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Storytelling through Movement:

An Analysis of the Connections between Literature and Dance

Written by

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An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Date



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4/14/18

Date

*“Stories are alive beings,
little animals who drink from the creek
of my spirit; who scratch at the door;
who invent absurd and curious ways
of being in the world; who
carve indelible maps in the sky
for the rest of us to follow.”*

-Tiffany Midge

*“Dance is your pulse, your heartbeat, your breathing. It’s the rhythm of your life. It’s the
expression in time and movement, in happiness, joy, sadness and envy.”*

-Jacques d’Amboise

Introduction

From time immemorial, dance and movement have been used as tools to express emotions and to tell stories. Before the development of syllabaries enabled the creation of written records, performances composed of oral storytelling and movement passed down the tales and traditions of cultures around the globe. Much later in history, as dance and literature became more artistically structured, the correlation between the two art forms grew together. Today, many people still go to the theatre to see both classic or more modern productions of their favorite stories. These stories and traditions are the link between past and present. Why do we dance? Why do we tell stories? Both dance and literature have the same artistic and primal

origins: communication. We began to dance to express and to communicate, to worship and to feel. We began to tell stories for the same reasons: to learn from the past and to be able to communicate in the present.

In this undergraduate thesis, I explore the connections between movement and literature. I have done so by looking at dance and literature as generic wholes, and also by examining the intermingling roles that literature shares with six different dance forms from across the globe. By looking specifically at Native American dance, Bharatanatyam, West African dance, Ballet, Modern dance, and Post-Modern dance, I have been able to discover connections that are unique to certain pairings of dance and literature and others that appear to be a global experience.

My goal in writing this thesis was to find both expected and unexpected connections between movement and literature. As a dancer, my own experiences have primarily been with ballet and modern dance, so I tapped my knowledge of these forms as a jumping-off point. Some questions that I wanted to answer when beginning my research were:

1. Why do we generally associate classical literature and drama with classical ballet? Do ballet and classical literature often end up paired together simply because they are both “classic” art forms?
2. How do we look at the difference in storytelling between classical ballet and other genres of dance? Just as ballet is associated with classical literature, are other forms of dance associated with other specific literary genres?
3. Are classical Western stories limited to the realm of ballet? If not, how can we translate them to other forms of dance to tell the same stories in a different way?

4. Does ballet tell the stories of Western culture in the same way that Native American dance or traditional African dance tell the stories of theirs? In the same way that classical Indian dance tells the stories of classical Indian culture? How does the Western stage create a different storytelling environment than other performance environments?
5. Does dance ever play a role in literature?
6. Does storytelling through movement serve a universal purpose to preserve the various cultures of the world?
7. Are there times in history when dancing, storytelling, or both, were prohibited? Monitored? Dangerous? What happens with this censorship?

Definitions

Dancing is “to move one's body rhythmically, usually to music or to engage in or perform a dance” (Merriam-Webster). I will use five basic yet encompassing facets of dance in this work:

1. *Trance* dancing is characterized by movements that are uncontrolled, unconscious, and flailing. Trance dancers often fall to the ground, into a trance, or become physically unconscious. Dancers often do not remember the experience of their movements; trance dance is a form of release typically used to celebrate some type of spirituality or freedom.
2. *Ritual* dancing is characterized by movement associated with rituals; it usually begins slow, dignified, and controlled, but may develop into more hectic movements (here, it may become trance dance). Ritual dance often has specific purposes, such as use in

religious ceremonies. Today, ritual dance can sometimes lack its original spiritual purpose as it is danced merely for tradition's sake. However, many ritual dances are still performed with their original purpose.

3. *Folk* dance is the dance of the people. Folk dances are forms of social dance unique to a culture, but they are also a global experience (as all cultures have them). They are typically characterized by simple steps danced to popular music, and performing dancers often wear elaborate costumes that capture the traditions of their culture. Folk dances are danced at social events, even today, like weddings.
4. *Ethnic* dance is characterized by technical difficulty and elaborate costumes that are indicative of an idealized time and place for the dancer's culture. Ethnic dance is usually performed for an audience, whereas the other forms of dance may not always be.
5. *Theatrical* dance is performed for an audience in both formal and informal settings.

Folk, ethnic, ritual, and theatrical dancing generally set the stage, if you will, for storytelling.

Stories are “accounts of incidents or events or an anecdote” (Merriam-Webster).

Literature is “writings in prose or verse, especially writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest” and “the body of written works produced in a particular language, country or age” (Merriam-Webster).

Prose is “the ordinary language people use in speaking or writing: the literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its greater irregularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to the patterns of everyday speech” (Merriam-Webster).

Poetry is “writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm” (Merriam-Webster).

The Importance of Dance & Literature

The human species has developed methods to both preserve our history and live in our present. In the introduction to *Performative Body Spaces: Corporeal Topographies in Literature, Theatre, Dance, and the Visual Arts*, Markus Hallensleben states that writing and moving are both ways that we achieve this preservation: “Our globalized cultures are. . . based on the European culture of *graphein*, of leaving traces in space. Writing is just one example of making oneself visible in order to be present; walking and dancing are two other instances of avoiding the absence of one’s own body” (Hallensleben 18). Storytelling and movement are important methods of creation; their impact can be seen in cultures across the world. Hallensleben notes the significance of both forms of expression: “If the image is text, then the body is space. If texts can create images, then spaces can change bodies and vice versa. If images can change cultures, then the body can create text; it is and has the text that controls cultural spaces, and at the same time is controlled by cultural images” (Hallensleben 18). We are both creators and products of our artforms, as art is affected by and affects human actions.

Dance and literature, while artistically correlated, are also vastly different in many ways. Literature is stable; a book can be printed, or an e-book can be accessed online because words can be written down and preserved. Today, we even have written or recorded sources of many oral traditions, despite oral storytelling having once been a temporal art. Dance, on the other hand, has always been transitory. In her article “Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural

Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's *Radha* of 1906," Jane Desmond writes about the importance of studying dance in an anthropological manner, pointing out that "as the most ephemeral of all the arts, dance leaves the fewest traces (most dances have not been recorded in any way), making historical reconstruction and analysis exceedingly difficult" (256). Today, dance performances and techniques can be filmed, and some forms have even developed written notation methods. Unfortunately, many styles and performances are completely lost in history.

Both dance and literature can help us to understand the various cultures of the world. By studying them, we study the human experiences of the past, present, and future.

Native American Dance & Literature

Modern Native American culture is extremely diverse, and the American Indian artforms mirror this diversity. However, looking at the pan-Indian experience, we can make connections between the dances and stories of Native American culture. Much like the Native people themselves, their literature and dance forms have had to adapt to harsh circumstances to survive in the modern world. Modern Native American dance is usually ethnic dance and identified as such by the intricate costuming (especially at powwows) and the advanced technicality of the vast majority of its forms. And although many ritualistic forms have lost their original spiritual purposes, ritual dances are still practiced. Today, Native American dance is performed at powwows across the continent; likewise, celebrated Native authors such as Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich have their works read across the world. Modern Native literature and dance are both forms of *survivance*. From the French that translates to *survival* or *legacy*, *survivance* captures the powerful determination that has kept Native American culture alive through countless undeserved horrors. Although modern Native dance and storytelling do not always

preserve the roles that they would have had in traditional Native settings, both artforms have survived and are thriving together.

