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THE DANTE PROJECT AT THE PARIS OPERA BALLET: MOVING ACROSS MEDIA



Photo: The Dante Project, Opera National de Paris, Germain Louvet (Dante) and Hanna O'Neill (Beatrice). Act Two. (© Ann Ray/OnP).
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MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, in his essay “On the Anniversary Celebration of Dante,” the legendary literary critic Erich Auerbach, observed that, “Dante is far from having achieved his maximum impact even now.”¹ The Dante Project—a recent collaboration between choreographer Wayne McGregor, composer Thomas Adès, visual artist Tacita Dean, and dramaturg Uzma Hameed—demonstrates that Auerbach is still right. Until this ballet, the world of dance referred to or evoked Dante’s poetry with its rich visual imagery only tangentially, as for example in several choreographic interpretations based on the music of *Francesca da Rimini: Symphonic Fantasy after Dante* by Tchaikovsky.² The Dante Project, commissioned by the Royal Opera House,

is the first attempt in current performative arts to reimagine Dante's epic poem as a full-evening ballet. It takes the public along with the poet through Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. The Project stages an artistic quest for the Dante of today, mediated by means of dance and presented as a condensed theatrical action.³

McGregor asked Adès, one of the leading classical composers in Britain today, to write a full-length score to be produced at the Royal Ballet. A prodigy of collaborative projects, McGregor did not specify the subject or theme for this commission. Adès had been fascinated by Dante's epic poem since his teenage years and suggested a score based on *The Divine Comedy*. The first act of the ballet, "Inferno: Pilgrim," exceeded almost twice the suggested duration of thirty minutes. And yet, for Adès, the fourteen musical episodes still seemed barely sufficient to submerge the listeners in the deepest circles of punishment, with all their physical and moral torments. "Inferno" was premiered by the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra in May 2019 in concert form, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. Two months later, it was performed again in Los Angeles; this time with the addition of McGregor's choreography performed by dancers from the Royal Ballet.

Next, McGregor and Adès's project moved to the Royal Opera House in London, where its scheduled opening in May 2020 was stalled for a long eighteen months. It was only in October of 2021, coinciding with the 700th anniversary of Dante's death, that the Dante Project was finally produced, in its full three acts, before the public. Then in May of 2023, it was staged by the Paris Opera Ballet, where McGregor had been working since 2007. The Paris production serves as the basis for this review.

Staging a full-length ballet based on a historical literary source, particularly an epic poem, is a worthy undertaking for contemporary ballet theater. However, while narrative ballet often meets with public appreciation, it also frequently bears the stigma of bygone cultural models, evoking the allegorical performances of the Baroque, the exotic glamor of the French belle epoch, or even the heroic ballets of the Soviet era. With the rise of neoclassical ballet, choreographers often preferred allusions rather than plots, associative atmosphere rather than verisimilitude, and the freedom of reference found in the absence of a libretto. Clearly, contemporary ballet theater cannot resist the enticing possibilities of transforming the most complex and grand literary works into balletic form, seeking to remake literature's logocentrism through the

poetics of corporeal narrative based on sensations. Given recent history, no one should doubt that the great works of literature, from Shakespeare to Tolstoy and Thomas Mann, could be choreographed into ballets. Though, of course, one might still ask, is this desirable?

Dante, however, never seemed high on the list of literary sources for ballet theater. Something in the poetic structure and cosmological grandness of this literary monument likely discouraged conversions from the poetic text even into a closer medium, that of theater plays. The Dante Project, therefore, offers an opportunity to think critically about contemporary ballet as a vehicle for Dante's theological epic; it also allows an opportunity to contemplate the ends of the balletic medium in relation to the other non-verbal media—music and visual arts—that collaborate with choreography when channeling poetry into the theatrical mode. The presence of Wayne McGregor, one of the most acclaimed innovators in contemporary dance today and an attractive, inviting figure for the newer and younger public in dance, makes *The Dante Project* fertile ground for an examination of the encounter between a Renaissance literary masterpiece and contemporary theater dance.

