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## **Kenneth MacMillan and the Visual Arts: A Case Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Using Kenneth MacMillan's ballet *The Invitation* as a case study, this article focuses on the influence that cinema and painting exerted in his choreography. It examines how the visual imagery and techniques that came from the acknowledged audio-visual and pictorial sources of this ballet entered into his choreography. It also reveals that paintings by Francisco de Goya are highly probable, but previously unacknowledged, sources of the ballet. A final reflection considers the *tableau vivant* as a choreographic technique for an image-based effect.

### **KEYWORDS**

Kenneth MacMillan, dance and visual arts, *The Invitation*, Francisco de Goya, Eduardo Torre-  
Nilsson, *The House of the Angel (La casa del ángel)*, *tableaux vivants*

### **Introduction**

The visual arts played an important role in the life and career of the British choreographer Kenneth MacMillan (1929–1992). Jann Parry's biography of MacMillan gives details of his childhood strong interest in cinema (from *Flash Gordon* to Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney films) and, as he grew older, his developing interest in Hollywood musicals,\* classical films, new

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\*In an interview with Susie Crow, MacMillan confessed that it was through watching Hollywood musicals of the thirties and, particularly, Fred Astaire's movies, that he decided that he wanted to

releases, and a particular interest in the French *nouvelle vague*.<sup>1</sup> Dance researcher Susie Crow suggests that films inspired the choice of subject matter and characters of MacMillan's first narrative ballets (created for the Sadler's Wells Choreographic Group) with the plot of *Somnambulism* (1953), for example, drawn from the psychiatry-haunted movies of the forties (such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, 1945), while *Laidierette* (1954) grew out of MacMillan's fascination for Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954).<sup>2</sup>

This keen aesthetic interest in cinema probably had its origins in MacMillan's way of perceiving the world for, according to his close friend and art dealer Jeffrey Solomons, the choreographer thought visually—not verbally or analytically.<sup>3</sup> When he read a novel, “he saw the story in vivid images.”<sup>4</sup> And that seems part of his approach to choreography, too, for Lynn Seymour, a close friend and the dancer for whom he created many roles, who describes his way of thinking as “cinematic.”<sup>5</sup> Another dancer who worked with MacMillan, Marcia Haydée from the Stuttgart Ballet, has a similar impression; she recalled, “He had the shapes [he wanted us to make] in his head.”<sup>6</sup>

MacMillan's first commissioned work for the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet,<sup>\*</sup> *Danses Concertantes* (1955), provides evidence of the impact of films in his early choreography. In his

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be a dancer. See Susie Crow, “Kenneth MacMillan 1945–1955—Emergence of a Choreographer” (master's thesis, University of Surrey, 1987), 65.

\* The company that Ninette de Valois founded in 1931, which is now known as the Royal Ballet, has taken several titles across its history. It was originally Vic-Wells Ballet and became Sadler's Wells Ballet in 1941. In 1956, granted a royal charter, Sadler's Wells became the Royal Ballet. Sadler's Wells Opera Ballet, a second company, had opened in 1945 as a separate touring troupe

review of the work, dance critic Clive Barnes noticed a strong correlation between MacMillan's choreography for the ensembles and the "brash vitality and extrovert openness" of the group routines of Hollywood musicals.<sup>7</sup> At one point the principal female dancer (originally, Maryon Lane) launched into a tap routine,<sup>8</sup> and, as music broadcaster Natalie Wheen has recently brought to light, it is possible to perceive extraordinary similarities between the solo that MacMillan created for Donald Britton in this ballet and Fred Astaire's dancing (for instance, in his solo "Puttin' on the Ritz" in Stuart Heisler's film *Blue Skies*, 1946).<sup>9</sup> As Wheen argues, the off-balance movements and the effect of *rubato* (slowing or delaying and then catching up with the beat), characteristic of Astaire's performance style, strikingly resonates with Britton's sequences.\*

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within the main company. It was renamed Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet in 1947, Ballet Touring Company (also the Touring Company) in 1956, the New Group in 1970, and Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet in 1976. It would become the Birmingham Royal Ballet in the 1990s. See Alexander Bland, *The Royal Ballet: The First Fifty Years* (London: Threshold, 1981); and Zöe Anderson, *The Royal Ballet: 75 Years* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

\* A clip of Fred Astaire's number "Puttin' on the Ritz" is currently available on the Internet as "Puttin' on the Ritz with Fred Astaire," vimeo, 4:49, posted by BeFit Oficial, November 10, 2011, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/31922652>. An excerpt of a 1955 film recording of a dress rehearsal of *Danses Concertantes* is included in the TV documentary *Out of Line: A Portrait of Sir Kenneth MacMillan*, directed and produced by Derek Baily (London: Landseer for the BBC, 1990), which is available as extra content in some DVDs of MacMillan's ballets, such as *The Prince of the Pagodas* (London: BBC Television and NVC Arts, 1990) and *Winter Dreams* (London: BBC Television and NVC Arts, 1992), both directed by Bailey.

If films played a key role in fueling MacMillan's visual mind, paintings and design were equally important. He was a frequent visitor of art galleries: when he was a member of the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet, he always visited the galleries in the towns to which the company toured.<sup>10</sup> While in London, he went to exhibitions and art galleries with Solomons, an interest that he would later also share with his painter and designer wife Deborah Williams, whom he met in 1972.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, under the name of Kenneth Adams, MacMillan designed three works choreographed by his friend Peter Darrell (*Midsummer Watch*, 1951; *The Telltale*, 1952; and *Harlequinade*, 1952).