Thus, in Native American dance and literature, we see:

1. A sense of *survivance*. Native Americans have managed to keep their artforms alive, despite historical hardships. Although modern dance forms and stories are sometimes diluted from their predecessors, they still contain aspects of traditional culture in adapted forms. Both Native dance and literature have defied odds to continue existing.
2. A reversal in the roles of dance and literature. In all the cultures and dance styles that I discuss, storytelling plays a stronger role in dance than dance does in literature because dance is a platform for telling stories, but literature is not always a platform for writing about dance. However, dance has a strong presence in modern Native American literature because of its importance in traditional Native culture.

Native American Survivance

Traditional Native American dance, while differing vastly across the continent, is typically founded in spirituality and often has some sort of ritualistic goal. In the Hopi Snake Dance, the Hopi believe that the snakes that they dance with will carry their messages and prayers into the underworld, prayers asking the deities to grant clouds and rain to the people above. In the much more modern Ghost Dance, the original dancers believed that their movements would bring about a revival of better days for Natives. These ritualistic dances are seen across Native culture; they are a pan-Indian experience. In many cases, such as in Plains

culture, dance rituals were used as a method to comprehend the natural world. In their article “Medicine of the Brave: A Look at the Changing Role of Dance in Native Culture from the Buffalo Days to the Modern Powwow,” Lisa Doolittle and Heather Elton write,

Because Plains culture was so deeply rooted in a sense of place, animals, weather patterns—like the dramatic prairie lightning storms—and other manifestations in nature profoundly influenced their world view. Dance became a means to understand these fantastic natural occurrences, and was possibly an attempt to exert some control over them. Tribes sharing a physical landscape developed a similar belief system, and, consequently, had similar dances. (Doolittle & Elton 114)

These dances, like traditional stories, became an integral part of Native culture.

When life in the Americas was thrown out of balance with the arrival of European invaders, Native American culture was thrown out of balance as well:

Because dance was so inseparable from daily life, it was only reasonable that when high Plains culture came to an abrupt end in the late 1880s the dances changed accordingly. Disease, death, isolation and outright suppression affected the survival of tradition. With the buffalo destroyed and life confined to the reservation, there was obviously no longer any need to dance to ensure the success of a good buffalo hunt. The dancing which had been a part of their culture for as long as 9,000 years was no longer relevant. (Doolittle & Elton 114)

From coast to coast, Native American culture was in crisis. How could the culture survive when lifeways and the people were dying? The prohibitions of Native American dance that began in

the nineteenth century would greatly affect the survival of the artform. In 1886, “a Paiute prophet named Wovoka had a vision promising the ‘revival of the old Indian ways, the return of the buffalo, and the annihilation of the race responsible for all their troubles’” (Doolittle & Elton 116). Wovoka foresaw that,

“a new world would be ushered in with a great earthquake, followed by a flood, which would wash away and destroy all unbelievers. The new world would be covered with green grass and herds of deer, elk, antelope and buffalo, and the Indians would live in a paradise, untroubled by war, disease or famine.” (qtd. in Doolittle & Elton 117)

After centuries of suffering, this vision of what is known today as the Ghost Dance must have seemed promising to Native people. Wovoka’s message “spread like wildfire among disheartened Indians” (Doolittle & Elton 117). The Ghost Dance was a ritual performed in circles; Natives grasped the hands of their neighbors and their movements became faster as the dance progressed (Doolittle & Elton 117). The Sioux militarized the dance, approaching the ritual as they would have approached a battle, and their white counterparts began to fear potential effects. Tensions rising from the Ghost Dance eventually led to the massacre at Wounded Knee. After this event, the Ghost Dance, and all other forms of Native dancing, were banned by the United States government. “In 1882 the US Indian Office issued ‘Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offenses,’” which put dancers at risk and made their artform reason for imprisonment (Treglia 777). The US government viewed practices of Native culture as savage and pagan and concluded that such acts put American citizens at risk. Religious bans were also enacted during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it wasn’t until 1978, with the passage of the

American Indian Religious Freedom Act, that Native Americans were finally given the basic right to practice their own religions and expressions, such as dance, legally in the United States.

In her article “Using Citizenship to Retain Identity: The Native American Dance Bans of the Later Assimilation Era, 1900-1933,” Gabriella Treglia writes, “Resistance to the dance bans took many forms, ranging from clandestine performance of the sacred Lakota Sun Dance, to open defiance of the bans, to conscious modification of proscribed ceremonies” (779). Native Americans found ways to preserve their dances and identities in the midst of oppression and danger. Dances were practiced out of the eye of the government so that traditions could continue. Dance communities began to rise in the early twentieth century, and despite the then criminal nature of these events, the modern powwow was born.

The “powwow” is derived from an Algonquin term that means to “rekindle” (Doolittle & Elton 115). In their article, Doolittle and Elton write that “the modern version of the powwow is truly a rekindling of the spirit of traditional celebrations” (Doolittle & Elton 115). Powwows are not only a rekindling of Native culture; they have also acted as preservers of tradition. In an interview featured in “Medicine of the Brave: A Look at the Changing Role of Dance in Native Culture from the Buffalo Days to the Modern Powwow,” Eldon Yellowhorn speaks of traditional Native Dance as something that has miraculously survived;

It’s a hold-over, something that should have gone extinct with the buffalo days, but for some reason it still endures. The reason that there are still Indians around. The same reason that they have powwows ever year. There was so much cultural baggage and not everything survived the transition. Some dances are lost from

this generation and some have survived, but in a very diluted form. (qtd. in Doolittle & Elton 120)

This is the essence of *survivance*: that despite everything that has happened to Native American people, they have endured. Their artforms have endured.

In another interview featured by Doolittle and Elton, Lloyd Ewenin describes the modern powwow phenomenon: “Powwow today is a little bit commercialized because we now dance for money, we’re competing; but there is still a lot of spirituality and respect for traditions. Powwows have always been celebrations” (qtd. in Doolittle & Elton 121). Today, it is clear that the dances performed at powwows often lack their original purposes, if that purpose is even remembered. They do, however, continue to celebrate heritage and culture while playing a role in preserving traditions for future generations. People attend powwows both to perform and to watch, to remember and to move forward. Doolittle and Elton explain that “Whether the purpose of attending a powwow is social, artistic, economic or political the participant asserts membership in a tribe, and in the great Pan-Indian community, playing a part in preserving tradition, creatively adapted to current circumstances. The dancers move in synchrony with ancestral patterns and yet are in step with modern times” (Doolittle & Elton 116). Powwows have become an integral part of Native American culture, and Eldon Yellowhorn says that, “Powwows have become synonymous with being Indian. It would take a lot to destroy the powwow movement now” (Doolittle & Elton 120).

Modern Native American literature plays the same role that dance does in preserving culture. Works are often sprinkled with Native creation and trickster tales, but they also inform readers of the plight of the modern American Indian. Much like with the evolution of Native

dance, the literature has adapted to include both traditional aspects of the cultures and Native life today. Native literature saw a boom after the rise of the powwow had already begun. In Nancy Peterson's article "Introduction: Native American Literature: From the Margins to the Mainstream," she states, "The late 1960s and early '70s witnessed a publishing explosion for Native American studies" (1). During this time, anthologists began to publish Native stories and songs, and contemporary authors published new works as well. These publications "began to shape the directions and identity of Native American literature for the years to come" (Peterson 1).