The word “project” in the title of this ballet is an apt choice for this multimedia figuration of Dante's verbal imagery: it suggests an ongoing, continuous character for this daring artistic enterprise. To condense Dante's epic poem into a three-act ballet while simultaneously creating a palatable, visually engaging, and illuminating experience for the public would be a daunting task for any single artist. Yet Adès's score, Dean's stage sets, and Hameed's dramaturgy furnish three structural pillars that support the contribution of dance itself. McGregor's prior collaborations with Hameed had already proved efficient in pouring—one might say even channelling—the choreographer's fount of plastic ideas into the flow of a narrative structure.

Hameed has divided the libretto into three acts that correspond logically to the *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*, thus mirroring the tripartite structure of the poem. Still, transforming *The Divine Comedy* into a ballet libretto was a task of a high order of difficulty for Hameed. The poem narrates the ultramundane journey of the poet, the literary avatar of the author, through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise in search of his true self. These three strata that once organized the social and religious world of the Renaissance man persist in various understandings of human destiny. In his journey to Hell, Dante encounters the souls of the damned, many of them his contemporaries or familiar historical char-

acters. These eternally tormented creatures retain their corporeal essence and convey to the poet anguish, misjudgements, and ethical or criminal misdeeds that continue to plague humanity, some seven hundred years after Dante's death.

McGregor's road to Dante was long and almost literally induced a change from sneakers to pointe shoes. His manner of movement originated in modern urban rhythms, asphalt surfaces, visceral bodily pulsations, bulging contortions, extreme extensions, and jagged lines. Already in his non-narrative creations, particularly in *Chroma* (2006) and *Infra* (2008), two ballets that became iconic for contemporary ballet canons, McGregor expanded balletic language through his non-hierarchical approach to pre-existing codes. Creating persuasive characters through dance and conveying their motivations came next. The shift towards building characters as in theater dance occurred in McGregor's choreography because of his search beyond the categories of contemporary ballet, and his incorporation of elements of techno and street dance. The invitations to stage ballets such as *Chroma*, for the companies as diverse as San Francisco Ballet, Bolshoi Ballet, or the National Ballet of Canada, among others, allowed the choreographer to estimate the potential of different interpretations, infusing his choreography with layers of meaning. Revealing a limitless plasticity and pliability in dancers, his choreographic imagination enabled dancers to search for a new level of emotional exploration on stage. Even his apparently abstract *Infra*, McGregor claimed, was simply about people.

McGregor's current style emerged consistently during his almost two decades of work with a single classical company, the Royal Ballet, for which he became the resident choreographer in 2006.⁴ Despite his status as a widely sought-after choreographer for full evening "traditional" ballets, McGregor keeps one foot in "pure" contemporary dance, never deserting his first company: Random Dance (now Company Wayne McGregor). He also eagerly ventures in the areas of popular cultures. His choreographies for the blockbuster *Harry Potter* or the *Goblet of Fire*, for the 2022 ABBA Voyage concert, as well as his staging of dances for the advertising campaign everyBODY of Selfridges in London occupy places of significance within his oeuvre of the last decade.

It seemed logical, then, that the same choreographer who had established his name in contemporary dance and became engaged with the leading repertory companies throughout the world would venture into full-length narrative ballet, and, more specifically, use literary sour-

es as an inspiration for his work. *Raven Girl* (2013), his first ballet grounded in a literary work, was followed by *Woolf Works* (2015), *Tree of Codes* (2015), *The Dante Project* (2021), and *MADDADDAM*, (2022), among others.⁵