When MacMillan started to choreograph, design became an element of paramount significance in his ballets. In an interview in *About the House* in 1963, he said that the designer was "as important as the choreographer and the music. They all ought to have equal parts."<sup>12</sup> He took particular care in choosing his designers early on in the creative process, thus they were able to sit in on the rehearsals.<sup>13</sup> The Theatre Design class at the Slade School of Fine Art in London proved to be a permanent, fortunate source of collaborators. There he found many of the most celebrated designers of his ballets, such as Yolanda Sonnabend, Ian Spurling, and his first and most enduring find, Nicholas Georgiadis.<sup>14</sup> In their first work together, *Danses Concertantes*, the close integration of choreography, music, and design emerged as one of the most celebrated and commented on aspects of the ballet.<sup>15</sup>

This conception of ballet as a cohesive combination of visual, kinetic, and aural elements, already perceptible in MacMillan's first professional work, was not surprising, however, in a choreographer born and bred in the Sadler's Wells Ballet. Design and painting had a considerable relevance in the choreography of the founder and director of the company, Ninette de Valois, and in the training program that she established in the Sadler's Wells School. She had

danced with the Ballets Russes, acquiring a first-hand knowledge of Diaghilev's collaborative approach to ballet,<sup>16</sup> and, in the 1930s, maintained close links with the Bloomsbury Group.<sup>17</sup> Dance scholar Helena Hammond has stressed that this bond was an essential factor in de Valois's development of a visually imbued approach to choreography and a strong visual culture in the company that she founded.<sup>18</sup> Her ballets *Job* (1931, based on drawings by William Blake) and *The Rake's Progress* (1935, inspired by William Hogarth's pictorial series) are perhaps the best examples in her repertory of the close connection between painting and dance that she persistently promoted. In her role as the Director of the Sadler's Wells Ballet School, de Valois included design in the instruction of her dance students. They received classes in stagecraft as part of their training in the School,<sup>19</sup> which, in her view, included aspects such as music and décor and costume. \* As a pupil, dancer, and a company member dancing de Valois's repertory, MacMillan was a direct recipient of this visual education. In addition, de Valois mentored him very closely in his first steps as a choreographer, a guidance that again included advice germane to visual matters.<sup>20</sup> It was de Valois who recommended MacMillan to visit the Slade in search of designers, and who was with him on that first visit when he discovered Georgiadis.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that MacMillan's confessed love for cinema and particular care with the set and costume design of his ballets are well-known details about his career, little is known about how the impact of both arts crystallized in his choreography. He was secretive about the

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\* It also included appropriate casting and "theatrical presentation," by which she meant the efficiency and recognized style of the production, as well as its relation to ballet past and present; see Ninette de Valois, "Six Essays Contributed to *Dancing Times* in 1926 and in 1933," in *Ninette de Valois, Adventurous Traditionalist*, ed. Richard Cave and Libby Worth, 159-62 [AU: **Need to add pages numbers for the chapter here.**] (Alton, UK: Dance Books, 2012).

sources he used for inspiration, and only in a few cases provided some clues about them. In 1965, for instance, MacMillan divulged that he drew inspiration from Renaissance paintings for the attitudes and poses in his version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1965),<sup>22</sup> and in 1980, he revealed, with his usual vagueness, that the opening of his ballet *Gloria* (1980) was based “on some pictures I had seen.”<sup>23</sup>

The pictorial base of his choreography for *Requiem* (1976) was also disclosed by MacMillan, as he acknowledged that many of the choreographic images of this ballet, which he created in Stuttgart in memory of his friend John Cranko, were based in William Blake’s drawings, paintings, and illustrations. In particular, he drew inspiration from those that Blake created for Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, for Dante’s *Inferno* (the first part of *The Divine Comedy*) and for the Old Testament book of Job.<sup>24</sup> However, MacMillan never discussed these sources with his collaborators in the studio: the dancers were not informed about the visual origins of the choreography, and the company notator, Georgette Tsinguirides, learned about them only after the creative process concluded, when MacMillan gave her a book of Blake’s illustrations as a first-night present.<sup>25</sup>

The existing body of scholarly literature on MacMillan’s work has rarely addressed aspects of his visual intelligence or sources, although dance historian and curator Sarah Woodcock (2002) analyzed the relevance of design in MacMillan’s ballets, and provided an excellent summary of the designers who worked with MacMillan,<sup>26</sup> while art historian Evgenia Georgiadis focused only on the ballets that Georgiadis created in collaboration with MacMillan.<sup>27</sup> Work on the sources that inspired his choreography has only paid attention to those from literature with, for example, literary scholar Rodney Stenning Edgecombe (2006) and dance

scholars Brandon Shaw (2017) and Lynsey McCulloch (2019) examining the connection between MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* (1965) and Shakespeare's play.<sup>28</sup>

In the absence of a direct and detailed account of the visual sources that MacMillan used for inspiration for many of his ballets, and of an exhaustive analysis about how the few sources that he did reveal entered into his choreography, this article attempts to bring some of those sources to light and to discuss their absorption into MacMillan's choreography. The examination of the ballet *The Invitation* (1960), created toward the beginning of his career, serves here as a case study for that purpose. The analysis that follows aims to show how closely MacMillan worked with the audio-visual sources of this ballet, and how noticeably he imported strategies from both media, in some cases with techniques that he would maintain for the rest of his career. The ultimate goal is to show that a close reading of his choreography made in connection with a detailed study of the visual sources that inspired it might reveal important angles of MacMillan's craftsmanship and of the intended expressivity of his ballets.

### ***The Invitation***

MacMillan created *The Invitation* in 1960, after six years as a resident choreographer of the Royal Ballet. It was a one-act, narrative ballet slightly longer than all his previous incursions in the genre (e.g., *The House of Birds*, 1955, and *The Burrow*, 1958). For the set and costume design, he selected Georgiadis (it was their eighth collaboration), and for the music, he commissioned an original score from Mátyás Seiber, an England-based, Hungarian composer whose music he had heard on the radio.\*

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\* Seiber's former student, Don Banks, added some additional music to the score after Seiber's unexpected death in a car accident in September 1960. Banks used material from Seiber's earlier pieces, and drew upon his understanding of Seiber's style. For further details, see Paul R. W.