As with dance, modern Native American literature risks loss of certain aspects of culture while preserving others. Peterson also includes a warning:

As Native American literature has become part of the mainstream . . . the literature becomes subject to an ever-increasing proliferation of readings, some informed and some not so . . . The potential downside, of course, is that, in the hands of untrained, though enthusiastic, readers and scholars, native texts may be romanticized, misread, and wrenched from their crucial tribal contexts. (2)

While modern forms of Native American dance and literature indeed run the risk of losing aspects of culture or falling into the hands of the wrong readers or viewers, their enduring roles in society and culture are far more important. The survival of these artforms are crucial to the continuation of Native American culture, and based on their strong endurance for the past few centuries, they will be surviving and thriving for much longer.

Native American Dance Playing a Role in the Literature

Because Native dance is spiritual and an important part of the pan-Indian culture, it often plays a role in Native American literature. Sometimes this presence is just a passing mention of dance, but sometimes it dominates a text. In Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer* (1994), the plot revolves around a local powwow and the people who compete and interact there. Despite the title, the novel is not purely about powwow dancing, but dance does play an integral role in the work. As in *The Grass Dancer*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) highlights the importance of dance in Native culture. However, as Power's text focuses more on ethnic, powwow dancing, Silko's text features ritual dance. *Ceremony* explores the intricacies and significance of both language and movement, as both are crucial in Tayo's healing process throughout the novel. Dance is also present in Native American poetry. Louise Erdrich's "White Braids" chronicles the dancing of an old woman, mentioning her "jingle dress exhibition," which is a popular woman's dance at powwows (*Sing* 34).

Bharatanatyam & Indian Literature

Bharatanatyam is ancient in practice and dates back to Bharatha's *Natyashastra*, which is "probably [from] the second to third centuries A.D." (Meduri 104). The *Natyashastra*, translated to English as the *Rules of Drama*, is not only a text on classical dance, but on Indian dramaturgy in general; within the text, the same rules govern both theater and dance practices. In her article, "Bharatha Natyam—What Are You?", Avanthi Meduri states that "Bharatha's vision . . . enunciates a total theatre that links all the minutest of units of dramatic representation. Each unit, such as dance, can be analyzed and described separately, and yet assumes theatrical significance only in the context of the whole dramatic representation" (104). Meduri, both a dancer and a scholar, defines Bharatanatyam by breaking it into "three distinct categories:"

natya, *nrithya*, and *nrtta*. *Natya* correlates to drama, *nrithya* to mime performed to song and music, and *nrtta* to pure dance that employs sculpturesque poses and body movements that do not refer back to narrative. The performer has four means of communication, or *abhinaya* (expression): *vacika* (speech), *aharya* (costume), *angika* (body), and *sattvika* (psychological states). (Meduri 104)

Thus, in traditional Southern Indian dance, there is storytelling in the cases of *natya* and *nrithya* but not necessarily in *nrtta*.

Bharatanatyam has a rich history; it begins in the temples of Southern and Western India and then undergoes immense transitions throughout its history. Originally, the temple dancers danced what is today called Bharatanatyam as a ritualistic, theatrical dance form. Today, Bharatanatyam is ethnic, theatrical dance, and it continues to be characterized by precise hand movements, fixed upper body, bent legs, and fast footwork. Difficult to master technically, traditional Bharatanatyam reflects stories and themes of idealized times in Indian society through its movements and its colorful and intricate costuming. There are also elements of trance dance in Bharatanatyam, as dancers aim to achieve *Rasa*, where they experience the “sublime in the erotic, the divine in the human” (Meduri 104). At its core, Bharatanatyam is correlated with Indian storytelling because the original dancers performed stories that had been passed down orally in the temples. It is an artform that draws from many aspects of the extremely diverse Indian culture. On Bharatanatyam, Meduri writes, “Indian dance . . . encapsulates both in structure and in content the philosophic aspirations of the Indian mind. It appears as a sublime synthesis of philosophy, sculpture, music, and literature. It gathers all these strands and sets them in motion before the eye” (Meduri 104). India’s modern repertoire of literature, too, represents a

synthesis of Indian religions, politics, and lifestyles. Authors like Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, and Vikram Seth captivate readers all over the world and question the identity of modern India. Both Bharatanatyam and Indian literature are symbols of strength in heritage and modernity.

Thus, in modern Bharatanatyam and Indian literature, we see:

1. Influences of colonization and globalization. During and since British rule in India, Indians have been caught in the contact zone between two worlds. Western influences have remained in the nation past the removal of British control, and these influences have significant impact on all aspects of Indian society, including the arts.
2. Secularization. While still maintaining aspects of traditional culture, modern Indian dance and literature have either left behind or questioned aspects of their more spiritual predecessors.

Colonization & Globalization

In 1947, the British left India, but the impact of their occupation never did. In his book *The Idea of India*, Sunil Khilnani writes, “No issue divides India’s historians more sharply than the impact of colonialism. Did British rule ruthlessly fracture the patterns of Indian society, or was it compelled to adapt to native styles, and merely preside in glorified manner over the more subterranean movements of India’s history?” (21). In the cases of Indian dance and literature, it can be unmistakably asserted that Western influences have had a strong presence throughout the last century. In the mid-twentieth century, India had to make a decision: what would the nation do about the problem of Western influence? Some Indians “chose to devise an ostentatiously

‘traditional’ self; others declared for a more stridently Western or modern one. But all had to make themselves out of the intimidations and possibilities posed by the West’s modernity. Out of this experience, they had to forge their own distinctively Indian modernity” (Khilnani 8).

As in other art forms affected by the West, those in India maintained certain aspects of their authenticity and lost others. Kapila Vatsyayan states that,

the generation that went to colleges founded by the British in the early nineteenth century was isolated from the art traditions of the country. Apparently the art had died by the twentieth century and what could be seen of it was only a diluted, almost degenerated form of what was known as Sadir in the South. It was like a shadow of a bygone reality. (qtd. in Meduri 105)

Some pieces of Bharatanatyam have remained intact; the costuming and movement are reminiscent of the form’s origins in India’s temples. Others have changed. What was once performed as a sacred Hindu temple dance is now performed for entertainment on the proscenium stage.

Although the original spirituality of Bharatanatyam is not entirely present today, the dance still retains storytelling aspects of its past. Dancers continue to use movement and facial expressions to tell stories, as many expressions or poses convey a specific theme to audiences. This use of *abhinaya* (expression) was used to tell the Hindu stories of the past, but today, modern Bharatanatyam dancers and choreographers are using it to explore other aspects of storytelling. In “Can Bharatanatyam Tell Painful Stories of Rape and Migration? A Dance Company Provides an Answer,” Malini Nair writes about modern pieces staged by Singapore’s Apsaras Arts Dance Company that attempt to address modern issues through storytelling and

movement. The artistic director of Apsaras, Aravindh Kumarasamy, wants to tell contemporary stories without borrowing forms from the West, asking: “I don’t want to mimic western dance forms, so why not use Bhar[a]tanatyam?” However, Nair writes that it is difficult to translate current events onto the classical Indian stage:

do you draw the line between the tragic and the mawkish? How do you show painful events that are simply not translatable into Bharatanatyam’s decorative vocabulary? If you need a narrator and a text screen to explain, how much should you explain and how much to leave to interpretation as classical dances do using mudras [hand movement] and abhinaya? (Nair)