In *The Dante Project*, the narrative thread and subsequent stage action follows the journey of three leading characters—the poet, Virgil, and Beatrice. In Dante’s poetic world, inspired by achievements of antiquity in the sciences and the arts, and by the mathematical thought of the Renaissance in particular, the way down is a descent into a geometrically structured series of concentric circles, and, Virgil, the leading poet of ancient Rome whom Dante revered as his mentor, becomes the poet’s guide on the journey to *Inferno* and *Purgatory*. And yet, as a pagan, Virgil cannot follow his ambulatory student to *Paradise*. Instead, at the gates of *Paradise*, Virgil entrusts Dante to Beatrice, the third principal character of *The Divine Comedy*. Beatrice is both a real woman, someone whom Dante might have encountered in his youth, and a symbol of divine love and the eternal beauty—the inspiration that led Dante’s soul and imagination to soar above the mundane world. Even this short sketch will suggest the high order of complexity that any “translator” of Dante’s monumental oeuvre into a theatrical format encounters. Dance, perhaps, has a certain advantage over other forms of art, given its potential for evoking the communication of emotions and ideas by means of nonverbal figurations.

Concerns persist, however. How can Dante’s and Virgil’s long voyage to the bottom of the underworld, their cumulative vision of both sinners and the righteous, as well as the transformation of Dante’s love for Beatrice be condensed into a ballet plot without losing its complexity and completeness? What balletic code would befit the re-enactment of the hellish torments, *Purgatory*’s self-revelations, and the further ascension to the angelic order? Perhaps the phantasmatic rites of Romantic ballets? Or the psychological density of neoclassical tradition, such as in John Cranko’s or John Neumeier’s works? Or the ritualistic rhythms of Maurice Béjart (his *Ninth Symphony* in particular)? Or something completely different and yet unseen?

Although *The Dante Project* is premised on collaborative work, McGregor faced a challenge—or perhaps a joy, or both—of devising Dante’s world on stage through the singular method of corporeal figuration that is the choreographer’s alone. By reputation an emotionally withdrawn artist, in *The Dante Project*, McGregor here attempted to

conceive movements expressing a range of emotional states, including horror, fear, disgust, despair, pain, regret, repentance, remorse, and each had to become legible to the public. On the one hand, that Dante's characters underwent extreme physical suffering seemed fitting to McGregor's physical approach to dance; on the other, the subtle concreteness and poetic transparency of Dante's figuration might be expected to clash with the supranatural, almost technological logic of movement preferred by the British choreographer.

Erich Auerbach was also one of Dante's most perspicacious scholars. He argues for example, that

"though Dante's language is marked by supreme artifice, it is uncomplicated in its effect: it does not deal in riddles. The profound wisdom of his words can thus be understood as fully by the simple and childlike mind as by the reader who contemplates them in pursuit of their deeper meanings."⁶

It seems, then, that the simultaneous transparency and depth of Dante's poetry can serve as a genuine source for dance, an art that old and recent thinkers have claimed to be akin to a universal language. For this to happen, that magic switch mentioned by Auerbach, which we call artifice, must be uncovered in the work's new artistic medium. Artifice, morphologically coming from art (*ars*), refers to an artistic technique, one that is not available in nature, hence the contrast between the "natural" and "artificial," articulated already in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Art imitates nature, but each art imitates it differently, finding its own tactics and keys.

The artifice that produces a transparency of meanings, as noted by Auerbach, is a particularly sensitive device for transitioning from verbal imagery to dance. The Dante Project's multimedia dazzle kept the public busy, at times oversaturated with the intensity of scenic action, but a clear eloquence of gesture, which ought to emerge at the passage of idea into movement, was often missing. For those who were not closely familiar with Dante's text, the balletic image of Dante along with the quest of his journey remained vaguely defined. No specific choreographic steps marked the transformation of the poet's attitude towards Virgil, towards his beloved Beatrice, or towards his own revelation of human destiny. In many ways, Dante lingered on the stage as simply an observer to constantly evolving moving tableaux, masterfully contrived for the corps de ballet, as if trapped in a beguiling high-tech fantasy, one in which no character would truly suffer or desire to change

their destinies.

