellow rushes” bend, “gay
shadows" drop, "exquisite brown waves" move, "the river breaks" and "the sky" comes down "lighter than tiny bubbles." At the birth of a new year, "against a smoky dawn," the poem celebrates a triumph over time in the endless cycle of death and rebirth in nature. “Suite” may also refer to the poem's three separate patterns of movement: horizontal, vertical and circular.  

All of these dance poems were included in Williams’ third collection of poetry, *Al Que Quiere!* (1917). Significantly, he chose for the book’s cover an image of some markings on a pebble because they reminded him of the figure of a dancer. “The effect of the dancer,” he said years later, “was very important—a natural, completely individual pattern” (IWWP 18). The dance was "natural" because it was physical and earthy and therefore "imitated" life. As an outward expression of subjective experience, it was "completely individual"; no two people performed the same movements alike.

Immediately following the publication of *Al Que Quiere!,* Williams started working nightly on a book of improvisations that would be published as *Kora in Hell* in 1920. Williams again emphasized dance and its source in the “ground” or local. The word “dance” appears more frequently here than in any other Williams' work and is associated with all that is creative, liberating, fulfilling and erotic. Dance is also mirrored stylistically in the
book's broken, exuberant prose rhythms. Section XV, for example, begins with a verbal evocation of the dance: “'N! cha! cha! cha!’” (Imag 57). Linda Wagner also noticed a dance-like rhythm in Williams' use of dashes and the "vertical spaces" he leaves between words within a sentence, which lend a visual tempo to the line (21)

Hey you, the dance! Squat. Leap. Hips to the left. Chin---ha!---sideways! (56)

So far away August green as it yet is. (34)

*Kora* also draws on many of the same dance images mentioned in the earlier poems. Like “Ballet” and “January Morning,” the poet's frenzied, Dionysian dancing expresses a lust for nature.

...and I? must dance with the wind, make my own flakes, whistle a contrapuntal melody to my own fugue! Huzza then, this is the dance of the blue moss bank! Huzza then, this is the mazurka of the hollow log! Huzza then, this is the dance of rain in the cold trees. (34)

Besides dance, *Kora* and these two poems share a related image cluster of "toes, heels, tops, sides, soles” and plain feet. The shoes on the decaying corpse of Jacob Louslinger in section I (either a singer of or lingerer among lice), described as “twisted into incredible lilies,” repeat the speaker's dream motif in “Ballet” of rolling on the ground with a robin “round/ with dust lilies” till “the pounding feet/ of horses” would “crush forth/ our laughter” (Imag 31; CP 93-4). In “January Morning,” the speaker's image of himself, taxed with
over-work, found lying stiff and "staring up under" the "warped/bass-wood bottom" of his "chiffonier" is related to the stiff Jacob Louslinger and also the "stiff dance [of] a waking baby whose arms have been lying curled back above his head upon the pillow, making a flower" (CP 103; IMAG 73). In the dance of the imagination, winter and summer or birth and death pirouette together, making it impossible to differentiate one from the other.

The satyr also re-appears in Kora. Although he is a more fully mythicized creature here than the happy fellow admiring his reflection from an attic mirror in Rutherford, New Jersey, he still represents, as Sherman Paul notes, the transformation of Williams' passion for things Greek into a passion for the local (Shaken Realist 37). He is described in section XVI as "a bare upstanding fellow whose thighs bulge with a zest for--say a zest!"

He tries his arm. Flings a stone over the river.
Scratches his bare back. Twirls his beard, laughs softly and stretches up his arms in a yawn -- stops in the midst--looking! (60)

Kora, however, turns the dance imagery of the earlier poems into some new directions, which would be more fully choreographed in Paterson. The object of this satyr's desire, for instance, extends beyond the natural world and his narcissistic self. Why he "stops in the midst" and what he notices and pursues, we are told in the interpretation which follows, is "a
white skinned dryad. The gaiety of his mood full of lustihood, even so, turns back with a mocking jibe" (60). The dryad the satyr/poet chases but never possesses is the Kora of the title. (Even Jacob Louslinger had caught a brief glimpse of her “while bumming around the meadows”: “Meadow flower! ha, mallow! at last I have you.”) Kora is a composite figure for all the various incarnations of the female principle the poet searches for in hell. She is also the all-inclusive “Beautiful Thing” Williams would continue to quest after in Paterson. And finally, like Yeats and his antithetical dancer/mask, Kora is Williams’ creative self and secret feminine nature--what Jung labeled the anima.

Because Kora (or Persephone in Greek) is so tied in to the meaning of dance in Williams’ poetry, it is perhaps necessary to quickly summarize the legend which surrounds her. According to Sir James Frazer, who includes Kore among his “Spirits of the Corn,” the young goddess was gathering flowers one day when Pluto, god of death (“the brutal lord of all”), raped her and carried her away to be his bride in the underworld (5:1-34). Demeter, her mother, was so bereaved that she made the earth barren in her daughter’s wake. Ron Loewinsonhn interprets Kora as a “three-personed deity”: mother, maiden and wife who appears throughout the Improvisations in all of these guises. “As Kore (the Greek word) she is simply ‘maiden’ .... In hell she is the bride of Hades, above ground, the mother Demeter” (236).
Echoing the Greek myth, hell or winter in Kora is the ordinary world untouched or unexplored by the imagination and thus rendered cold and incomprehensible. The twenty-seven improvisations are characterized by relentless movement—burrowing, scraping, scratching and digging—which is an analogue for the poet’s psychic descent into his own unconscious or the “pre-reflective” intuitive faculty Williams associated with the dance. “There’s no dancing save in the head’s dark,” he tells us in Kora; that “which is known has value only by virtue of the dark” (66, 74). The plunge into the unconscious will result in a loosening of inhibitions; the speaker will be able to connect by creating “a new step” with his lady—“o’ the dark side!” (67).

This “new step,” furthermore, will both uncover the uniqueness of “broken things”—“that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself”—as well as connect the broken shards to each other because of that “one-thousandth part of a quality in common” (14). “Everything that varies a hair’s breadth from another is an invitation to the dance,” Williams says elsewhere (Doctor Stories 89). The primal connection the dance makes for the speaker is between the music of the unconscious (“Hark! it is the music! ... Out of the ground?”) and the words that make up a poem: “It is the music that dances but if there are words then there are two dancers, the words pirouetting with the music” (Imag 34, 32). The ideal dance the speaker envisions would be
a slow one between the physical reality of things and their imaginative qualities:

... the wish would be to see not floating visions of unknown purport but the imaginative qualities of the actual things being perceived accompany their gross vision in a slow dance, interpreting as they go. (67)

But as the speaker learns by the second improvisation, words are clumsy and cannot always “pirouette” with the music. Often they inhibit the dance:

“Again the words break [the musical rhythm] and we both come down flatfooted” (43). That language often betrays the dance is understandable, since the dance, in its purest form, is virtually untranslatable or ineffable. Like Mallarmé’s “Idée,” the dance “is a thing in itself” (47).