In *Agathi* (2017), the Apsaras Dance Company shatters many Bharatanatyam stereotypes, beginning with the unpleasant story that is told. As soon as the dancers take stage, audiences can see that *Agathi* is not like the classical Indian dance of the past. Instead of showcasing bright colors, makeup, and body painting, the dancers wear costumes that are indicative of harder times. While the design of the costuming is similar to that of traditional dress, the colors are dark and remove a certain brightness from the stage. *Agathi* also features male dancers, who are extremely new to the world of Bharatanatyam, which has always been performed exclusively by women. Rather than presenting the pleasant and coy visages that can be seen on the traditional stage, dancers in *Agathi* perform with expressions of terror and hopelessness. This alone drastically alters the appearance of the dance, which tells the story of crisis that forces families to leave their homeland. In “Can Bharatanatyam Tell Painful Stories of Rape and Migration? A Dance Company Provides an Answer,” Nair writes that “[t]he choreography starts with a montage of happy households and ecstatic lovers in their homeland. Then crisis hits, shattering the idyll,

ripping families apart and tossing them into dangerous seas, prisons and into the hands of tyrants” (Nair). As the staging of *Agathi* demonstrates, Indian artforms have certainly been influenced by the presence of the West but have also maintained aspects of their own traditional culture in blending with modernity. While this history of Bharatanatyam was forever altered the moment that the British set foot in India, tradition remains a part of India, adapting to circumstances and modernity.

Indian Secularization

In “Bharatha Natyam—What Are You?”, Meduri analyzes how modernity has affected the spirituality of India; “Rent asunder by colonialism, regionalism, and political strife, India today is psychologically restless and far removed from Bharatha’s religious state of mind characterized by *visrati* (expansive quiet)” (Meduri 105). This restlessness takes form in the questioning of traditional spirituality; the influences of colonization and later globalization began the process of secularization in Indian artforms. At its core, Bharatanatyam is a religious artform. In the *Natyashastra*, the form is identified in part by its spirituality. Meduri states that “Bharatha’s attention to theatrical unity and aesthetic wholeness evokes in the meditative mind a philosophic, cosmic vision of unity” (104). From the beginning, Bharatanatyam was meant to be a ritualistic dance. Dancers attempted to achieve *Rasa*: a “state of joy characterized by emotional plenitude” (Meduri 104). Over time, Bharatanatyam became secularized and transformed into something more theatrical and more ethnic than it had been in its beginnings.

Bharatanatyam was originally practiced by temple dancers in what is today South India. These dancers, dubbed the *devadasi* (translated literally as *servant of God*) “danced and sang the stories of God before temple deities to propitiate and entertain them” (Meduri 105). The *devadasi*

held respected positions in society and were at the height of their historical glory “under the rulership of the Chola kings in the ninth through twelfth centuries A.D.” (Meduri 105).

Traditions of the devadasi were passed down orally between generations of temple dancers, and thus small changes in the forms occurred throughout the years. Meduri states that “it was a living tradition fused with practice” that lasted for centuries (108).

As time passed, the devadasi continued to dance but Indian society began to see them in different light. With modernity, the devadasi transformed from a symbol of spirituality and tradition to one of sexuality and corruption, as many had turned to prostitution as a means of survival. During British rule, patrons were no longer able to support the temples, thus being unable to support the temple dancers. Despite once being honored and respected members of society, the devadasi fell into disarray. In 1934, Temple dancing became legally prohibited, and the dancers were left on the streets with nothing but their traditions and knowledge of Bharatanatyam. “Caught in this changing, uneasy political atmosphere,” the devadasi took their artform to the secular stage for survival (Meduri 104). Through the remaining years of colonialism, the artform was almost completely lost.

In the first half of the twentieth century, there was a push for the revival of Indian tradition. As India was gaining its independence, traditionalist parties hoped to expel the cultural influences of the British by revalorizing and celebrating Indian culture. Two women, Rukmini Devi and Balasaraswati, carried the revival of Bharatanatyam on their shoulders. However, as with many old forms, pieces of the art were lost between the fall of the devadasi and the post-colonial rebirth of Indian traditions:

It may be useful to point out that Rukmini Devi and the other scholars who helped mobilize support for bharatha natyam did not “rediscover” India as many claimed; rather, they reinterpreted it in a respectable language for the modern masses. A number of factors—urbanization, diversity of languages, and a political history which has interrupted the continuity of Indian art—prevent any authentic rediscovery. (Meduri 109)

Although the revival was not a complete restoration, enough of the tradition had survived to continue on. Balasaraswati and Rukmini Devi approached Bharatanatyam in two different lights: “Balasaraswati focused on inner feeling, on surrender to the medium that led effortlessly to the concentration of the Yogic mind, Rukmini Devi approached the same goal through body control, mind an awareness. In a typical Brahminical manner, she focused on ritual, style, and form, and saw form as revealing content” (Meduri 109). While Balasaraswati hoped to preserve an idealistic view of the devadasi and her history, Rukmini Devi worried that contemporary India would not continue to hold a place for such spirituality. So, she focused on technique and form, despite favoring idealistic spiritual views herself; “Rukmini Devi had a reason for focusing on form—she was anticipating the secularization that is the most singular feature of Indian dance today . . . And by merely anticipating it, she actually began the secularization she so strongly abhorred” (Meduri 109).

In “Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings: Riots and Realism: The Secularization of Urban Space in Fiction by Rudyard Kipling and Vikram Seth,” Neelam Srivastava examines secularization in Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and Rudyard Kipling’s “On the City Wall” (1889) because “[r]eligious conflict is a haunting presence in

colonial and postcolonial narratives of urban India” (87). As in the world of dance, secularization in Indian literature was motivated by the presence of the British. Srivastava states that both Vikram Seth and Kipling use an “Anglophone realist mode” in these works, which “allows both authors to present the secularist position as the most rational one” (88). Both works present visions of secular modernity, but as Srivastava points out, this secularity is not necessarily non-religious or anti-religious. Srivastava also defines the secularization of India as “Nehruvian secularism” (after Prime Minister Nehru), which “promotes equality of treatment towards all religions” in India’s extremely diverse spiritual environment (88).

West African Dance & Literature

Traditional African dance does not only stand powerfully alone as an artform; it also serves as the main spring of influence for most recently formed styles of Western dance. Modern dance, jazz, hip-hop, and tap all have deep roots in African movement. Characterized by loose, flailing, and grounded movements and a strong utilization of the torso, traditional West African dance is used in many aspects of culture: ranging from tribal celebrations to rituals. Dance is often incorporated in the Griot tradition, which creates a platform on which oral storytelling, music, and dance are integrated. In traditional cultures, children begin dancing at a young age, although they are not formally trained. In a PBS recording of a West African dance class, the teacher can be heard saying, “Now in Africa, you don’t go to school to learn the dances; you dance in your mother’s womb while she does the dances. It becomes genetically coded in you” (“West African Dance: Choreography”). Some elements of West African dance fall into the category of folk dancing, as so many Africans learn the dances and use them for social celebrations, but the technical difficulty of the style also allows it to lean towards the world of

ethnic dance. And of course, many ritual and trance dances are still practiced today; West African dance is also taught in other parts of the African diaspora. In the realm of literature, modern West African authors from Chinua Achebe to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have been exploring both their African heritage and the many effects of colonialism in their nations. Both West African dance and literature have deep roots in timeless tradition and modernity.