MacMillan wrote two versions of the scenario of the ballet, preserved in the British Library.<sup>29</sup> He acknowledged that he drew inspiration from two literary sources—Beatriz Guido’s, *La casa del ángel* (1954) and Colette’s *Le blé en herbe* (The Ripening Seed, 1923)<sup>30</sup>—and from their adaptations to cinema.\* According to Seymour, the Argentinian film *The House of the Angel* (1957), directed by Eduardo Torre-Nilsson, was the catalyst for the project.<sup>31</sup>

MacMillan saw it at the cinema and was so impressed by it that soon afterwards he also read Guido’s novel, which inspired it.<sup>32</sup> The main events in the central plotline of *The Invitation* come from this novel.† A young girl (Ana, in the novel; the Girl, in the ballet) meets an older man

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Jackson, “Sir Kenneth MacMillan and His Use of Music,” in *Revealing MacMillan: Conference Papers*, ed. Royal Academy of Dance (London: Royal Academy of Dance, 2002), 65.

\* *La casa del ángel* (The House of the Angel), directed by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Sono Film, 1957), motion picture, accessed July 11, 2019, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f26FqMslOYM>; and *Le blé en herbe*, directed by Claude Autant-Lara (1954 [motion picture]; Neuilly-sur-Seine, France: Gaumont, 2010), DVD. The film was originally released in Britain under the title *The Game of Love*, but is better known by its original title in French. While MacMillan rarely disclosed his pictorial sources, in this case, he acknowledged the four sources, but privileged Torre Nilsson’s film and Colette’s novella; see Kenneth MacMillan, interviewed in *Out of Line*; and Kenneth MacMillan, quoted in Jann Parry, *Different Drummer: The Life of Kenneth MacMillan* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 224.

† Beatriz Guido and Eduardo Torre Nilsson met in 1951; they kept their affair clandestine until they separated from their respective partners (divorce was not allowed in Argentina then) and were together until Torre Nilsson’s death in 1978. Guido had a successful career as a novelist and screenwriter. *The House of the Angel* was her first novel, for which she won the prestigious



(Pablo Aguirre, in the novel; the Husband, in the ballet) in her family house, where he is a guest. She becomes infatuated with him, but when she refuses to have her first sexual experience with him, he rapes her. To this storyline, MacMillan added two subplots—the Boy/Girl incipient romance and the Boy/Wife adulterous affair, both taken from Colette’s novella *Le blé en herbe*, which he had read earlier and whose film version he had also seen.<sup>33</sup> The performers who MacMillan chose to create the four central roles were Seymour (the Girl), Christopher Gable (the Boy), Anne Heaton (the Wife), and Desmond Doyle (the Husband).

The creative choices that MacMillan made to craft the story of this ballet had paramount importance for the formation of his philosophy on the subject matter of ballet.<sup>34</sup> Strongly influenced by John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and by the regenerative movement that it triggered in postwar British drama, in the late 1950s, MacMillan redirected the plots of his ballets toward dark areas of human experience.<sup>35</sup> The controversial violence presented in *The Invitation* deliberately set him apart from ballet’s neoclassical tradition and from the romantic, mythological subject matter favored by the main choreographer of the company, Frederick Ashton, in such ballets as *La fille mal gardée* (1960) with its overt romantic plot, and *Daphnis and Chloe* (1951), based on a Greek myth.<sup>36</sup>

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Emecé Award for unpublished authors. The script for the film version was her first project in the film industry. See Cristina Mucci, *Divina Beatrice: Una biografía de la escritora Beatriz Guido* (2002; repr. ebook, Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2015), 19–27 and 104–8; and Ricardo García Oliveri, “Eduardo Torre Nilsson,” in *Diccionario del cine iberoamericano. España, Portugal y América—Volumen 8*, Emilio Casares Rodicio (Madrid: SGA/Fundación Autor, 2011), 368.

The world of cinema that surrounded MacMillan in the years preceding *The Invitation* shared the impetus for change of the British New Wave drama that so directly impacted on him. Since the 1940s, new ways of filmmaking, confronting Hollywood's commercial practices, had been reaching the screen. Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), with novel ways of shooting and editing, and Italian Neorealism, with its emphasis on reality in such films as Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946) and Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (1948), opened a new phase in film history.<sup>37</sup> In Britain, the documentary film movement known as Free Cinema heralded the arrival of New Wave films in the late 1950s and early 1960s. And in France, in this same period, the *nouvelle vague* rebelled against the conventions of French cinema by producing "low-budget location-shot films, with loosely-constructed narratives, free editing styles [, and an] air of youthful spontaneity."<sup>38</sup> The two films that inspired MacMillan's creation of *The Invitation*, Claude Autant-Lara's *Le blé en herbe* (1954) and Torre-Nilsson's *The House of the Angel*, belong to this artistic landscape.

### **Film sources**

*Claude Autant-Lara's "Le blé en herbe" (1954)*

Autant-Lara's *Le blé* is a film version of Colette's novella of the same title. It slightly changes the story, adding new characters and episodes, but preserves the core of the plot delineated by Colette (and borrowed by MacMillan): the incipient romance between childhood friends Phil and Vinca (the Boy and the Girl in the ballet) is disrupted by Mme. Dalleray (the Wife), a married woman, twenty years their senior, who has an affair with Phil. The film is shot in a matter-of-fact style that removes most of the halo of sensuality in Colette's writing, a stylistic substitution that semiotician Julia Kristeva considered 'an indecent assault' on the novella.<sup>39</sup> MacMillan must have had some reservations about the film too because he did not import any of its plot changes,

images, or film practices. The only noticeable imprint of the film in *The Invitation* comes from the interpretation of one of the actors, Edwige Feuillère playing the role of Mme. Dalleray. Feuillère's dramatic use of gestures and glances are key to disclosing the feelings and thoughts of the character. Heaton's creation of the role, with intensely expressive eyes, hands, and face, parallels the subtle, warm performance by Feuillère in the film.\* Both artists exploit the expressivity of small gestures similarly, portraying the quiet, sensitive wife through delicate, yet extremely vivid, body language. MacMillan's insistence in casting Heaton for the role (she was retired and returned to the stage just to perform this character) seems related to Feuillère's stellar performance in the film, particularly if we consider the extraordinary resemblance between Heaton's interpretative skills and stage presence and the acting style and mature allure of the French actress.