The dance which connects the speaker to his fellow humans is not always a pleasurable one. The “stern dance” of disease (77) and poverty has taught him (to borrow a phrase from *Paterson*) to “embrace the foulness.” When his patients’ misery becomes too overwhelming, (“an old man dying piecemeal,” the “moaning and dull sobbing of infants”), he finds some relief by shaping it into a sadistic *danse macabre*, a dance of death rather than life. “Dance! Sing! Coil and uncoil! Whip yourselves about! Shout the deliverance!” (57). Similarly, in his story “Danse Pseudomacabre” (1920), the narrator/doctor characterizes the anguish of
two sets of parents whose children die on consecutive nights as "an invitation to the dance":

So, the next night, I enter another house.
And so I repeat the trouble of writing that which
I have already written, and so drag another human
being from oblivion to serve my music.... Either
dance or annihilation. (Doctor Stories 89-90)

More often, the Kora pattern connects the poet to the female sex: his wife as well as all the anonymous women, real or imagined. The naked girls of the striptease, the young woman excelling at intellectual pursuits as well as the living and dead, robust and sick, rich and poor, young and old--all are aspects of Kora or the "Beautiful Thing" of his quest. Women and dance are indissolubly mixed in the poet's mind with the imagination. Mozart's mind being so fertile, writes Williams, he "would whistle his own tune" and dance with his wife in the dead of winter. But when the speaker tries to write poetry, he is not nearly as agile or coordinated. For him, the process is like a clumsy, unconsummated attempt at love-making or a clumsy pas de deux between himself and the object of his desire:
The words of a thing twang and twitter to the gentle rocking of a high-laced boot and the silk above that... always she draws back and comes down upon the word flatfooted.... For a moment we-.... Again the words break it and we both come down flatfooted. (55)

Nor is the speaker always successful in partnering Kora in the glaring daylight of reality. So what he does is arrest her in an image of a motionless dance:

What a rhythm's here! One would say the body lay asleep and the dance escaped from the hair tips, the bleached fuzz that covers back and belly, shoulders, neck and forehead. The dance is diamantine over the sleeper who seems not to breathe! (47)

In the “diamantine” or diamond-like dance, frozen out of time, the poet has found momentarily his “radiant gist,” which was the goal of his “descent” and the aim of his poetry.

There is another dance in Kora, existing as a sub-text, which calls for a more active participation between the reader and poet. Because of the nearly obsessive repetition of the word “dance” within the text, it is likely Williams intended it to suggest a method of moving through the opacity of the improvisations. If we think of dance as roughly synonymous with the meaning of another figure—“the play of the mind”—then to follow the “dance” of Williams' thoughts means playing or interacting with his images at some deeper level than we are normally accustomed to with language. In
Freudian parlance, we must “free associate” till the images conjure up
something buried in our own unconscious. Like a choreographer
assembling dance phrases, Williams presents objects or motifs made out of
language to the listener, but he will not manipulate our perceptions by
interpreting them for us. In so doing, he intends us to get lost like his mother
in the “Prologue,” who always lost her bearings on the streets in Rome. The
underlying principle behind both the dance and the Improvisations is to
“loosen the attention” and “see the thing itself without forethought or
afterthought but with great intensity of perception” (imag 8).

Joseph Riddel claimed that Williams associated both his mother and
Homer with this dance world because of their ability to see things anterior to
ideas (“Wanderer and Dance” 55). But it may not be too farfetched to see
Williams' memory of Isadora Duncan's dancing as the impetus behind the
method of Kora. Many thought her dancing looked free and improvisatory,
as well as instinctual and intimate. Unlike ballet, her choreography used the
ground; like Williams, she embraced gravity.

After Kora, Williams' use of the dance as an image dwindled for the
next twenty years. The only exceptions are one reference to dance as
imagination in a prose section of Spring and All (1923) and an allusion to
dance in the poem, “An Elegy for D.H. Lawrence” (1935). In the latter,
Williams associates the author with the great dance scenes in his novels and mourns that the "satiric sun" will lead April not to "the panting dance but to stillness" with "poor Lawrence dead" (CP 392-5.) Williams, in other words, understood Lawrence's view of dance as an expression of the life force in nature.

During this transition period, Williams expressed his ideas about dance in his prose. In the American Grain (1925), probably his most famous prose work, dance is placed in an historical/social context. In denying the New World the "pleasure of motion to release itself" (in dance or sex), the Puritans in Williams' eyes were the real villains of American history and the "niggardliness of their damning tradition," was a "spiritually withering plague" (IAG 130). "The May-Pole at Merry Mount" chapter, in particular, denounced the Puritans' malicious treatment of Thomas Morton for introducing a pagan symbol in the New World, for "drinking and dancing about it for many days together" and especially for "inviting the Indian women for their consorts" (79). The Puritans' thwarting of natural desires like dancing, and not our frontier heritage, in Williams' eyes, was the root of the perversions and violence endemic to the New World, a subject he would have more to say about in Paterson.
In the American Grain was also the catalyst for Williams' friendship with Martha Graham. Earlier, Lawrence had praised Williams' revisionist history in a review, singling out its denunciation of the Puritans and its turning the genius of the continent into a mythic "woman with exquisite, super-subtle tenderness and recoiling cruelty" (Phx 334-6). Graham, likewise responding to the book's female archetypes and its emphasis on sex as the single, great motivating principle in the universe, wrote to Williams that "she could not have gone on with her choreographic projects without it" (Auto 236-7). Williams had met Graham earlier while she was in residence at Bennington College in Vermont, but according to him, "she was so closed about by the sheer physical necessities of her position that nothing had come of it" until he received her letter (237). At another point, Williams toyed with the idea of writing her biography (SL 171). Shortly after World War II broke out, Williams and Graham--together with her photographer, Barbara Morgan--collaborated on a project intended to symbolize the horror of war. Morgan photographed Graham with a bomb exploding over her head with her body, clad in a long, black robe, contracted into a spasm of mute terror. Delighted with the photo, Williams wrote the poem, "War the Destroyer," which he dedicated to Graham.

Williams also alluded to Graham in a short story entitled "Inquest" (FD 317-21). An unnamed woman waiting for a bus prompts three
"inquests" or investigations into the nature of feminine virtue, various kinds of flowers and the differences between European and American dancers and dance. (Eschewing logic and conventional narrative, as it does "conventional ballet," the story is a variation on Williams' female principle: flowers are women, women are dancers, dancers are "sexless" creatures who express sex by their dance.) The narrator calls Degas' dancers "ugly enough...from the American viewpoint...with their deformed legs. Dumpy little things." The Russians, "with their big peasant women" and the "leg muscles of Nijinsky" replaced the French (319). But all that "brainless classic ballet" is "peasant stuff" (320).