Dean's sets and Adès's music played crucial roles in supporting the choreography's progression through the three acts of the ballet. In the opening scene, the public sees dancers clad in grayish, ashen bodices, inside a circle drawn upon the stage, while the two characters representing Dante and Virgil, dressed in bright, blue-and-yellow costumes, walk at the edge of the circle. A circle, an indexical sign of Dante's representation of Hell, marks the limit of the figurative action that develops against the backdrop of a gigantic chalk drawing of an inverted mountain formation, falling into a vortex at the universe's center. Dean's ingenious choice of chalk for the set in Act One is a strong emotional gesture. This fragile, natural substance that crumbles into particles after a trace is applied underscores the improbable reality of the negative world, where the sins and errors of the positive world are disrobed. The crumbled chalk, like ashes, covers the bodices of dancers who appear androgynous, interchangeable, and deprived of identity.

Dante's journey into the underworld breaks down into fourteen episodes as charted by Adès. The poet encounters fallen people, including the selfish, the ferryman Charon of Hades, and the poets (among them the great classical poets of Antiquity, consigned to Limbo like other non-Christians); he recognizes Ulysses, observes Francesca and Paolo, walks through the Forest of Suicides, with Dido and Aeneas among them, and discerns soothsayers, thieves, the wrathful, and the false pope; the poet witnesses the Road to Calvary, and, finally, he meets Satan.

With this dense number of episodes, McGregor had to be precise in choosing movements, stances, and gestures that would distinguish the different types of the damned. While some groups of sinners were sharply characterized, the function of others was not immediately legible. For example, the pairing of female dancers as conjoined twins to represent soothsayers, or the frenetic fouettés performed by the all-male group in the episode of the thieves made a solid balletic iconography. At the same time, two duets of unfortunate lovers—Francesca and Paolo, and Dido and Aeneas—were visually coherent but they left the viewer with no sense of empathy; nor could the public understand what tormented these couples, or why encountering them were important for Dante's journey. In his recent choreography, McGregor clearly feels more and more at ease with academic movement vocabulary. Even the characteristic jaggedness of his lines created by movement patterns has become smoother and coherent, especially in the duets. Being at ease

with classical vocabulary, however, does not necessarily lead to mastering its rhetoric.

McGregor's lexicon of movements is diverse. Yet in *The Dante Project*, he distinctly privileges academic movements and forms, including those generated by the pointe shoes technique. This choice secured visual consistency throughout three acts of the ballet. Classical vocabulary, in this case, became something akin to the high style of poetry, associated with the epic genre, that Dante learned from Virgil. Yet in his *Divine Comedy*, Dante transgressed the limits of Virgil's style by mixing different genres and shifting narrative modes. In breaking the boundaries of genres, and even in naming his work a comedy, Dante freely revised what was felt to be appropriate for his period in the relations between form and content as well as thought and expression. As such, visualizing in choreography Dante's narrative and, a fortiori, expressing the passions that lead Dante's characters to the abyss might well be a task of inventing a figurative poesis that surpasses the limits of a single style.

One of the most striking episodes in "Inferno" was the appearance of Satan in androgynous guise. In the Paris production, both Valentine Colasante and Roxane Stojanov performed this role with confidence and individual touches, but Stojanov's Satan seemed particularly gutsy and monumental. On this point, McGregor seemed to be fully in touch with the existing iconography; he delineated an image pulsating with meaning and echoing, yet not repeating, familiar visual sources. One might think here of the timeless sway of Michelangelo's monumental fresco of the Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel and its stunning inventory of suspended movements, which could themselves unfold into the energy of dance. Theater dance, as Jean-Georges Noverre argued two and a half centuries ago, continuously benefits from resourcing the iconography established in the visual arts, as both painting and dance deal with imaginary figurations. Throughout his career, McGregor has collaborated with the visual artists of today, enriching his choreographic ideas by novel, technologically inspired means of contemporary art. The older repository of images, however, might be a platform of resonance and consideration as well.