*Eduardo Torre-Nilsson's "The House of the Angel" (1957)*

Unlike that minor impact of the French film, this Argentinian film had a decisive influence in *The Invitation*: with its controversial topic and inventive lighting, filming and editing, *The House*

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\*The main audiovisual source for my comments on the original cast's performances and for the instances of dance analysis included in this article is Edmée Wood's recording of a 1960 dress rehearsal by the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet (Edmée Wood, *The Royal Ballet in Rehearsal: The Invitation* (London: Royal Ballet, 1960), 16mm, British Film Institute Archive, with Lynn Seymour (the Girl), Christopher Gable (her Cousin), Anne Heaton (the Wife) and Desmond Doyle (the Husband). Other sources consulted are Birmingham Royal Ballet's recording of a dress rehearsal (1983) and footage of the 1996 Royal Ballet revival. In addition, the audio-visual material has been complemented with observations taken from the Royal Ballet's rehearsals and ensuing live performances of the ballet in May–June 2016.

*of the Angel* epitomized the spirit of the time.<sup>40</sup> MacMillan most likely viewed it in London thanks to the critical acclaim it met in Cannes in 1957. Two influential French publications, *Cahiers du cinema* and *Lettres Françaises*, ranked it among the ten best films shown in France that year.<sup>41</sup> An Argentinian contemporary review praised its camera movements, which “seek the best dramatic effect, travel with curiosity, and penetrate the characters to expose their psychological privacy.”<sup>42</sup> And the British critic John Gillett complimented its style, rich in low- and high-angle shots, in dense close-ups, and in sudden musical effects.<sup>43</sup> Torre-Nilsson also possessed an artistic profile typical of the age. The son of a filmmaker formed in silent movies, he rebelled against the artistic conventions received from older generations, and actively fought against the censorial restrictions in his country.<sup>44</sup> This affinity with MacMillan’s own artistic vision and experience at the time<sup>45</sup> must have been crucial to attract his attention to a film that “exuded an air of novelty.”<sup>46</sup>

A first point of comparison between *The Invitation* and Torre Nilsson’s film is the music. The sudden musical effects, noticed by Gillett in the score composed by Juan Carlos Paz for the film, are perceptible in Seiber’s music for the ballet too.\* The most important devices that he uses to “reflect, underline and sustain” the drama<sup>47</sup> are abrupt changes in dynamics and harmony. While the passages at high volume and full orchestral force usually stress disturbing or significant events in the action (such as the rape, and the provocative waltz that precedes it), the passages of lower volume and speed always possess disquiet intent, conveying the sense of a

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\* *The Invitation* was Seiber’s first and only commission for ballet, but he had extensive experience in composing for films, notably John Halas and Joy Batchelor’s *Animal Farm* (1954) and Jack Lee’s *A Town like Alice* (1956). See “Index of Complete Works,” Mátyás Seiber Trust since 2005, accessed April 21, 2020, [http://seibermusic.org.uk/?page\\_id=14](http://seibermusic.org.uk/?page_id=14).

hidden, potential disaster (such as the opening notes, when the day-dreaming Boy is onstage). The sudden outbursts of energy are frequently accompanied by emphatic dissonances whose unsettling tone is similar to the distressing effect produced by the dodecaphonic music in the source film.<sup>48</sup> Since Seiber tailor-made the music to meet MacMillan's precise specifications,\* the film music may well have been decisive in leading MacMillan to commission a score with similar mood.

The film script (by Guido, Torre Nilsson, and Martín Rodríguez) is the origin of the second notable impact that *The House of the Angel* leaves on the ballet. It reduces the number of events in the story and, crucially, transformed the fragmented, nonchronological recollection of memories of the novel into a linear account, condensing the most relevant episodes of Ana's story into a few days. The film narrative opens with a scene (placed much later in the novel) where the children play games with the statues in the garden. The nudity of the statues is hidden by drapes, as the Catholic prudishness of Ana's mother considers it obscene. The children, however, find delight in peering under the drapes, and laughing at Ana when she is forced to look and blushes. The dramatic purpose of this opening scene is to introduce Ana's adolescent

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\* Seiber's handwritten notes in the first scenario of the ballet that, according to MacMillan's biographer's Jann Parry, reflect the conversations between the two artists, include many references to the intended mood of the music. For instance, where MacMillan's typewritten scenario reads "scene II—inside the house: Married couple alone—convey their present unhappy married relationship," Seiber's notes add "sad/agitated/frantic," which is the exact progression of musical mood of this *pas de deux*. See Parry, *Different Drummer*, 223–25; and Mátyás Seiber, "The Invitation: Music Score, Piano Score," 1960, vol. XLVII, MUS/ADD/62830, Seiber Collection, Music Collection, British Library, London.

nature and her rigid Catholic upbringing. The introductory dance numbers of the ballet have a similar setting, action, and intent, contextualizing the story in a specific milieu

<Place Chart 1 near here>

The ball in Ana's house acquires, too, a key relevance in the film. In the novel, the ball has a marginal role, for Ana is a mere observer from the balustrade and never gets to participate in the dancing. In the film, however, she is no longer an intrigued, passive witness, but an active participant who timidly, but happily, dances in the arms of Pablo. This seduction, which MacMillan borrows entirely from the film, allows the first intimate contact between the protagonists, embodying the physical attraction that is nearly absent in the novel. The plot of the ballet thus firmly rests on the plot underpinning the film, rather than upon that of the source novel.