Now they fight against Martha Graham. But what else is there to do with the ballet except what she does? It can't keep repeating that saccharine putridity.

Each muscle is a thought -- quite apart. Quite different from the conventional ballet. Martha doesn't grow old. (319)

After attending a performance by the Graham Company in New York in 1944, however, Williams detected a change in her choreography which went against his aesthetics and, incidentally, the principles that gave birth to modern dance. Less interested in articulating America than formerly, Graham began codifying her vocabulary of movement and borrowing themes from Greek mythology and literary works. Williams accused her of covering up a weakness of invention "that distinction we seek anew with
such great difficulty”) with imported subject matter. In an unpublished letter to Horace Gregory, he admitted her new Deaths and Entrances was “powerful and impressive,” but for all the wrong reasons. The dance was loosely based on the lives of the Bronte Sisters and, therefore, not “derived from our culture or our history.” For Williams, “its distinction came from the story,” which was “a borrowed distinction.”

Williams obviously had dance on his mind a lot during the period he went to see the Graham Company. By 1946, he had resumed writing poetry and published the first book of Paterson. Again, the dance functions like a verb in fusing or wedding the “virgin” “dream of the whole poem” to the “whore” of reality, with its “muck” and “bloody loam.” The epic, in fact, was Williams’ most ambitious use of dance as a reconciling figure, especially as it is embodied in his longtime persona of dancing satyr. The image of the satyr in Paterson is more impersonal and complex than the earlier ones figured in the poetry and Kora in Hell. His frenzied dancing at the end of Paterson is modified or held in check by Williams’ increasing concern for “measure,” which by the time he completed Book V in 1956 had assumed aesthetic, ethical and epistemological proportions.

At the start of Paterson, however, none of the “relatedness” the dance made possible in earlier poems has occurred. The inhabitants of the city
“walk outside their bodies aimlessly/...locked and forgot in their desires” (I:i, 6). Their redeemer—the giant Paterson or man/city—has not yet realized Kora's ideal of a slow dance between “the imaginative qualities of actual things,” and their “gross vision” remains unrealized in the “dance of [Paterson's] thoughts”:

The vague accuracies of events dancing two and two with language which they forever surpass -- (I:ii, 23)

But such “walking” and such “thoughts” create a rhythm that supports Williams' contention that the “dream [of beauty]” is “in pursuit!” (V: ii, 222). Williams, according to Benjamin Sankey, “means [Paterson] to appear not only as a completed design but as a recorded struggle—his own struggle to write the poem” (14). The aimless walking in Book II, the victorious hunt in V, plus the obsessive wandering and questing that characterize all five books concern fundamental rhythms related to dance, such as the beauty in the thrust and counterthrust of the river:

...the river comes pouring in above the city and crashes from the edge of the gorge in a recoil of spray and rainbow mists -- (7)

Other rhythms capture the quiet, serene beauty in the movement of trees:
The locust tree in the morning breeze
outside her window
where one branch moves
quietly
undulating
upward and about and
back and forth. (237)

*Paterson* also enlarges on two patterns that were first counterpointed in *Kora in Hell*. The Dionysus and Persephone myths, in fact, are embedded into *Paterson*'s structure. The Dionysian or male principle traces a linear movement or progression *in* time, which grows increasingly violent and sexual in the first four books—like the apocalyptic “horny” fire that burned in Paterson’s history in Book III or the “shark, that snaps/ at his own trailing guts” in “a sea of blood” in Book IV.6 The Dionysian myth resonates most of all in the prose account of John Johnson, a hired hand who brutally killed his former employer and wife in 1850 and “was hung in full view of thousands who had gathered on Garrett Mountain in April...to witness the spectacle” (IV: iii, 203). (In one version of the myth, Dionysus died a violent death by hanging and then was resurrected like Christ.) What gives the Johnson passage authority is its placement right before the conclusion of Book IV, where the poet undergoes a symbolic death by drowning and is resurrected when his seed (or word) floats to shore and blossoms as Book V of *Paterson.*
Juxtaposed to the Dionysian, the more orderly and restrained female principle or Persephone pattern persists as a continuous descending and ascending movement, which links the seasonal cycles of nature with the death and rebirth of mankind in endless cycles or dances.Williams describes the process as:

Persephone
gone to hell, that hell could not keep with
the advancing season of pity. (III: ii, 125)

Hell is no longer figured as the private domain of the poet's unconscious as it was in Kora, but is objectified and repeatedly evoked: "Pursued by the whirlpool-mouths, the dog/ descends toward Acheron" (III: iii, 132). Kora or Persephone has been objectified too. She is embodied in the newly-wed Sarah Cumming, whose marriage to a false language drove her into a suicidal leap into the inarticulate roar of the Passaic Falls at the beginning of the nineteenth century (I: i, 14-5). She is also the "Beautiful Thing" or black, gang-raped victim in Book III, whom Dr. Paterson calls on in her bedroom in the cellar. In her "white lace dress" and "high-heeled slippers," she reminds him of another ethereal creature, "the dying swan," also the title of a solo that name Fokine choreographed for the Ballet Russe and ballerina Anna Pavlova (III: ii, 126).
The poet also identified with his Kora or female principle in *Paterson*. Adopting the persona of the nineteenth-century daredevil Sam Patch, he too leaps into the Falls like Sarah Cumming, because language had failed him. He saw “a sort of springtime/...within himself--ice bound” (I: iii,36). The word had not yet undergone a secularized and material incarnation for Patch as it would in Book V, figured in the poet’s satyr persona. Patch’s ironical leap and resurrection in the spring, “frozen in ice-cake,” completes a circle and identifies the poet with the natural world. His leap into the Falls is also described as a kind of graceful ballet:

instead of descending with a plummet-like fall his body wavered in the air -- Speech had failed him. He was confused. The word had been drained of its meaning. (I: i, 17)

*Paterson* is also full of lingering traces of Persephone and Dionysian dance rites, which once gave aesthetic meaning to life and death. While taking his Sunday walk in the park in Book II, for example, the protagonist Paterson observes a group of immigrant Italian picnickers. Mary, a member of the group, spontaneously jumps up and acts out an ancient fertility dance in which she resembles those Maenads who worshiped Dionysus. Mary
--Lifts one arm holding the cymbals
of her thoughts, cocks her old head
and dances! raising her skirts:

La la la la!
What a bunch of bums! Afraid somebody see
you? .
Blah!