A choreographically bland dialogue between Dante and Virgil was something of a missed opportunity, whereas in the source poem it is a highly charged interaction between a student and his chosen mentor from the past. Virgil not only accompanies Dante on his voyage, he

warns, protects, and conveys moral judgments to his Renaissance peer. The Paris cast of *The Dante Project* featured Irek Mukhamedov, the legendary Tatar dancer, whose career unfolded in the Bolshoi and Royal Opera House, as Virgil. Though in his mid-sixties, the dancer retained his powerful plasticity and dramatic presence on stage, but this was not sufficiently explored by McGregor's choreography. For Mukhamedov, now working as a ballet master in the Paris Opera Ballet, the role of Virgil had a deeper symbolic meaning, as both dancers performing Dante—Germain Louvet and Paul Marque—work in the company with this Soviet-trained teacher almost daily. The significance of this casting choice for the Virgil-Dante tandem might well have resulted in a greater dramatic impact, if the choreography had been available to accommodate it. Both Louvet and Marque performed Dante's part dutifully and with technical ease; however, neither emotional depth nor intellectual investment informed their respective interpretations of the role.

The most convincing attempt to re-enact Dante's poem as dance was found in Act Two. Musically, "Purgatorio: Love" expressed the process of contemplative prayers and introspection. Adès, by condensing thirty-three *canti* of Dante's "Purgatorio" into seven musical movements, structured as an unfolding meditation that served to pacify McGregor's thirst for revolving movements. Importantly, the music suggested a new poetic mode, different from that of the "Inferno." As a theme, the purifying power of love, a mystery equal to the revelation of faith, was developed in Adès's music with charged intensity. Based on the ancient Jewish chants still preserved in Jerusalem's Ades Synagogue, which were established by the composer's Sephardic ancestors, the music called for ritual introspection in this balletic Dante.

Tacita Dean's set for Purgatory was equally commanding. She divided the stage into two parts: a bare monastic dwelling with simple taborets to the left and a series of large, superimposed photographs of a street corner in Los Angeles to the right. To underscore the meaning of Purgatory as the middle ground between Hell and Paradise, Dean used a sequence of photographic negatives of a real tree on the street in Los Angeles in order to show its transformation from violet into a blooming, intense green, with the coloring added by hand. The series of photos serves as a fold in Dante's memories of his encounters with Beatrice: first as a girl, and later as a teenager (both flashbacks were short duets danced by students from the School of Paris Opera). McGregor

responded to the serene atmosphere created by the music and the set with graceful attention. The narrative created by Dante's memory became graspable and captivating, particularly when Beatrice appeared on stage. Hannah O'Neil's appearance in the role of Beatrice came across as a great revelation of the growing artistic potential of this recently recognized étoile of the Paris Opera Ballet.

Act Three brought Dante to Paradise, the logical ending to his journey. In the poem, *Paradiso* represents the ascension of the poet's soul to the highest, celestial order of things. The transformation occurred over twenty-four hours, during Easter Sunday, when the bright light of life takes over death. In Hameed's ballet dramaturgy, Paradise ought to render a finale, an apotheosis, as it did in the bygone classical formula. In Act Three, "Paradiso: Poema Sacro," McGregor's choreography thrived in the atmosphere afforded by the music and sets, but it did not command the ensemble. Searching the means for transformation of Dante's argument on divine cosmology and angelic order within some thirty minutes of theatrical action—a daunting task in many ways—the creators of The Dante Project chose different paths and relied on their corresponding media. Finding a visual abstraction of levitating happiness as the pinnacle of Dante's journey turned out to be more challenging than creating the vision of the lower world.



Photo: The Dante Project, Act Three. The Royal Ballet ©2021 ROH.
Photograph by Andrej Uspenski.
Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris.