One of the four central characters of *The Invitation*, the Husband, also owes much of its conception and characterization to Torre-Nilsson's film. In Guido's novel, Pablo Aguirre is a vague figure whose traits are blurred and subjectively recalled through Ana's distressing memories (which provide some details about his life and personality); his background remains largely undefined. Importantly, Ana's infatuation with him does not seem to stem from his seductive nature but, rather, to be merely fueled by her romantic imagination. In the film however he is a handsome, elegant man with some allure that causes fascination: he has a mistress as well as frequent affairs with other women; in his public life, he is a successful politician and, since his role as a member of Parliament is expanded in the film, his political reputation allows him to project a positive image that is almost absent in the novel. But he is subtly presented as a two-faced man, since several characters reveal his hidden, dark nature: his lover laments his infidelities; his brother reproaches him for his double moral values (his

irreproachable façade in the public sphere, in contrast with his libertine life style); and a political adversary provokes an aggressive reaction from him (a slap in the face), revealing his violent nature. All these features, latent in the novel but manifest in the film, thanks to the character's expanded presence and to the interpretation by actor Lautaro Murúa, are transferred to the Husband in *The Invitation*. The balletic equivalent of Pablo has an irreproachable public face, is good-looking, and has a double nature (suggested to the audience by a sinister melody at his first entrance). The creator of the role, Desmond Doyle, succeeded in portraying a fully fleshed character: his nuanced portrayal, his understated acting, and a commanding presence onstage, are remarkably similar to those of Murúa in the film. Selecting Doyle for the role seems again a casting decision driven by his resemblance to the physique and acting style of the cinematic performer.

A last aspect that evidences the crucial role of the Argentinian film in shaping the ballet is, significantly, the choreography, for the transformation of film techniques and images into dance imagery is a distinctive feature of MacMillan's approach to choreography in this ballet. The instances of translation from film images to dance are so noticeable that dance critic Clive Barnes found the ballet too filmic. In his measured review, he analyzed in detail the flaws of the ballet as well as its merits. Despite the fact that among the latter he praised the cinematic interplay of glances between the Boy and the Wife on the one hand, and between the Husband and Girl on the other (both taking place before and during the ball), he concluded that MacMillan should never forget that he was a choreographer, "not a film-director."<sup>49</sup>

Several vivid examples of this cinematic permeation come in two different scenes of the ballet: the long scene of the ball (which takes place in two dance numbers—number 9, group scene, start of the ball, and number 10, *pas de deux*, waltz by Husband and Girl) and the brief,

violent scene of the rape (in number 15, *pas de deux*, the rape). They illustrate the relevance of *The House of the Angel* as a provider of both visual references and cinematic techniques successfully translated into dance. Ultimately, they also expose the significance of MacMillan's visual thinking for his craft.

### *The rape in number 15*

In spite of the largely elliptical account of the rape in the film (Torre-Nilsson did not like sexual scenes and preferred to suggest the encounters with hints and understatement<sup>50</sup>), some of the visual imagery that suggests it finds a place in MacMillan's explicit representation of the act. For instance, the actress Elsa Daniel, as Ana, uses clenched fists and folded arms to create a useless, fleshy shield against Pablo's aggression, conveying a sense of vulnerability that the Girl in *The Invitation* suggests with similar gestures in the intense, final moments of the ballet. In addition, the shots from behind the actor, showing Aguirre's neck, shoulders, and fiercely embracing arms, show the violent force falling upon the defenseless Ana, which MacMillan reconstructed for the ballet for a similar dramatic purpose. MacMillan's Husband, downstage, and with his back to the audience,<sup>\*</sup> also uses his arms with ferocity to dominate the Girl; he rapes her. This exposition of his vigorous back, similar to the brief shot of Aguirre's back in the film,<sup>†</sup> provides a powerful, visual summary of the brutal action just enacted. In addition, as a dramatic strategy, it allows for a shift in the focus of attention from the Husband, and his violent actions, to the Girl and her psychological damage, on which the action mainly focusses until the end of the ballet.

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<sup>\*</sup> All references to locations on stage (right, left, etc.) are depicted here from the audience perspective.

<sup>†</sup> Another notable similarity between Aguirre and the Husband in this scene is that they dress similarly in dark trousers and white shirt.



Earlier in the story, during the ball in which the Girl becomes infatuated with the Husband, the influence of Torre Nilsson's film is even stronger. The way the filmmaker shoots and edits the scene achieves such dramatic intensity that it becomes pivotal to the denouement of the story. MacMillan's successful adaptation of Torre-Nilsson's cinematic practices to his own choreography parallels the peak of intensity attained by the ball in the film.

*The ball in the film*

When the ball starts, neither Ana nor Pablo is in the house. The film shows how they arrive separately at the party, but do not join the ball—they go upstairs where, at the top, they exchange an intense glance. Ana then goes to her room while Pablo pays a visit to her father. (Although the action has moved upstairs, the diegetic music of the party is always heard in the background.)

After the talk between Pablo and her father, Ana and Pablo meet again on the landing of the first floor. They politely greet each other and, in a close-up, Ana blushes (her embarrassment filling the screen, thanks to the camera shot). They start to part but, when a waltz begins to play, Pablo returns and invites her to dance. He offers his hand, which she accepts, and leads her down, the film explicitly showing the transition from the space upstairs to the ballroom downstairs through long shots framing the two characters while they walk down the stairs. When they arrive at the bottom, two consecutive close-ups concentrate on Ana and on Pablo before they start to dance. A long shot then shows how they join the rest of the dancing couples, to the surprise—first, of one of Ana's sisters, and second, of her mother, both shown in two medium shots.\* The long shot is

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\* A medium shot frames a character from waist, hips, or knees up (or down), allowing the character to be seen in relation to her or his surroundings. These surroundings are hardly seen in a close-up, which is a shot that isolates a portion of a character, usually the face, so that the subject framed by the camera fills the screen. By contrast, in a long shot, the characters are at

then followed by an extended series of close-ups of Ana and Pablo as they waltz. The scene concludes with their farewell, still narrated through close-ups, at the end of the dance. Ana rushes upstairs, leaving the ballroom and putting an end to the sequence.