Excrementi!
-- she spits. (II: i, 57)

The “vulgarity” of her dance is redeemed by the awakening of primal,
atavistic memories in the woman’s mind: “the cymbals/ of her thoughts.”
Paterson attributes her intoxication to the “air of the Midi/ and the old
cultures” of Europe with their pre-Christian memories.

Mary’s dance also evokes in the protagonist an image of a slovenly
satyr, aesthetically transfigured through the cinema.

Remember
the peon in the lost
Eisenstein film drinking

from a wine-skin with the abandon
of a horse drinking

so that it slopped down his chin?
down his neck, dribbling

over his shirt-front and down
onto his pants -- laughing, toothless?

Heavenly man! (II: i, 58)
Just as Mary's dance captured her vitality, Eisenstein's camera captured or framed the peon's Dionysian abandon and blissful animal spirits in a way which denied the peon's decrepitude. Likewise, Williams (as the protagonist) framed or isolated his memory of Eisenstein's image by intercutting or superimposing it between the passage above which describes Mary beginning her dance and the one below which describes her actually dancing. In other words, he imaginatively "instructs" the "dance of his thoughts" (his memory of the film) on the outside world where Mary's dance occurs.

-- the leg raised, verisimilitude
even to the coarse contours of the leg, the bovine touch! The leer, the cave of it,
the female of it facing the male, the satyr --
(Priapus!)
with that lonely implication, goatherd
and goat, fertility, the attack, drunk, cleansed. (Il: i, 58)

This whole scene is a successful rendering of the aesthetic ideal elucidated in Kora in Hell: to see "the imaginative qualities of the actual things being perceived accompany their gross vision in a slow dance, interpreting as they go" (Imag 67).

Mary's "undying" dance also provides a context for the Dionysian letting go of the naked girls dancing in the speakeasy (Ill: iii, 136), the dancing of the drunken whores in a Mexican brothel (V: i, 214) as well as the
“burlesque” dance of the lesbians Corydon and Phyllis (IV: i,149). Most of all, Mary’s dance anticipates the cathartic, satyric rites which end the epic.

The Persephone pattern, on the other hand, is reflected in the more solemn dance imagery describing the Kinte Kaye, a primitive death rite of the Indians (III: i,102; III: ii,114; III: iii,132). Unlike the orgiastic gestures of the Dionysian dancers, this type of dancing, performed in a circle, suggested a beneficent, shared ritual which brought within its compass human relationships and man's relationship to nature. Contrasted to the “divorce” between culture and nature the Europeans made of their experiences in the New World, the Indian ceremonies celebrated continuity with nature or the survival of the tribe in the death and resurrection of its king-father (III: iii, 132). Williams implies, as Lawrence before him, that the aboriginal American, through his dance rites, had a sense of integration lost to the modern, alienated world. Significantly, the white soldiers refused the braves their dance rites, just as the Puritans In the American Grain outlawed the pagan dance around a may-pole (another communal rite celebrating the coming of spring or life). Whenever the life-affirming, sensory pleasure of movement was denied, it became subverted or perverted, resulting in the death-defying leap of daredevil Sam Patch, or the suicidal jump of Mrs. Sarah Cumming.
The progressive violence and endless cycles of death and rebirth come to an end with the apotheosis of the poet into a dancing satyr in Book V. Like the identification Yeats made with his Salomé image, the satyr is an androgynous figure for the bi-sexual artist, wedding both male and female principles in Paterson. As Dionysus' attendant, the satyr grounds Williams' love of the classical into the local as it did in Kora. As half-man and half-goat, he ties together that ubiquitous group of dwarfs, unicorns, centaurs and other grotesque creatures of mixed human-animal-divine attributes who dot the past and present, mythological and real landscape of Paterson. When the satyr dances, "all deformities take wing," just as Williams' writing of a new or authentic language raises the "deformed" or commonplace speech of Paterson's denizens to a level of distinction (V: ii, 221).

The satyr's strategic position in Book V also amends an earlier statement in the "Preface":

For the beginning is assuredly the end -- since we know nothing, pure and simple, beyond our own complexities. (3)

With the last five lines of Paterson, we are offered this cryptic qualification:
We know nothing and can know nothing
but
the dance, to dance to a measure
contrapuntally.

Satyricaly, the tragic foot. (V: iii, 239)

The meaning of these lines do not imply a metaphysical position like Yeats's
illustration of unity of being through the undifferentiated dancer and dance.
To "know" anything, even one's own identity, means to have experienced a
relationship with some thing or person(s) in the outside world. Like
Lawrence, Williams felt it took at least two to make a dance in his sense of
the word. Knowing through relation involves the imaginative act of imposing
an order or "measure" onto the random, chaotic facts of existence.

Because he associated dance with the birth of poetry, Williams was
fascinated with the "measure" underlying any kind of primitive form--from
Indian dance rites like the Kinte Kaye to the sacred dance rituals in honor of
Dionysus at the Greek Spring Festival or those performed at the Eleusian
Mysteries in honor of Demeter and Persephone. In the essay, "America,
Whitman, and the Art of Poetry" written in 1917, he stated:

    the origin of our verse was the dance--and even
    if it had not been the dance, the heart when it is
    stirred has multiple beats, and verse at its most
    impassioned sets the heart violently beating. ("ELG" 23)

In a letter to John Thirlwall in 1955, Williams reiterated his belief that poetry
traced its origins to the formal arrangements in dance:
Poetry began with measure, it began with the dance,
whose divisions we have all but forgotten but are still
known as measures. Measures they were and we still
speak of their minuter elements as feet. (SL 331)

Williams notion of primitive measure is about as elusive and difficult to
pin down as his related concept of the “new measure,” “variable” or
“relatively stable” foot he searched for throughout his career. The “old
measure” he described elsewhere as something “we feel but do not name”
(SE 339). In the final lines of Paterson, we are given a clue that the ancient
satyric measure is danced on “tragic” feet. But in an earlier passage from
Book V, Williams had associated the satyrs with a “pre-tragic” or comic beat.

.. or the Satyrs, a
pre-tragic play,
a satyric play!

All plays
were satyric when they were most devout.
Ribald as a Satyr! (V: ii, 221)

Joseph Riddel argues around the dilemma by stating that the satyr
dance occurs

...on the original site where the pre-tragic steps into tragic,
where the primordial dance of form and power, or word
and thing, broke off. It is the point of departure of man into
history, the place of blockage. (Inverted Bell 35)

For Riddel, the ancient satyric dance and the “new measure” Williams
sought in Paterson are synonymous. They are both characterized by
absence and trace a lost plenitude. The satyric dance, he explains, “precedes the word.”