Dean's digital projection serves as a background to the balletic action. The film, titled *Paradise*, centers on the aperture's contrivance that allows different visual sequences to co-exist within a single-film frame. Dean found her inspiration for this pulsating, plasmatic eyeball in William Blake's vision of Paradise for the British artist's watercolor illustrations of *The Divine Comedy*, produced in 1824.⁷ Developing Blake's sensuous palette rather than his mode of figuration, as a point of departure, Dean intelligently brought an art-historical reference to her abstracted representation of Paradise in the film. Looking back at Blake, and perhaps also to John Flaxman, another great nineteenth-century artist working on Dante's iconography, pointed to abstraction, not only as a property of contemporaneous visual languages, but as mode of representing Dante that emerges through a longer historical projection.

For Act Three, from the scene depicting the departure of Virgil from Purgatory, Adès took the theme "Sweetest Father" as the opening passage to Paradise. Expanding on this theme from Purgatory, Adès linked the theme of the poet's purification to his ensuing journey to a higher stratum. Musically, the earthly Dante who bade farewell to his beloved teacher gave way to the Dante released from his previous bonds. Furthermore, the concept of spiral ascension of the celestial spheres found support in his construction of musical tones as gravitational rotations, mirroring the magnetic forces of the universe. The music conjured for listeners something of the abstraction of radiating, glowing celestial bodies that Dante observes in Paradise. A vocal theme, a divinely pure yet human voice that emerged in the final duet of Beatrice and Dante, seemed organically built into the theme of the transformation of bodies.

How, then, did choreography fill the space between the spiraling movement suggested by Adès's music and the anamorphic projection by Dean? McGregor expressed his vision of the celestial spheres through the revolving, circular movements of several couples of dancers dressed in diaphanous, illuminated bodices. His aptitude in creating light, weightless transfers between positions and in distributing the grouping on the stage was particularly effective throughout Act Three. His choreography devised scintillating, visually absorbing concentric movements of couples and floating lifts. Yet the meaning of Dante's wandering among these luminous bodies, and, moreover, the poet's reconnection with Beatrice, however wonderous they may have appeared to the viewer, seemed too gleeful and affected for the celestial, unreachable order of things. The lack of delineation of the main characters Dante

and Beatrice, through purely figurative, choreographic means became evident here again, echoing their insufficient development through the ballet. Instead, they turned into beautiful bodies, like those swirling around them. As they were from the outset, they remained abstractions.

Academic ballet of the nineteenth century had certain recipes for tying up the concrete and the abstract on stage: either a “white act” or a marriage divertissement, depending on the plot of the ballet. To take the most obvious example, *Giselle* in the eponymous ballet appears as a modest, peasant girl in the first act, with its “concrete,” life-like details. She goes through the discovery of betrayal and insanity only to reveal the transforming power of forgiveness in the second act, a category as abstract as divine wisdom in Dante’s work in many ways. No “happy ending” to the story of *Giselle* was possible within the limits of the romantic ballet. The abstraction of the Wilis—bodies and spirits at once—becomes an aspect of the genre’s codified poetics. *The Dante Project*, particularly in its choreographic aspects, offered a handsome, uplifting ending, with many beautiful lifts and precise, mechanically executed movements. But the composer, the artist-designer, and the choreographer seem to lose sight of each other in their respective pursuit of abstraction, each seeking the empyrean in Dante on their own terms.

Still, *The Dante Project* does leave the public with a sense of accomplishment. The road through the three strata of Dante’s universe that the team elaborated was instructive, despite certain discrepancies between the visual and choreographic components of this ballet. None of the four main contributors to the Project—Adès, Dean, Hameed, and McGregor—were vanquished by the monumental status of Dante’s literary work. They endeavored to capture its wholeness through their respective artistic means, revealing the possibilities and appeals of multimedia approaches. In the voluminous critical literature on Dante, thinkers of different schools agree on the poet’s gift for creating a sublime simplicity in his universal quest, one that Dante learned in part from Virgil; they also emphasize his ability to channel doctrinal and esoteric knowledge by means of human encounters and specific events. Taking a human measure of the universal order and charting individuality on the divine scale were key engines in the Renaissance project that Dante inaugurated. The production in question was in many ways too mediated and thus busy to focus on the individuality of the main characters, who were not given the chance to pose their simple, essential questions on life, the afterlife, and art.