The film technique in this excerpt serves a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, it uses a multi-spatial location with three different areas (the landing on the first floor, the ballroom on the ground floor, and the stairs) to create suspense. As the two characters transit through and between the three spaces, the interest in their actions progressively increases, finally reaching its peak in the waltz. The tension released there is thus anticipated by lingering in a minute description of the preceding moments. On the other hand, the choice of shots that visually present these events allows for a progressive, dramatic stress on the experience of the characters. Long shots frame the action in the context of a social event, whereas close-ups highlight the increasing mutual attraction between the characters. Although there are two close-ups upstairs and two more downstairs, when Ana and Pablo start to dance, long shots dominate the first part of the sequence. Only at the end, after several long shots framing Ana and Pablo within the crowd of dancing couples, does the narrative attention finally rest on the two characters, exclusively. A long series of close-ups as they waltz portrays their feelings. Their faces, rather than their dancing bodies, are framed by the camera: the external characteristics of the dance are no longer the focus of attention. Within the whole sequence, the combination of long shots and close-ups, with predominance of the former at the beginning and of the latter at the end, enables the film's dramatic strategy to direct the attention from the general action to a particular event happening within it, shifting from the external event to the inner experience of the characters.

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some distance from the camera, so that they are seen in full in their surrounding environment.

See Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2006), 355–56.

*The ball in the ballet—General scene in no. 9: Stillness*

In MacMillan's ballet, a similar narrowing down and shift in focus takes place during dance numbers 9 and 10. The action in number 9 introduces the ball in general terms, although it progressively concentrates the audience's attention on the Husband and the Girl. Their actions are equivalent to the fragment of the film sequence framed in long shots (both upstairs and downstairs, with the couple dancing among the rest of the guests). The effect of a long shot is achieved in this number by a combination of kinetic, aural, and visual elements\* that organize the group scene as a multi-action scene with a background of action (Guests and Children arriving and dancing at the evening ball) that frames a central focus of attention (the interaction between Husband and Girl). The spatial distribution of dancers across different areas of the stage helps to build a surrounding environment similar to that captured by a camera in a long shot. Upstage right, the Children, in couples, dance a social dance under the Governess's watchful eye. Also upstage right the adult Guests arrive in pairs. They walk the diagonal downstage left, where the Wife, who welcomes them, is initially placed. After briefly greeting her, they congregate upstage

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\* The methodological basis for the instances of dance analysis that I present here comes from the framework introduced by Janet Adshead (ed.) in *Dance Analysis. Theory and Practice* (London: Dance Books, 1988). This analytical model considers that dance is composed of four elements: movement, dancer, visual elements, and aural elements. I here use the term "kinetic" to succinctly refer to all the aspects that Adshead considers included in movement, such as type of motions, spatial elements, and dynamic features. In addition, my analysis of the relationship between movement and music is based on Stephanie Jordan's model for choreomusical analysis set out in her monograph *Moving Music: Dialogues with Music in Twentieth Century Ballet* (London: Dance Books, 2000).

left and stage left. The Husband and the Girl occupy the space downstage that is left free by the two groups: the Girl, on the right, is illuminated by a bright spotlight; the Husband, a few meters away, on the left, stares at her. Their dominance over the rest of the characters, in attracting the main narrative interest, is emphasized by their spatial location downstage and the selective lighting highlighting the Girl's position.

The music also highlights the interaction between the Girl and the Husband. Importantly, in contrast to the previous dance lesson (in numbers 7 and 8) where the music was embedded in the story and therefore the Children (as characters) could (metaphorically speaking) hear it and dance to it, in this number (9), the music is no longer part of the part of the story. This shift from diegetic to non-diegetic music\* allows for an aural atmosphere with richer nuances that significantly contribute to emphasize what is going on between the Girl and the Husband. For instance, the heavy, potent, and sinister melody recurrently used across the ballet to signal the two-faced nature of the Husband now returns to add a disturbing layer to his gestures; and an additional, nervous sounding tune in the flute stresses the Girl's hesitant excitement in front of him.

The association between the music and just one of three actions onstage matches the kinaesthetic emphasis that arises from the contrasting actions of each of the groups. While there is constant movement in the dancing steps of the children and in the gradual arrival of the guests, the chief elements in the choreography for the central couple are stillness and unhurried gestures.

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\* Most ballet music is non-diegetic: it is not built into the story enacted on stage; the characters do not hear it in their world. Occasionally, ballet music becomes diegetic (i.e., part of the story), as in the dance lesson in number 7 in this ballet. For further details on the difference between diegetic and non-diegetic music, see Jordan, *Moving Music*, 71.

The Girl stays on the spot, her weight slowly shifting from foot to foot; her head is down except for a few furtive glances at the Husband while her hand gestures, such as twitchily smoothing her dress down or placing them, with fingers laced, in front of her body, expose her inner agitation.\* The Husband has been mostly still, gazing intensely at the Girl. The few movements that he performs are at a measured, slow pace, and are accompanied by long, penetrating glances. The almost static Husband and Girl thus attract most of the dramatic attention, their highly expressive stillness standing out in contrast with the two dynamic crowds of adults and children; surrounded by the rest of the characters, they make important progress in their affair.

It is possible to see that the combination of spatial, visual, musical, and kinetic elements, which shifts the attention away from the general action of the scene and directs it toward the specific actions performed by two characters,<sup>†</sup> is a choreographic strategy that is similar to the progression from long shots to medium shots and close-ups in Torre-Nilsson's film.\*

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\* The dramatic expressivity of these gestures owes much to the creator of the role, Lynn Seymour. She acknowledged that she got inspiration from actress Joan Plowright when she, in company with Georgiadis and MacMillan, saw her performing in Eugène Ionesco's *The Chairs* (1952). Plowright was playing an old woman, and one of the ways she conveyed the character's age was through the expressive use of her feet, in carpet slippers. This inspired Seymour to create "young feet" for the characterization of the Girl. At different moments of the ballet, and in particular in this scene, they embodied the Girl's nervous, sexual awakening. See Lynn Seymour, quoted in Anthony Crickmay, *Lynn Seymour: A Photographic Study* (London: Studio Vista, 1980), 72.