It has no name. It is not a unity, but a dissonance.
It is, therefore, an opening a violent and inaugural
beginning of the word which the word can never name. (40)

According to Riddel, the satyric dance in Paterson expresses that which is ineffable, the “stream/ that has no language” (I: ii, 24). It is like that

flower within a flower whose history
(within the mind) crouching
among the ferny rocks, laughs at the names
by which they think to trap it. Escapes! (I: i, 22)

If the satyr’s dance is ultimately untranslatable as a “thing in itself,” the image of his “tragic foot” is rich in verbal associations. Emily Wallace thinks it “resonates with the terror and absurdity of existence, and the halting, descending and ascending processes of life and art” (141). With his cleft feet/goat legs, the satyr/poet is a defective, handicapped hero pitted against a tragic world, one experiencing the aftermath of the Holocaust and the ever-present threat of the atomic bomb. His dancing at the end of the epic suggests a way of coping with the horror, like the Jew
in the pit among his fellows
when the indifferent chap
with the machine gun
was spraying the heap.
he had not yet been hit
but smiled
comforting his companions
comforting
his companions. (V: ii, 223)

According to Williams, even an aesthetic gesture can teach us how to order our lives.

Conversely, the poet/saty r has the dimensions of a tragic hero who finds himself living in a limited, defective world. Paterson, New Jersey in the mid-twentieth century is the antithesis of the heroic, Homeric age depicted in Greek tragedy, where a noble, aristocratic race of men created gods in their own image. Where heroes like Agamemnon quested after an ideal like family retribution ("tho' love seem to beget/ only death in the old plays") III: i 106), we worship money in America, according to Williams, and crave the fantastic and exotic, imaged in the high divers, tightrope walkers and whorehouses dotting Paterson's landscape. Because he treats this landscape parodically, Williams, as "satyric," is a "satirist" and the "new measure" is "satiric" in being a more appropriate form for mirroring the absurdity of modern existence.9
The measure which intervenes in the final lines of *Paterson*, however, is also danced “contrapuntally” as well as “satyrically,” like the dance in *Kora*, where the “trick” was “following now the words, allegro, now the contrary beat of the glossy leg” (*imag* 55). If the satyr has a “tragic foot” in life’s descending/ascending rhythms, he also has a “pre-tragic” Bacchic one, tapping out the wildly sensual rhythms of pure art. The Satyr, from the passage beginning “... or the Satyrs, a/ pre-tragic play,” is closer to the satyrs of his earlier works as well as their classical counterpart—the companion and devotee of the god Dionysus. To Peter Schmidt, they represent “sexual and spiritual potency”; to M.L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall, the satyrs link sexual interaction with the artistic imagination (192, 253).

To Emily Wallace, on the other hand, the creatures evoked by the line are not “the actual sylvan demi-gods who peer out of and between lines in *Kora* and some of his early poems, not those shy, lusty creatures in pursuit of nymphs. These satyrs are mortals dressed as satyrs, professional actors performing on stage, innovators, creative artists.” They are Williams’ “tribute to the Dionysian spirit of the theater” (138-9). Wallace reads the entire passage from Book V as an example of Williams’ “concentrated form” in which he carefully avoids the scholarly controversy over whether tragedy—from a Greek word meaning “a chorus of goats”—evolved from satyr plays, which, in turn, evolved from the *dithyramb*—originally a violent, leaping
dance.\textsuperscript{10} "Williams says simply 'a pre-tragic play, a satyric play!'" according to her, "because no one disputes that satyr plays existed before tragedies (and comedies)" (139). The "pre-tragic" satyrs are thus a concrete embodiment of Williams' interest in dance as the origin of verse. Aristotle, corroborating Williams' view, stated in the \textit{Poetics} that the iambic measure replaced the trochaic tetrameter, which was originally employed "when poetry was of the satyric order, and had greater affinities with dancing" (24). "All/ plays were satyric when they were most devout" because they originated as passionate cathartic dancing, in which the participants felt within themselves the divine and creative attributes of their gods.

The final "contrapuntal" dance that straddles both the "pre-tragic" and "tragic" or art and life expresses in miniature Paterson's collage structure. The "new measure" exists as new relations between words which have been "rhythmically organized." In a fragment from an interview which followed the first satyr passage, Williams explained to Mike Wallace:

"Anything is good material for poetry. Anything. I've said it time and time again" (V: ii, 225). Words "rhythmically organized" do not have to \textit{mean} anything. The words in a poem function like those "dances of the Bacchic sort," which the Athenian stranger in Plato's \textit{Laws} would condemn as disorderly and frivolous since "all this sort of dancing cannot be rightly defined as having either a peaceful or a warlike character, or indeed as
having any *meaning* whatsoever" (qtd. in Wallace 139). *Paterson* presents to the reader examples of “found” language -- like snatches of letters, newspaper clippings, advertisements, engineer reports, etc., which have been set down on the page to rhythmically counterpoint with literary language. The effect of juxtaposing objects of art together in the same space with artifacts from real life produces an element of ambiguity, which is also present in the abstract shapes that dancers’ bodies make as they rhythmically interact through space. *Paterson*’s collage structure, like *Kora*’s improvisatory one, requires that we “dance” with the juxtapositions at some elemental, “pre-conscious” level and determine whatever meaning resides there for ourselves.

After *Paterson*, Williams continued searching for the appropriate measure or form with which to articulate his poems as verbal dances. A heart attack, together with a series of crippling strokes in the fifties, however, left him incapable of dancing with or of directly touching the objects of the sensory world as he had done in the poetry of the late 1910s and 1920s. According to Carl Rapp, Williams withdrew “into himself to contemplate things from a distance” (123). Instead of the things-in-themselves, Williams’ thinking-about-things or thought processes became the subject of his poetry. In “The Desert Music” (1951), “The Dance” (1953), “Wedding Dance in the Open Air” (1959) and “Heel and Toe to the End” (1961), Williams’
meditations centered on dance; it was to remain his supreme figure for the artistic process, along with Kora or his female principle. And though the satyr disappeared, Williams created other “modern replicas” (to borrow a phrase from Paterson), who still remembered traces of the old, primal Dionysian measure.

“The Desert Music” (PB 108-20), written for and recited in front of a less than sympathetic Harvard University Phi Beta Kappa Society, was inextricably bound up with Williams' recovery from his first stroke (Mariani 631-2). The poem was also the product of Williams' second visit to the Southwest at the invitation of his old friend Robert McAlmon, a writer stricken with tuberculosis and reduced to selling shoes at his brothers' store in El Paso. The highlight of the trip was an excursion across the international bridge to Juárez, where Williams encountered, as Lawrence before him, widespread poverty, violence bubbling under a somnolent exterior and a “rank” fecundity of life springing from the “ground,” the source, as Williams explained in an earlier context with respect to the Aztecs, of the “mysterious secret of existence” (JAG 34).