Thus, in West African dance and literature, we see:

1. Influences from colonization, urbanization, and globalization. While traditional African dance has played a major role in founding Western styles like tap, jazz, hip-hop, and modern, aspects of Western and Francophone cultures have played roles in the formation of contemporary dance in West Africa. Literature, too, has been affected by the West.
2. A rising presence on the global stage. Although many people might wrongly assume that African nations are not thriving or even developing, artists from Senegal, to Algeria, to Chad are producing works and forms that have audiences and students all over the world.

Colonization, Urbanization, and Globalization

African dance forms have had an enormous impact on numerous other styles of dance. However, contemporary dancers in West Africa have also been influenced by forms and cultures of the West. During French rule, Western dance and theater forms were introduced in Africa. In her article “Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-colonial Dakar,” H el ene Neveu Kringelbach writes that “in Senegal as elsewhere in Francophone West Africa, the performing profession was transformed by the introduction of modern theatre (with a

strong musical and choreographic component) into colonial schooling by the French authorities from the 1930s onwards” (38). The more formal traditions of European cultures began to creep onto new proscenium stages in West Africa. Ballet began to gain momentum, and, “[i]n the late colonial period, the most significant artistic event had been the West African tour of a Paris-based troupe, Guinean Fodéba Keita’s Ballets Africains. Dakar was the capital of French West Africa, and the troupe’s success in Paris had compelled the governor to invite them on a regional tour” (Kringelbach 40). Thus, by the end of French rule, West Africans began performing and viewing ballet in addition to their own traditional dances. According to Kringelbach, the generation of dancers that came to prominence in Senegal during the late colonial period were funded by the government and were provided many opportunities to learn and perform Western styles (41-43). International tours became extremely popular, and audiences from all over the world were exposed to African performers.

However, the dancers that would rise during the latter part of the twentieth century did not have the same opportunities as those before them. Kringelbach states, “[c]aught between a previous generation still in place and declining opportunities for innovation within the state-funded arts world, those who did not simply stay behind during international tours turned inwards and attempted to rediscover the ‘traditions’ that they felt their senior peers had neglected” (45). Western forms of dance, while appreciated across West Africa, were not adequate forms in which to tell African stories or continue traditions. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, we see a “resurgence” of tradition because contemporary West Africans had returned to their roots in searching for a way to dance in the present (Kringelbach 45).

With this restoration of heritage, the Griot tradition was one of many that regained prominence in West Africa. Griots, who tell the oral stories passed down by other Griots in their families, often incorporate the use of dance into their performances to create a visual representation of their tales. Although Griots or storytellers and African dancers also perform on separate stages, their works are often combined to create pieces on a grander scale. Traditional movement aids storytellers of West Africa by creating movement for the stories and also by helping to preserve more specific cultures than that of the continental whole. Andrea Vinson, the assistant artistic director of Najwa Dance Corps explains that “[c]ertain movements portray different things from the different cultures, whether it reflects where they live—in the mountains or desert, for example—or the things they need to know about becoming a young woman” (qtd. in Hevrdejs). The performances that Griots, storytellers, and dancers give in West Africa help to preserve heritage and stories for the people.

Although traditional forms have certainly resurged over the last few decades, colonization, globalization, and urbanization continue to affect African artists. In her article “Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation,” Kariaumu Welsh Asante states that “[t]raditional dance in urban areas is more stylized, removed from ritual, and influenced by other nationalities” (145). This difference between more traditional and more urban dance can especially be seen in the younger generations of dancers. Youth of urban West Africa today still dance but do so slightly differently than their predecessors. After the rise and popularity of Afrobeat music in the 1970s, a newer form of music, Afrobeats, came to prominence during the early 2000s. Unlike its predecessor, who focalized on jazz and funk to create African sound, Afrobeats music lives more in the realm of pop and hip-hop music. Afrobeats music encapsulates the idea of a modern Africa, including sounds and influences from across the African diaspora.

The dance form that accompanies it, too, draws from global influences, but is based heavily in traditional West African movements. Afrobeats dance continues to rise to prominence on the global stage; the form is popular around the world, with many online tutorials teaching movements and choreography. Afrobeats dance allows dancers to explore storytelling and movement both through tradition and through modernity. Young people often dance to Afrobeats music and hip-hop instead of drumming. Their costuming, too, has changed. Gone are the colorful costumes of the past; dancers are now more likely to don athletic brands like Adidas or Nike. There are many studios in West Africa and in the diaspora where students can learn both urban and more traditional West African dance. With a fusion of hip-hop and tradition, performers from these contemporary studios tell the stories of modern West Africa.

Presence on the Global Stage

In “Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-colonial Dakar,” Kringelbach follows three generations of dancers in urban Senegal. She states that these contemporary dancers “develop their bodily skills, not only for the pleasure of innovation, but also to ‘make their way into the world.’ In so doing, they produce new social spaces, and engage with a multiplicity of existing ones” (Kringelbach “abstract”). These dancers challenged concepts of what it meant to be an African artist by mixing their own traditional forms with Western and modern influences. During and after the colonial period, there had already been a surge of popularity for West African dance troupes who toured internationally. However, it wasn’t until the rise of Kringelbach’s “second” and “third” generations that contemporary West African dance in Senegal truly began to represent the culture of the people and not just Francophone aspects that had been left behind by the Europeans.

As we have seen, more recent West African dancers returned to the use of tradition in their work, blending it with some of the more Western and modern influences that France had brought to the African continent. Kringelbach upholds that “‘Contemporary’ choreographic work, therefore, reflects and shapes new notions of the person in Dakar, a process which mirrors similar developments in other African cities” (51). Contemporary artists found a powerful platform on which to dance promptly after the fall of colonialism; Kringelbach writes, “Aspirations by the younger Senegalese (and other West African) performers to use these historical spaces, connections and even modes of creation to challenge Africa’s place in the global arts world can therefore be seen as a powerful political gesture” (52).

In “Critical Postcolonial Dance Pedagogy: The Relevance of West African Dance Education in the United States,” Ojeya Cruz Banks writes of the importance of teaching traditional dance styles outside of Africa. In teaching at a US high school, Cruz Banks “found students to be culturally disassociated from their African heritage” (24). For these students, West African dance was not only a technique to learn, but a way to reconnect with heritage, history, and story. While teaching, Cruz Banks and her colleagues did not place emphasis on technique but on the social, spiritual, and cultural aspects of West African dance (20). Cruz Banks does so because she believes that “[r]ecovering the knowledge embedded in our cultural diversity as a nation has the potential to reconcile the consequences of cultural imperialism and to invigorate education with world wisdoms almost left behind” (19). Thus, West African dance is not only essential to the maintenance of culture in West Africa, but also in all of the African diaspora: “Dance acts as a force for recovering non-Western forms of empowerment” (Cruz Banks 20). By teaching and practicing West African forms across the globe, they can continue to hold firm on the global stage.

West African literature, too, is rising on the global stage. Also influenced by colonization and urbanization, modern West African works contain aspects of both African heritage and Western ideas. In “In Search of African Literary Theory,” John Hawley identifies three categories of nativism in the works of Adélékè Adéèkó, an African author and educator. According to Hawley, Adéèkó

divides his subject into three types: classical nativists who imagine an irreducible African aesthetic in which daily concerns of the African reader are rendered in an easily accessible form; structuralist nativists who root their essentialism in historic precolonial cultural expressions, in conventions and philosophies of representation that may be joined to modern literary techniques; and linguistic nativists, who insist that African literature is, by definition, written in languages pre-existent on the continent before the European invasion. All three types of nativists disparage art for art’s (or artist’s) sake and valorize literature that is didactic and agenda driven. (466)

As in the world of dance, West African literature contains pieces from heritage and from the West, and often blends them together to make new and modern pieces.