<sup>†</sup> Another example of this technique, that perhaps possesses more clarity and more dramatic power, can be found in MacMillan's 1965 ballet version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The two

Pas de deux in no. 10: External waltz / interior feelings

The almost static interaction between the Husband and the Girl, in dance number 9, creates anticipation for the subsequent action, in number 10, where the Husband and the Girl waltz together. This dancing is again significantly influenced by the sequence of the ball in *The House of the Angel*, although MacMillan adapts the shooting and editing film technique differently, using dance sequences that transform the film images and practices into choreography. After the Husband's slow, minimal motion to get close to the Girl, and leading her to the center of the stage in dance number 9 (paralleling the long shot in the stairs capturing Ana and Pablo descending to the hall), the ensuing number centers the attention, exclusively, on the dancing couple (closely matching the film's close-ups). Their waltz together is the only action onstage, since the rest of the couples stop dancing, surround them, and observe their dance. In addition, the choreography for the waltz progresses from just dancing to the exposition of the internal, growing attraction between the characters, in close equivalence to the chain of attention-catching close-ups of Ana and Pablo in the film.

<Place Picture 1 near here>

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protagonists meet during a ball in Juliet's house, a bustling group scene where the simultaneous presentation of the general action (kinetically active) and the private encounter (with minimal motion) allows the emphasis on the relevance of the patriarchal society over the love story to be seen. See *Romeo and Juliet*, performed by the Royal Ballet, (2007; London: Decca Music, 2009), DVD.

\* Later filmmakers could also use a zoom-in, which picks out and isolates a person or object from a wider context, for the same purpose. See Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2006), 510

To that purpose, in just under two minutes, the combination of kinetic and aural elements provides information that refers to three different aspects of the story. First, the external action performed by the Husband and the Girl (they waltz in a ball); second, the characters express their internal feelings (both experience a growing sexual attraction as they dance together); and third, similarly to the intrusive narrator who comments on the action in a novel, some cues send warning signs of an imminent tragedy to the audience, foreshadowing the twisted denouement of this affair. Each type of information is conveyed through different elements: the external action is portrayed through the waltz steps of the dance (or rather, the artistic re-creation of waltz steps) to the waltz passages in the score, here functioning as diegetic music; the inner experience is conveyed through dance movements that do not belong to the social dance, but to ballet vocabulary (including shoulder-level lifts) and that are performed to music that, while retaining the waltz rhythmic pattern, moves away from the waltz melody (thus becoming non-diegetic music); and the terrible fate of the infatuated characters is foreshadowed through the melodic assonances and sudden increases in dynamics of the (still non-diegetic) music.\*

The density in dramatic information achieved in this scene is perhaps MacMillan's most accomplished transferal from the screen to the stage, with the combination of the film's long shots and close-ups of Ana and Pablo inspiring the most intricate dance sequence. The series of exuberant lifts, with erotic connotations that expose the inner feelings of the characters in this

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\* For further details about the contribution of the music to the dramatic expressivity of this scene, see Cristina de Lucas, "Narrative Aspects of Kenneth MacMillan's Ballet *The Invitation*" (PhD Thesis, University of Roehampton, 2016), 207–13. For an introductory study of the music score, see *ibid.*, 84–90.

*pas de deux* is, together with the visual and aural cues that also decisively contribute to its expressivity, a remarkable rethinking of moving images in purely dance terms.

### **Pictorial sources**

In comparison with the crucial and extensive role of Torre Nilsson's film in the configuration of *The Invitation*, the pictorial base behind the ballet might seem minor and only circumstantial, yet it contributes to the visual and kinetic conception of the ballet in important ways. It entered into the creative process from the very beginning for in his first version of the scenario of the ballet, MacMillan must have already had some pictorial sources in mind; he wrote, "See possible Spanish nineteenth-century pictures for children's games."<sup>51</sup> This note is placed in scene one of the ballet, by the third dance number, when the Girl's friends are introduced in the story.

Although only part of Francisco de Goya y Lucientes's huge number of works were produced in the nineteenth century (he was born in 1746 and died in 1828), the correlation between some of his paintings and MacMillan's lively choreography for the Children suggests a likely connection, particularly in the light of MacMillan's working note.

Goya created a series of cartoons for tapestries on everyday subjects that depict, in a somewhat idealized way, the customs of Spain.<sup>52</sup> The tapestries were intended to hang in the palaces of the royal family and most of them have an outdoor setting and a light, vivacious tone.<sup>53</sup> Three of those paintings are particularly relevant here: *The Kite* (1777–1778), *Boys Picking Fruit* (1778), and one of the most famous cartoons in the series, *The Blind Man's Buff*



(1788) (also known in the Anglo-Saxon culture by its Spanish title *La gallina ciega*). All three portray outdoor games, with figures involved in a physical activity.\*

*The Kite* shows five boys playing with a kite on and around a bulky stone, a composition that MacMillan seems to have replicated in the starting moments of the Children's number (dance number 3). This scene in the garden opens with the Children surrounding the Girl and the Boy, who sit on the floor, cuddling each other. The group of dancers around the couple form a similar shape to Goya's central rock, and the subsequent movements that they make, propelling their bodies away from the group, recall the outward projections of Goya's kite fliers. The choreography that follows has expansive movements, with limbs reaching into space and to the floor. The figures in Goya's *La gallina ciega* are arranged with similar spaciousness. Holding hands, the couples in the painting form a circle around a central character. Since in this game the circle moves in all directions, each of Goya's players has expansive outstretched arms and a clearly defined kinetic direction and action. MacMillan's Children do not form a circle but move around the garden in group, with arms in ballet second position. They cover all the available space, and also incorporate the garden statues into their games. They touch them, hide behind them, and play with their covers. This integration of the props recalls the action of climbing a tree in another of Goya's cartoons for tapestries, *Boys Picking Fruit*, where a group of children are portrayed ascending the branches of a plum tree.