According to Sherman Paul, Williams was able to affirm his shaken identity as a poet in “The Desert Music” by creating a familiar pattern of psychic descent and ascent or his Kora principle (Music of Survival
22-3, 67-8). Because the plunge was into unfamiliar, exotic territory, Williams’ excursion into Mexico resembled Marlow’s descent into the heart of darkness. Only the “horror,” in Williams’ case, was not the evil lurking in mankind (symbolized by Kurtz), but was manifested in an image of total human inertia and deformity: “a form/ propped motionless—on the bridge/ between Juárez and El Paso” (PB 108). Like Kora’s hell and Paterson’s American environment, this shapeless lump on the bridge was Williams’ figure for virgin reality:chaotic and threatening when not measured by the dance or poem. His ascent, on the other hand, began in a sleazy Mexican nightclub, where Kora (an “outworn stripper from the States”), in a reversal of former roles, rescues the poet.

Like Paterson, “The Desert Music” also aspires to the condition of dance through its rhythmical interplay of words. How the “verb detaches itself” and becomes articulate in this poem is a metonymy for the way art imitates—“NOT prostrate, to copy”—nature (109). The poem as a verb dances “two and two” with both an inner and outer space: the ambiguously fertile and menacing world of Juárez as well as Williams’ vulnerable human nature which agonizes to achieve self-realization:
--to tell
what subsequently I saw and what heard
--to place myself (in
my nature) beside nature. (110)

Williams' abrupt counterpointing of multiple voices, as well as his fracturing of chronological time, result in the poem's jagged, syncopated rhythm. The use of asymmetric typography, line enjambment and white space, moreover, imitate the speaker's sense of inner fragmentation. Conversely, the final repetition of neat quatrains and symmetrical lines signal a return to measure and order in both the poet's inner and outer nature.

The poem begins in Williams' memory of the shape "propped motionless," which he spotted as he left Juárez with the McAlmons and Floss to return to El Paso. Because of his recent stroke, the poet cannot at the present time dance with the image and render it luminous. Instead, it renders him poetically impotent and "sticks" in his throat (109) as an image of his own approaching death, when he too will "lie prostrate" and sink back into the utter formlessness of the ground or nature.

The typological organization of the first three stanzas mirrors the poet's anxieties:
the dance begins: to end about a form
propped motionless -- on the bridge
between Juárez and El Paso -- unrecognizable
in the semi-dark

Wait!

The others waited while you inspected it,
on the very walk itself. (108)

Williams imitates the dangling form by leaving it verbally dangling on the page with several lines of white space. The space, indicating a pause, is in turn followed by the urgent, one word imperative line--"Wait!"--followed by another white space or pause. As Lois Bar-Yaacov notes, the isolation of one word in the center of the page, surrounded by wide space, has the same dramatic visual effect of a "single dancer, broken off from the group, center stage, the focus of all eyes, while movement is momentarily halted" (93).

In addition to provoking a flash-forward of impending death, the image also initiates a flashback in the poet's mind to the beginning of his journey into archetypal America, starting with the train ride into El Paso to visit his friend. The "fertile desert" had surrounded them with an insensate "music of survival," which is now only "half heard" and "distant" in his memory (110). Williams then recalls the Mexican marketplace. The memory of its intense light, vivid colors, begging children, vulgar tourists, and the
snatches of tales he has heard about human vice and violence create in him feelings of stress, a “vague apprehension,” which is expressed in the repetition of nouns and adjectives like “intense,” “obscene,” “insistent,” “pressure” (112-3). To Williams, the place was both exotic and alien, attractive and threatening, and from it another “music rouse[d]” in him, different from the music heard on the train.

This was the changeless and “insistent” Latin music emanating from the bars, where the Indians “prattle about their souls and their loves” (115). This music, he remembers, was “nauseating” and made him sick, but when he entered one of these bars, he found some temporary relief in watching a stripper dance to “another tune” (115).

    What the hell
    are you grinning
    to yourself about? Not
    at her?
    The music!
    I like her. She fits

the music. (115)

According to Stephen Cushman, the typographic isolation of the final line removes “the music” from its literal context and “associates it with the figurative music of the desert” (95). With “her bare/ can waggling crazily,” the stripper “fits” the insensate music of the mind, which it projects onto the fragments of existence. The description of her dance which follows, he
points out, "gyrates through five neatly symmetrical quatrains before yielding to the asymmetry of verse paragraphing which Williams reserves for a shift in tone" (95).

The stripper also "fits" into Williams' longtime fascination with archetypal women like Persephone and Kora, who make brief appearances (as the young Indian carrying her baby and a "half-grown" girl, laughing and "eating a/ pomegranate" 113). In contrast, the stripper from the States is old and "heavy on her feet." Yet her solid grounding reminds the poet of "Andromeda of those rocks" (115-6). The legendary Andromeda was tied to a rock, as an innocent victim in a dispute over beauty. Ironically, Wallace Stevens was to question the beauty of Williams' stripper, labeling her "anti-poetic." But for Williams, she moved by the "grace of/ a certain candor" (115) and was one more variation of his "Beautiful Thing."

After the stripper's dance, the poet recalls another scene at a restaurant where he was questioned by others in his party about being a poet.
So this is William Carlos Williams, the poet. You seem quite normal. Can you tell me? Why does one want to write a poem?

Because it's there to be written.

Oh. A matter of inspiration then?

Of necessity.

Oh. But what sets it off?

I am that he whose brains are scattered aimlessly

--and so, the hour done, the quail eaten, we were on our way back to El Paso. (117-8)

Asymmetric typography and line enjambment reinforce visually the sense of estrangement Williams feels from his fellow humans, as well as his shattered sense of identity as a poet. For the poet may have seemed "quite normal," but "the disconnected, typographically dislocated" lines beginning, "I am that he," as Cushman noted, betray an inner chaos and disorder. Enjambment in the above passage "expresses an uncomfortable self-consciousness"
as it extracts Williams' first name from his literary name and label, 'the poet.' Line division images the estrangement of a man from his reputation, from the name he has made for himself in the world. In that estrangement he finds himself momentarily cut off from the external world of people who do not expect a poet to 'seem quite normal'; yet he also finds himself cut off from himself and his own sense of poetic identity. (121)

The lines also illustrate Williams' attempt to impose an order he cannot at this point in the poetic process sustain. "I am that he," is a non-response to the question posed at the table ("But what sets it off?") and breaks the pattern of the first two questions addressed to him which did receive real answers.

Once outside the restaurant, however, the stripper's music returns and fully reawakens the poet's senses. He feels again those mud-soiled, threatening and "insistent fingers" of the Mexican beggar boys on his "naked wrists." But now the image is accompanied by the memory of Pablo Casals' fingers when he "struck/ and held a deep cello tone" (117-8). After conjuring the image of the stripper, things begin to connect in the speaker's mind. The garish colors of the Mexican marketplace and the "rank fertility" of the Mexicans are fused to the "bright-colored candy" of the stripper's "nakedness" (111,113,116). Like the old muse in "The Wanderer," who initiated or baptized a young Williams in the filthy Passaic, the stripper has re-
affirmed to an ailing Williams that he is still a poet. When the image at the
beginning of the formless lump on the bridge returns, its former intiminations
of the poet's mortality are reconciled with images from art and life.