Ballet & Western Literature

In the Western world, ideas of dance and theatre have conjured the image of the ballerina for centuries, whose dance form has played a huge role in Euro-centric cultures since its birth during the European Renaissance. Born out of pre-classic European folk dances, ballet flourished in the courts of Italian and French nobility with the help of powerful figures like Catherine di Medici and Louis XIV. During the reign of the Sun King during the second half of the

seventeenth century, ballet transitioned from being a hobby for the nobility to being a profession for dedicated dancers, teachers, and choreographers. Ballet has endured centuries growing into the form that we have today; during the reign of Louis XIV, ballet academies began to formally train dancers, and dancers spent their lives studying the art. As the years went on, the popular male ballet star was replaced with the female Ballerina, who learned to dance *en pointe*. The technique became more difficult and precise, the skirts became shorter and shorter, and ballet spread across Europe and eventually to America and other parts of the world. Through the Romantic period, the rise of the Ballet Russe, and the era of Balanchine, classical ballet gave birth to contemporary ballet and set the stage for other new dance forms to arise.

Today, classical ballet is still prominent in Western culture and is practiced and performed across the world. Ballet has retained aspects from all eras of its history. In the style of Petipas, classical ballet is often known by its intense training regimes and intricate staging, and the noble and orderly beginnings of the Renaissance have passed down through the years and can also still be seen in ballet today. Ballet is a form of Western ethnic dance because of its intense technical difficulty, detailed costuming and staging, and utilization of stories that idealize and romanticize periods of European history. Both classical and contemporary ballet aim to represent idealized times and places in Western culture.

Thus, in ballet and Western literature, we see:

1. A timeless connection between ballet and classical Western stories, particularly those of Shakespeare. For many reasons, Shakespeare's works have always been popular on the dance stage, as have other romantic and tragic ideals.

2. A departure from classical ideals to modern ones. Just as classical authors paved the path for modern authors to write new and different works, ballet has been a jumping off point for more modern styles of dance.

Shakespeare & Ballet

When one thinks of the ballet, one may picture Giselle dreamily gliding across the stage in white (*Giselle*), Clara exploring her dreams with her nutcracker (*The Nutcracker*), or Kitri dancing with her tambourine (*Don Quixote*). But many people might envision the timeless pas de deux from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which has long been famous on the ballet stage. *Romeo and Juliet* isn't the only work of Shakespeare that had been adapted for dancers, but it does convey both the romantic and tragic ideals that audiences wish to see when they attend the ballet and has thus remained immensely popular on the proscenium stage. While discussing Shakespeare's influence on ballet in her book *Dancing through History*, Joan Cass cites *Romeo and Juliet* as the inspiration for many different dance works; as of 1993, "At least a dozen totally different versions have been produced during the last twenty-five years alone" (Cass 60), and this number continues to grow. Even today, Shakespeare continues to serve as inspiration for the ballet world. Four hundred years after the bard's death, choreographer Christopher Wheeldon translated *The Winter's Tale* to the ballet stage for the first time. In the Royal Opera House's video "Opera, Ballet and the Bard - Shakespeare Lives," Wheeldon tells viewers, "I've always wanted to make a Shakespeare ballet, so I wanted to find a Shakespeare story that hadn't been told through movement" ("Opera").

The popularity of adapting Shakespeare's works for the ballet stage is founded primarily in two facets. Firstly, as Cass states, "Shakespeare provided a lot of material to choose from"

(60). The intensity and complexity of Shakespeare's plots simply offered choreographers many characters and situations to work with; Wheeldon believes that "you need very strong characters, you need strong plotlines," and this is something Shakespeare delivers ("Opera"). Secondly, Western audiences are by and large so familiar with works like *Romeo and Juliet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that they are able to recognize the narratives of these in any setting, including in ballet. In "There are no mothers-in-law in ballet: 'doing' Shakespeare in dance," Robin Wharton writes that "Shakespeare's familiar plots allow a rare opportunity for narrative complexity in what is almost always a non-verbal medium." Because audiences are already familiar with Shakespeare's plots, ballets that utilize his works can focus more on movement and emotion than gesture and acting. Wharton writes,

Through citation of a Shakespearean text, which might be as simple as naming a piece after a Shakespearean source, a ballet draws upon the narrative associated with the source text to layer gesture with story. In a ballet titled *Hamlet*, every woman partnered with the leading male becomes a potential Gertrude or Ophelia, and homosocial interactions between the male characters acquire basic narrative functions . . . In a ballet attempting to tell a story based upon a source text, every gesture or step may be endowed with narrative meaning drawn from the source, yet some, such as sequences of choreographed pantomime, are clearly more deliberately citational than others.

In watching these familiar stories being danced, audience members also bring their interpretations and perceptions beyond the pure narrative to the theater. This next layer allows

audiences to further dissect both the production that they are viewing and the work that it has been based on. Wharton writes,

An audience's cultural expectations—of both Shakespeare and ballet—become part of the material from which the choreographer's interpretation is fabricated. Through citation of the text that forms at this intersection of cultural awareness and performance history, gesture and movement acquire an additional layer of meaning or significance that makes them newly or differently visible as conventions and modes of representation. (Wharton)

Ballet dancers use their bodies to tell stories, and many dancers believe that this allows them to tell stories that could never be produced in words. Jean Georges Noverre, an eighteenth-century ballet master, once said, “[a] step, a gesture, a movement, and an attitude express what no words can say. The more violent the sentiments it is required to depict, the less able is one to find words to express them” (Cass 91). Many dancers create movement to express what they cannot in words; sometimes our bodies naturally depict emotions that we could not express in spoken or written language. Perhaps the emotional limitations of language are another reason that so many stories have been translated to the stage. However, translating a piece to movement does not necessarily mean that the staged version has an upper hand over the written. Lauren Cuthbertson, who dances Hermione in Wheeldon’s *The Winter’s Tale*, is a Principal ballerina at the Royal Ballet in London. The piece was choreographed on her, and thus she must have a deep connection with the movement. Even so, she recognizes the importance of Shakespeare’s original texts and tells her audience, “Shakespeare’s plays are so beautiful, and the way he words

things are really interesting. So, if you don't read the text, for instance, there's a certain magic that you will never capture" ("Opera").

The Rise of Contemporary Ballet & Other Ballet-Derived Dance Forms

At the turn of the twentieth century, ballet began to transform. Influenced by Modern dancers, especially Isadora Duncan, choreographers at the Ballet Russe began to create ballets that were unlike anything that had been seen on the stage before. The Ballet Russe is generally credited with creating the first modern ballets; Nijinsky's *Afternoon of a Faun* (1912) and *Rite of Spring* (1913) both contained traditional balletic values but shocked audiences with their modern influences. In *Afternoon of a Faun*, Nijinsky's faun dances in parallel movements (a huge shock to audiences accustomed to the turned-out legs of ballet) and seductively with his nymph. The choreography was set to "music by Debussy which was in turn an impression of a poem by Stephen Mallarmé" (Cass 171), layering dance, music, and literature. In *Rite of Spring*, dancers once again perform in parallel and turned-in movements as they enact ancient pagan rituals. Set to a score by Stravinsky, *Rite of Spring* was even more avant-garde than *Afternoon of a Faun* had been. At its premier in Paris in 1913, the crowds supposedly rioted in the theater, becoming as pagan and primitive as the dancers on stage appeared to be. Balanchine would later bring this new flavor of ballet with him to America, where he would continue to expand upon the foundations of the art.