The multimedia approach launched in the project, however, might be also a way to reciprocate the sensory fullness of Dante's images by several artistic means. Among many literary scholars studying Dante's poetic style, Auerbach pointed to the poet's mingling of genres with no respect to the earlier boundaries established in classical literature. Auerbach identified Dante's style as mixed and figural, taking figural as a mode of reading and interpreting the world.⁸ Osip Mandelštam, the great Russian poet of the last century and a contemporary of the Russian formalist tradition in literary studies, sought in Dante a model for the autonomy of poetic language. Mandelštam ardently disputed the widespread opinion of his time that Dante's poetry was sculptural. In his powerful essay "On Dante," Mandelštam insisted that "Dante's poetry possesses all the kinds of energy known to modern sciences. The unity of light, sound, and matter make her inner nature."⁹ Auerbach's notion of the figural interpretation of Dante along with Mandelštam's keen sensitivity to the rhythm of Dante's poetry predicted in some ways the possibility of transferring Dante's imagery into dance, giving it some sort of kinetic representation. One might consider here the Russian poet's observation that "philosophy and poetry are always on the move, on the legs, in Dante. Even a stop [in Dante's verses] is a form of an accumulated movement, a plateau for a conversation [...]. A quatrain is breathing in and out, and then—a step." [10]

As a theatrical production, *The Dante Project* should be justly credited with forecasting the ways by which Dante's universe might reach today's public, might touch and perhaps transform it. That dance should be able to convey the most complex stories and forge characters equal to those created in the greatest works of world literature was an idea advanced already in the Age of Enlightenment, at the time when the modern system of the arts began taking its shape. *The Dante Project's* search for converting one of the most revered literary monuments into a theatrical and balletic form suggests that academic dance still actively reflects on its role in the current system of the arts and, consequently, remains an audacious platform for experimentation with traditions and limits of the arts.

NOTES

¹Auerbach, Erich, and Jane O. Newman. “On the Anniversary Celebration of Dante (1921)” in *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*, ed. James I. Porter (Princeton University Press, 2014), 121.

²Tchaikovsky’s music was used for at least two eponymous ballets, including those choreographed by Serge Lifar for Ballets de France of Janine Charrat in 1958 and by Yurii Possokhov for San Francisco Ballet in 2012.

³The attempt to capture Dante’s imagery in dance, which requires a transition from the verbal to the visual figuration, inevitably recalls the rich tradition of Dante’s reception in the visual arts, running from the Renaissance masters, such as Botticelli, to the Romantic rebellion of Eugène Delacroix, John Flaxman, or the late nineteenth-century printmaker Gustave Doré, whose images inspired Adès in composing his music.

⁴It is important to mention here that he was the first resident choreographer of this leading academic company who trained neither in classical dance nor at the Royal Ballet.

⁵For *Wolf Works*, a commission from the Royal Ballet, McGregor obtained an original score by Max Richter and engaged Hameed’s expertise for the dramaturgy. Hameed devised the three-act structure of the ballet inspired by Woolf’s novels—*Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*—leaving to choreography the task of conveying characters’ psychological depth along with some historical ambience. *Wolf Works*, which premiered in May 2015 on the stage of the Royal Opera House, earned recognition and high praise among critics, winning the Lawrence Olivier award in 2016 as the Best Dance Production; Alessandra Ferri also received the Outstanding Achievement in Dance award the same year based on her interpretation of the central role.

⁶*Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*, 129-30.

⁷<https://www.mariangoodman.com/exhibitions/tacita-dean-paris-2022>

⁸Erich Auerbach, “Farinata and Cavalcante” in *Mimesis, The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 198.

⁹Osip Mandelštam, *Razgovor o Dante* [A Conversation about Dante], (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1967), 9-10. Translation is mine.

¹⁰Ibid, 10.

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