There it sat
in the projecting angie of the bridge flange
as I stood aghast and looked at it --
in the half-light: shapeless or rather returned
to its original shape, armless, legless,
headless, packed like the pit of a fruit into
that obscure corner -- or
a fish to swim against the stream --or
a child in the womb prepared to imitate life,
warding its life against
a birth of awful promise. The music
guards it, a mucus, a film that surrounds it,
a benumbing ink that stains the
sea of our minds--to hold us off--shed
of a shape as close as it can get to no shape,
a music! a protecting music

I am a poet! I
am. I am. I am a poet, I reaffirmed, (119-20)

The poet's private triangular shape from the early poems re-appears as the
"obscure corner" and "projecting angle," which Doctor Williams faced many
times before while delivering babies. Punning on the words, "mucus" and
"music," the earlier heard "protective music" becomes both the protective
placenta out of which the poem is finally delivered and the amniotic fluid
guarding the embryo "against/ a birth of awful promise." Human life, like the
poem, imitates the generative principle in nature, like the continuance of the
fruit in its pit and the fish who swim upstream to mate and die. The
“benumbing ink” in the pen which writes the poem is a stay (“to hold us off”) from the shapelessness of death.

In the next poem, the elegiac lyric “The Dance,” Williams moved beyond the personal to explore the cosmic implications of dance. The poem presents a somber vision of life as a “flurry of the storm/ that holds us,/ plays with us and discards us” (PR 32-3). In this Lear-like world, “only the dance is sure!” (33). The movement of the poem links up various levels of reality in a chain of being which spirals downward to the earth. The snow flakes spinning “intimately/ two and two” as they descend, are seamlessly woven into the “whirls and glides” of forever changing, human partners:

    spinning face to face but always down
    with each other secure
    only in each other's arms. (32)

Even the mind dances with itself “two and two” as a figure for the poetic process. The barren reality of falling snow is imitated formally. The poem’s minimal punctuation (three comma's, an exclamation point and question mark) results in enjambment, or the syntax spilling over from one symmetrical quatrain to the next. The reader’s eyes are thus effortlessly directed downward in imitation of the gravitational pull of all dance and life.
This is not the case in one of Williams' last poems, "Heel and Toe to the End," where Soviet Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin literally defies gravity when he "dances" in outer space. Gagarin is related to other explorer/heroes of the poet's, like Columbus and DeSoto. But instead of a New World, Gagarin discovers the infinite possibilities of the old one, "one hundred eight minutes off/ the surface of/ the earth." Even from that mind-boggling, dizzy height, a measure intervenes, as it did in Paterson and "The Desert Music." This measure is also relational. For Gagarin, it is a scientific, Einsteinian measure ("all that division and/ subtraction") which brings him safely back to earth. For the poet, it is the aesthetic or imaginative measure which orders and shapes reality. Once again, it is grounded in the foot and the ancient "divisions" of dance:

from all that division and subtraction a measure
toe and heel

heel and toe he felt
as if he had been dancing. (PB 69)
Notes

1 See “The Poem as a Field of Action” (SE 280-91).

2 The interested reader should refer to Stephen Cushman, William Carlos Williams and the Meaning of Measure, for a thorough analysis of the poet's method of lineation in his nonmetrical verse. Williams' numerous references to the word “measure” are often contradictory or confusing, according to Cushman, because of the poet's tendency to undifferentiate between two entirely different meanings of the word. Williams often used “measure” in its specific technical sense of signifying pseudo-musical divisions in verse. But he also meant “measure” as "meet" or fitting, appropriate, commensurate. When used in the latter sense, Williams was generating poetic trope.

3 See William Marling, “Corridor to Clarity”: Sensuality and Sight in the Poems of William Carlos Williams," for a detailed phenomenological explication of the prow's "out-of-body forward motion" (285-98).

4 “I am told that it is my duty to write the biography of Martha Graham,” he wrote in a letter to Alva Turner. But with Williams up to his neck in commitments, the project never materialized (Selected Letters 171).

5 Unpublished letter dated May 9, 1944 to Horace Gregory from the George Arents Special Collections of the Syracuse University Library.

6 Books II, III, IV and V of Paterson were published in 1948, '49, '51 and '58 respectively.

7 Analogous to the spring festival honoring Dionysus, the Eleusinian Mysteries (bequeathed to the ancestors of the Athenians by Demeter) were originally sacred dance rites. Symbolic dramas which re-enacted the myth, like the Attic tragedies, evolved later. The mimetic representations were said to put the participants in touch with divine power (as did the ecstatic dancing of Dionysus' followers) and as a result, reduced their terror of death with intimations of an afterlife.

8 When asked in a 1962 interview if the satyrs represented "the element of freedom, of energy within the forms," Williams said: “Yes. The
satyrs are understood as action, a dance. I always think of the Indians there” (Koehler 130).

9 The satyr’s deformed foot also recalls the prose fragment at the end of Book I quoted from John Addington Symonds’ Studies of the Greek Poets (1880). Symonds described the lame or halting verses of Hipponax as being to poetry “what the dwarf or cripple is in human nature”:

Here again, by their acceptance of this halting meter, the Greeks displayed their acute sense of propriety, recognizing the harmony which subsists between crabbed verses and the distorted subjects with which they dealt — the vices and perversions of humanity — as well as their agreement with the snarling spirit of the satirist [emphasis added]. Deformed verse was suited to deformed morality (I: iii, 40).

Since one of Paterson’s themes is “the vices and perversions of humanity,” Stephen Cushman persuasively argues that Williams felt justified in using “mutilated, crabbed verses, which range freely into prose and common speech” in Paterson (118). Cushman’s reading of “to dance to a measure contrapuntally” as line-sentence counterpointing, refers to Williams’ frequent use of enjambment, where lines end in mid-sentence, and caesura, in which sentences end in mid-line (22).