Contemporary ballet has continued to grow and flourish on the stage long past the age of Balanchine. Today, choreographers like Crystal Pite and William Forsythe live in between the worlds of ballet and modern dance, creating choreography that reflects elements of both styles. In "Political Body Spaces in the Performances of William Forsythe," Gabriele Brandstetter states

that Forsythe's juggling of these two forms have allowed him to further explore the realm of ballet:

Forsythe started out in classical ballet but re-oriented the basic idea and technique of ballet into one of the more dynamic art forms of the twenty-first century.

Through this, and through the connections he establishes between body movement and art forms like architecture, video and text, he has opened ballet to an unlimited potential of figurations and a new dynamic. (58)

While classical ballet has remained a classic in the repertoire, it is important for artists to continue to push the boundaries of ballet. Forsythe experiments with many different aspects of the theater; he may include digital aspects in his work, like the use of video or projection, or have his audience sit among the dancers. In his *Human Writes* (2006), audience members wander among dancers who perform various mundane actions such as writing at a table or sitting down and standing up. Brandstetter states that the piece "is a reflection on the mediality of writing; or more precisely, as the title *Human Writes* indicates, a reflection on writing as a human action At the same time as the title suggests its homophone meaning 'human rights,' it deals with writing as a constitutional text, a key legal text, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its history" (65). So, we see that contemporary ballet has developed to become just as politically vocal as styles like modern dance might be. In pieces like *Human Writes*, we can see the continuation of the breakdown of the traditional Western stage.

Modern and Avant-Garde Dance & Modern and Post-Modern Literature

Frustrated with the structured world of dance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dancers in the West began to break free from tradition to create a new style of dance,

one that shunned the rigid technique of ballet to focalize on liberated movement and pure human emotion. Like the literature of the time, modern dance was a product of the social and political changes that the Western world faced during the 1900s; both World Wars greatly affected how dancers approached their art, as did the Civil Rights Movement and the Sexual Revolution. Modern dance was predominantly of product of the United States and Germany. Of course, by the beginning of World War II, America was playing a larger role in the advancement of the form.

Like literary Modernists, modern dancers played with different forms and expressions, experimenting in ways that were often ahead of their time and shocking to their contemporary audiences. In *Dancing through History*, Cass introduces the beginnings of modern dance alongside other modern artforms:

. . . [S]o we now meet modern dancers who shared in the same impulses that drove modern painters like Van Gogh and Cezanne; modern composers like Debussy and Ravel; and modern writers like Walt Whitman, Émile Zola, and August Strindburg to explore new ideas and techniques. In dance this meant: exploration of the middle body, the torso, to start waves of movement; the use of the bare foot; the free, swinging motion of the whole body; the treatment of space as three-dimensional; and the importance given to the expression of feelings and ideas. (225)

These shocking and new works were taken even farther in the late twentieth century, during the time of the Avant-Garde artists, who took the extremes of modern dance further than what many thought was possible. Despite wanting to create a dance form that was purely a product of the

twentieth century, modern dancers carried influences from ballet, traditional African dance, and other Eastern styles into their works. The Avant-Garde dancers truly tried to remove all remnants of ballet and the past, although many of the masters still studied ballet technique to make their bodies strong canvases for new forms.

Modern dance can be extremely difficult to define because so many of its founders (who were predominantly female) approached the rejection of ballet and tradition in different ways:

The art form has undergone so many changes in its . . . years that some of its practitioners work in ways directly opposite to others. However, we are stuck with the term [modern dance] because of common usage. Perhaps one trait that unifies all modern dancers is their rejection of the academic, classic ballet as the basis of the dance art. (Cass 175)

Some modern dancers, like Graham, were extremely grounded and sharp in their movements, while others, like Isadora Duncan, were airy and flighty in theirs. Almost all were ahead of their time and caused quite the stir in their approaches to performance. While modern dancers did attempt to reject ballet and its technique, the matriarchs of modern dance developed their own techniques, often equally difficult and rigorous as ballet. Because of the vast differences in the matriarchs' styles, modern movement is difficult to define. It is often still theatrical, though sometimes plotless. It is usually technically difficult, producing aspects of ethnic dance, but is sometimes less complex and thus lies more in the realm of folk dance. At its core, modern dance is undefinable, and continues to become more and more so as time goes on. Today, major modern techniques are less shocking than they were during their foundations and are still practiced and performed.

Thus, in modern & post-modern dance and Western literature, we see:

1. A disregard of previous rules. Dancers and authors alike wished to create new forms that expressed deeper human emotions, often without the cumbersome structures and narrative plots of previous centuries.
2. An influence from the immense social changes and historical events of the twentieth century. Artists reacted deeply to WWI, WWII, women's suffrage, civil rights, and the Sexual Revolution.
3. Major influences from the East. Modern and Avant-Garde dancers are often accused of cultural appropriation. Some, like Martha Graham, gloried in it. Others, like Merce Cunningham, recognized the value of Eastern ideas and replicated them in the West. Others used Oriental exoticism purely as a form of entertainment.

Disregarding the Rules

After years of building and following rules and forms set by their predecessors, artists in the West began to question the necessity of various traditions. Was a plot really necessary in a dance performance, or even in a novel? Early modern dancers were more concerned with dancing human emotions than dancing stories. In *Dancing through History*, Cass says that this “emotional source of gesture” was the original inspiration for the creation of modern dance (341). While there had been some plotless performances in ballet by the early twentieth century, they were not common. Dances that simply interpreted the spirit of the music became more popular during the rise of modern dance. “In the 1920s,” Cass writes, “such dances were called music visualizations. Today they are called plotless ballets” (272).

Many Modernists believed that narratives were not important for their audiences. Doris Humphrey, one of the first modern dancers to rise to prominence in the United States, believed that movement and emotion were more crucial for creating “truth and realism” in her pieces than any story could be (Cass 275). She was not telling trivial stories in choreographing, but the larger story of humankind and how we react to the world around us. On utilizing narratives, Humphrey stated,

The blunt fact is that subject matter is mostly of concern to the choreographer, and whether it takes the form of a narrative, symbolism, or a conviction about style, is of no importance . . . [W]hat audiences see is mostly the result in movement, which is exciting or not as the case may be. (qtd. in Cass 280)

But the early modern founders still had not separated dance from all other artistic aspects of their predecessors. Theatrical and balletic influences remained on all stages until later in the twentieth century, when dance was to be isolated from all other forms, including narrative, music, and emotion:

Before Cunningham, dance expressed emotions: ecstasy, fear, anger, and frustration. It made statements about human dignity, freedom, anxiety, and brotherhood. It was performed by dancers who were trained to project feelings dramatically. After Cunningham’s appearance, dance was for and about movement. (Cass 345)

During the height of the avant-garde movement, dance and literature are not connected, as dancers rebelled against all “conventional structures that provided theme and development, climax and resolution, or contrast and unity” (Cass 342). Whereas modern dancers and literary

Modernists wanted to explore the full range of human emotion and significance, avant-garde dancers focused purely on the body and what physical feats it was capable of: “A new style was born, one in which the avant-garde dancers bent over backward to avoid any hint of significance, emotion, plot, or traditional form in their works” (Cass 345).