10 Williams had read Jane Harrison, who, we recall, corroborated Aristotle’s statement in the Poetics that Greek tragedy grew out of the Dithyramb or Greek spring festival honoring the god Dionysus. He was also probably aware of Aristotle’s statement in the Poetics, in which he referred to tragedy’s “satyr-like” origins and claimed it was not until the sixth century that it “discarded the grotesque diction of the earlier satyric form for the stately manner of tragedy.” Even during the classical period, satyr plays were still performed and usually came after a trilogy of tragedies at the Dionysian festival. They resembled tragedies in form, but treated their Homeric legends grotesquely. The choruses from these plays were dressed to represent satyrs and their language and movements were often obscene.
CONCLUSION

In between Yeats’s faeries dancing in the Celtic twilight and Williams’ Russian cosmonaut’s jig through space, the modernist dancer underwent several metamorphoses. Influenced by the fin-de-siècle Salomé fixation, Yeats drew a beautiful woman with a perfectly proportioned body and a Mona Lisa smile whose dancing roused in the beholder both inspiration and madness. In Lawrence’s fiction, the female who dances is more apt to conjure a little madness within herself, yet is still threatening in her overwhelming need to dominate her partner. Eliot neutralizes the menace posed by the female dancer by trivializing her in the early poems and concentrates instead on the self-flagellation of a saintly male dancer. With Williams, finally, the femme fatale dancer undergoes a role reversal. As a “worn-out stripper from the States,” she is hardly beautiful in any conventional way and as “The Beautiful Thing,” a battered victim of male lust, she is hardly treacherous. Yet as embodiments of Kora or the female principle, all of Williams’ dancers, like Yeats’s, are figures for the creative process.

Besides the variations in dancer, the sixty some years covered in this study saw some revealing differences in the conception of dance. To Eliot, it
meant the control, refinement and transcendence of the body through the
mastery of learned, prescribed choreography. Dance to him was
synonymous with the classical ballet, with its highly specialized technique
and its aspirations of rising above the ground into a purer realm. Eliot
lauded a ballet company's authoritarian, hierarchical structure, its unified
point of view, the rigorous training of its cloistered members and, most of all,
its role as a transmitter of tradition, in which past ballets were handed down
to and re-invented by the present generation.

Lawrence, on the other hand, neither knew nor seemed interested in
professional dancers and was more concerned with the place of dance in
everyday life than he was with dance as art. To him, dance was instinctual,
natural, improvised and an efficacious activity for every member in society.
When Lawrence read Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual*, he too became
excited about the ancients feeling attuned or unified with their external world
through dance. But instead of wanting to re-capture this unity for the theater
like Eliot, Lawrence had planned that daily communal dancing would play
an integral part in Rananim, his unrealized Utopia (Bolton 951).

Williams, like Lawrence, looked at dance as a cathartic "letting go"
and freeing of the body. And unlike Eliot, he came to see classical ballet as
the "brainless" repetition of a "saccharine putridity" (FD 319-20). Williams'
own poetic of "nothing is good save the new" shared more in common with
the early modern dance movement in America. The new dance, like
Williams' poetry, had its roots in the local and probed the unconscious for a
plainer, less stylized movement vocabulary. Instead of ballet's heavenly
ascent, it hugged the life-sustaining ground.

Yeats, the eclectic Celt, embraced all forms of dance. The particular
backgrounds of his dancer/collaborators--eurythmic-trained Michio Ito and
ballet-trained Ninette de Valois--were irrelevant, since he covered them both
up equally with masks. Yeats, moreover, was drawn to the Oriental themes
of two stylistically antithetical soloists: Ruth St. Denis and Anna Pavlova. Yet
his greatest artistic affinities were with Loïe Fuller's symbolist dance.

Despite the vast ideological differences among Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence
and Williams, all four saw in dance an ideal expression of impersonality in
art. Mallarmé isolated this quality in the non-human, non-dancing ballerinas
of the Paris Opéra and in Fuller's submerging her personality into abstract
shapes which danced through space. Likewise, Yeats saw in Michio Ito's
immobile face his own ideal of impersonality, which meant the wearing of
masks and the subsequent attainment of a measure of personal, existential
freedom for the artist living in a deterministic, modern world. Eliot saw in
Russian Ballet star Léonide Massine's entire performance a "vital flame," an
“impersonal ... inhuman force” in which the dancer extinguished his personality to a four hundred-year-old tradition and became indistinguishable from the dance. Differing from the other two, Lawrence developed his views of impersonality from the Italian futurists, rather than French symbolists, and from Ancient Art and Ritual, where he envied the ancient Greeks for expressing in their dance rites a realm of experience beyond personality and the self. If modern men and women could once again partake in rituals, they too could likewise shed their egos (or “diamonds”) for the greater inhuman will (or “carbon’) expressed in the dance.

All four modernists were also united in their view that dance existed at some unconscious level and that it signified some deeply felt experience which eluded verbal utterance. Yeats felt dance’s trance-like rhythms altered daytime consciousness into a twilight realm between sleeping and awaking. Being swept up into the rhythms of a collective dance made him forget his isolation as an “old scarecrow.” Eliot felt dance rhythms traveled to the brain through the neurological system (the “dance along the arteries”) and evoked the spiritual by tapping latent religious archetypes residing in the psychological unconscious. Lawrence also felt dance was experienced in the blood (moving in the opposite direction), and that it constituted “phallic consciousness” or man’s sympathetic, intuitive awareness of all living
things. Williams, finally, envisioned dance as a numinous, pre-reflective state anterior to language, which was capable of loosening the mind of its inhibitions. He called dance "the thing-in-itself," while Eliot labeled it the "stillpoint." Eliot concluded "there is only the dance," while Williams confirmed that "only the dance is sure." To Lawrence, dance brought back a sense of awe and mystery missing in the modern age and to Eliot, it simplified "current life into something rich and strange."

Yet the cross-fertilization between dance and literary modernism does not end here. For the vectors of influence traveled the other way as well. Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn (her partner/husband) as well as Martha Graham were, like Lawrence, deeply inspired by the ecstatic dance rituals of aboriginal Americans. At her request, Graham's ashes were recently dispersed into the Southwest, just as Lawrence's had been fifty years earlier. More importantly, Graham's symbolist dance theater and her collaborations with Japanese sculptor Isamu Noguchi drew on the expressionistic style of Yeats's Noh plays. Significantly, Graham's version of the Salomé myth, Hérodiade, was based on Mallarmé's poem (rather than Wilde's play) and featured the same icy, narcissistic dancer fixated by her reflection in (Noguchi's) mirror that Yeats had identified with. Moreover, the heroines of Graham's early dances (like Frontier, American Provincials and American Document) were inspired by Williams' portrayal of American
archetypes *In the American Grain*. Merce Cunningham, however, representative of the third generation of modern choreographers, is the rightful heir to Williams’ *Paterson*. Like the mix of art and life language in Williams’ epic, Cunningham juxtaposed pedestrian (non-dance) movement with a stylized movement vocabulary. Like Williams’ cubist poems, Cunningham played with perspective by de-centering dance and doing away with the hierarchical structure of the proscenium. And finally, even Old Possum left his imprint on the dance world, when his *Book of Practical Cats* and a segment of the poem “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” were transformed into the exuberant feline dancing of Andrew Lloyd Weber’s musical *Cats*. 
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