In literature, too, Modernist authors attempted to remove oppressive forms of the past. Virginia Woolf is perhaps the most famous twentieth-century author to demonstrate this stylistic change. In her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), the emotions and memories of the characters are more important and revealing than the actions of the present moment. In fact, the plot of the present moment can be condensed to one sentence: Clarissa Dalloway buys flowers, runs into an old friend, and throws a party. Compared to the dense novels of earlier centuries, *Mrs Dalloway* is practically plotless. Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) is another example of the plotless novel. It, too, can be condensed to a one sentence summary: Sal and Dean drive back and forth across the country with no money and a lack of morals. As in modern dance, the focus in modern literature is on human emotion and mentality. The emotions of the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* and *On the Road* have far more significance than the plots.

Social and Historical Influences

Modern dancers of the twentieth century arguably lived through one of the most intense and changing periods in recent global history. Throughout the century, artists reacted to wars, especially to the two World Wars. Mid-century, dancers and writers were influenced by the Sexual Revolution. Artists were also constantly inspired by the fight for civil rights in America.

Modern dance has strong roots in both the United States and Germany, but “[o]nce Hitler came to power, the upheaval in German society destroyed the growth of modern dance along

with so much else” (Cass 251). During and after WWII, artists began to explore the horrors of the Holocaust in their works. Anna Skolow’s *Dreams* (1961) depicts a “nightmarish scene from Nazi Germany” (Cass 293). *The Green Table* (1932), choreographed by Kurt Jooss, is another celebrated anti-war work, which meant to question the purpose of war and the motivations of those who control them (Manning & Benson 220). In the realm of literature, poets, in particular, wrote of the horrors of both World Wars; the works of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen are some of the most powerful in the war repertoire.

In the dance world, the women’s rights movement inspired female dancers, especially after the powerful presence of Isadora Duncan, to be more liberated in their movements and to wear more revealing costumes. Duncan, whose work was starting to steal the spotlight by 1900, became a liberated example for female dancers to replicate. The Sexual Revolution, too, continued to inspire dancers in this way. While it is mostly remembered for inspiring jazz dancers, it did play a role in the world of modern dance, as well. In “Interrupted Continuities: Modern Dance in Germany,” Susan Allene Manning and Melissa Benson explain that before modern dance, the dancer was “either an ethereal ballerina—woman as angel—or an overstuffed chorus girl—woman as whore” (Manning & Benson 218). Women of the twentieth century would not continue to allow audiences or society to label them in such a way. From as early on as Isadora Duncan, who is often remembered as performing with her breasts out, female dancers were shattering costuming and staging conventions.

“Borrowing” from the Exotic East

In escaping the world of ballet, early modern artists began to draw from other global genres of dance. The exoticism of the Orient fascinated both choreographers and audiences, and

Eastern influences became quite familiar in the realm of Western modern dance. In “Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis’s *Radha* of 1906,” Jane Desmond states that this fascination was founded in the unchanging and eternal mysticism that the West has associated with the East: “The East is primitive, childlike, and backward; it is eccentric, irrational, chaotic, and mysterious; it is sensual, sexual, fecund, and despotic. Most important, the Orient is deemed incapable of speaking for itself” (262). So, the West has assigned meaning to Eastern cultures in dissecting and presenting them for their Western audiences. Some artists drew upon Eastern forms more subtly than others, but many knew that these foreign aspects would sell tickets and please audiences. In *Dancing through History*, Cass states,

It is this search for novelty that paradoxically connects Western theater dance with traditional dance forms of the non-Western world. To infuse their work with new life, you will frequently see choreographers draw on time-honored alien forms of dance, which are ancient in their own cultures but unfamiliar in the West. (xi)

Modern pioneer Ruth St. Denis is famous for her depictions of the Orient. Many of her pieces were “scene[s] of life in India,” where she was “motivated by a desire to create for Western audiences a sense of the spiritual peace and poise of the Orient through theatrical productions of Eastern themes and costumes” (Cass 238). In fact, the large part of Ruth St. Denis’s works were “dances inspired by ethnic styles ranging from American Indian to Japanese” (Desmond 257), with not very much original Western content. St. Denis never studied these foreign styles of dance. Desmond states that in choreographing “Indian” pieces, she simply “drew on the images of India available to her in books and punctuated her simple phrases with poses that recalled

oriental icons and ‘popular images of the late Victorian era,’ such as the femme fatale” (258). Martha Graham herself, often remembered as a queen of originality in her works, is famously quoted as saying, “‘I am a thief—and I glory in it—I steal from the present and from the glorious past, and I stand in the dark of the future as a glorying and joyous thief’” (qtd. in Cass 263). Eastern and African influences continued to be present in Western dance throughout the twentieth century. Cunningham, known for his use of chance in choreography, based his utilization in “Eastern philosophies and theories of chance and indeterminacy” (Cass 342). While he did not appropriate Eastern styles as blatantly as some of his predecessors had, he still borrowed from the East.

Here, the question of appropriation or appreciation must be posed. Could Western dancers have told stories of the Orient without disrespecting Eastern cultures? Was this phenomenon merely a product of uneducated artists? Even in our globalized world, should artists stick to what they know? These are difficult questions to answer. As we saw in *Agathi*, Indian artists have found ways to tell global stories without borrowing from the West...

Conclusions & The Global Stage

Dance and storytelling help to create our human experience. In “Choreographing Lived Experience: Dance, Feelings and the Storytelling Body,” Karen Eli and Rosie Kay write,

Dance . . . constitutes lived experience in the here and now. As the dancer immerses herself in remembered spaces and times, she embodies these experiences in the moment. Dance, then, is marked by presence; it unveils embodiment through dialectics of being and creating, imagining and acting, collapsing binary divisions of mind and body, thought and feeling. And

contemporary dance, specifically, enables the exploration of identity, experience, meaning, context, history, the future and the body, as they all intersect in present-tense movement. (Eli & Rosie)

Dance and storytelling are extremely important aspects of cultures across the globe. In the era of globalization, artists have adapted to new circumstances, incorporating both tradition and modernity into their works, because “a dancer is as much a product of her past as she is a reflection of her times” (Meduri 111).

In between the worlds of dance and literature, we see:

1. dance that plays a role in literature. Although it does not appear to be a common occurrence, the cultural importance of dance does sometimes manifest itself in literature. In modern Native American literature, we see a recognition of both traditional dance and powwow dancing.
2. literature that plays a role in dance. Literature and storytelling play roles in every form of dance except the Avant-Garde. Influences from both oral tradition and written works can be seen on stages across the world. In India, we see aspects from the storytelling devadasi that have been passed down through history to form modern Bharatanatyam. In ballet, we see how Shakespeare’s works have directly influenced choreographers for centuries.
3. dance and literature that have been parts of the same artistic movement or social environment and have evolved together. As cultures are affected, their artforms are affected, too. We see this evolution and adaptation in cultures that have been affected by the presence of the West such as Native American,

West African, or Indian. We also see this through the impact of modernity on dance and literature across the world.

On one level, different forms of dance tell the stories of their cultures in different ways; they often have different stories to tell. But although these forms may differ in technique, purpose, or even in the stories that they tell, all forms of dance tell the story of human experience. In our globalized world, storytelling through movement serves a universal purpose to preserve the various cultures of the world, and to look towards the future.

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