These coincidences in theme, tone, and dynamic qualities—between Goya's cartoons and MacMillan's choreography—support the hypothesis that the choreographer possibly used them

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\* Many of the cartoons in this series, including the three mentioned here, currently belong to the Museo del Prado's collection, available online: "The Museum's Collections: Masterpieces," Museo del Prado, accessed July 11, 2019, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection>.

for his own artistic purposes. They may have provided him with the “shapes in his head,” which Marcia Haydée recalled as the driving impulse of his choreographic method, as the kinetic qualities, floor patterns, and dance formations of the Children’s number match the bodies in motion depicted by Goya. Additionally, Seymour remembers that the Girl’s first entrance onstage, gliding through the garden with her arms outstretched like an airplane, had a note in the score (to help the dancers and the pianist) that read, “falling out of a tree.”<sup>54</sup> The evocative intent of this expression again agrees, coincidentally or not, with the playfulness suggested by Goya’s tree scenes.

This evidence suggests that it is likely that MacMillan undertook the research on Spanish painting that he planned in the scenario and that the exploration led him to Goya. While his cartoons for the tapestries are probable visual sources of the ballet, they are not the only aspect of Goya-inspired choreography in *The Invitation*, for MacMillan’s exposure to the work of the painter seems to have left yet another imprint in the ballet. The duet for the married couple at the beginning of scene two (inside the house, dance number 6) portrays the difficult rapport that exists between the Husband and the Wife. The kinetic imagery of the choreography is rich and contains one particular moment that seems inspired by two of the most famous paintings by Goya, the *Naked Maja* (1795–1800) and the *Clothed Maja* (1805–1807).<sup>\*</sup> These two canvases depict the same woman reclined on a bed, exposing her body to the viewer; she is nude in the first piece and dressed in the second. At the time when Goya painted them they were considered indecent, forbidden by the Inquisition, although Goya never intended them for public display.<sup>†</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> The two Majas are also part of the Museo del Prado collection, available online.

<sup>†</sup> They were commissioned by Charles IV’s aristocrat prime minister, Manuel Godoy, who wanted them for his own enjoyment. The most probable sitter was Godoy’s mistress, Pepita

<Place picture 2 near here>

The *maja*-like posture in MacMillan's ballet unfolds in an intimate atmosphere too. The action takes place, for the first time in the ballet, under the austere, severe walls of the house. The Husband and the Wife are alone in a room and there they unleash their mutual, bitter feelings. At one moment in the choreography, the Wife leaps into her Husband's arms into a horizontal pose with arms in ballet's fifth position, which is similar to the provocative posture of the *majas*. The shape of the Wife's body, openly displayed like the *majas*, seems to invite a sexual gaze. But since the Wife has leapt with energy into the Husband's arms to adopt the provocative pose there, the invitation seems to be even more direct, as if she is inciting him not only to admire her body, but also to take it. Her attempt fails, however, as his disdainful support seems to hurt her feelings; she makes a hand gesture turning his head away as if she cannot bear to see his cold, indifferent look; the sad melody in the oboe voices her yearning.\*

A comparison between the Wife's action and the Goya models exposes striking similarities—the most obvious one is the physical arrangement of the bodies, almost identical in the dancing *maja* and the pictorial sources. In both cases, legs are slightly bent (crossed, in the

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Tudó, whom he eventually married when his wife died after thirty years of marriage. Godoy kept the two suggestive paintings in his private office away from the public view of the other rooms in his palace. See Valeriano Bozal, *Goya* (Madrid: Machado Libros, 2010), 56–58, and Robert Hughes, *Goya*, trans. [into Spanish] Caspar Hodgkinson and Victoria Malet (Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2004), 274–75.

\* A picture capturing this exact moment of the ballet is available online in this article: Sarah Woodcock, "MacMillan and His Designers," Kenneth MacMillan, accessed June 6, 2020, <https://www.kennethmacmillan.com/new-page-2>.

ballet) and arms are raised, exposing the area of the armpits.\* The Wife wears an Edwardian evening costume, so no flesh is directly visible, but the open display of her body introduces a suggestion of sexual intimacy that later choreographic material in the *pas de deux* develops further.

A second resemblance between Goya's two portraits and MacMillan's choreographic version of the *maja* is in the use of the eyes. In the paintings, the eyes of the sitter play a crucial role in the composition of the painting, for the woman looks directly at the viewer, with a flirtatious glance. MacMillan copies the dramatic function of the eyes, but changes its tenor and expands it. The presence of the Husband onstage allows for an exchange of glances between man and woman that is not seductive, but bitter. These are emphasized by accompanying head movements and sideways balances by the Husband. The dramatic expressivity of the sequence, which was particularly intense and revealing in the performance of the two original dancers, Heaton and Doyle, thus incorporates and develops further a strategy that Goya explicitly exploited in his *majas*. This coincidence suggests again that it is plausible that when he was creating *The Invitation*, MacMillan studied in detail the production of the Spanish painter.

### **Quasi-tableaux vivants**

Beyond these instances of probable direct inspiration by Goya, *The Invitation* also includes one choreographic technique that is not connected to any pictorial source in particular but is closely related to a characteristic trait of paintings: their static two-dimensionality. The incorporation of quasi-tableaux vivants (slow-paced, almost static living pictures) into the choreography of a

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\* MacMillan must have been particularly attracted by the dramatic possibilities of the underarms, for he would put them on view again in *Manon* (1974) as a device to depict Manon's immodest behavior in the brothel.

ballet, is a device that MacMillan later used frequently in his work, and the early examples from this ballet reinforce the argument that the visual arts were much more than providers of stories, characters, and some particular visual referents for his choreography. More broadly, and in connection with his visual imagination, they led him to dramatic strategies akin to their image-based impact.

In a *tableau vivant*, the kinetic aspect of dance is momentarily brought to a halt: the temporary absence of movement stresses the visual composition formed by the spatial arrangement of the bodies onstage, allowing the audience to contemplate the frozen action as if it was a painting.\* MacMillan rarely crafted such an obvious dramatic *tableau* as Anthony Tudor in

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\* The “living picture” is a form of representation with a long tradition in drama and performance. It was popular in medieval and early modern Europe as a form to represent acts from the Gospels or Greek mythology. In the eighteenth century it progressed to portray famous literary or historic passages and became popular as a stand-alone entertainment in European private theaters and salons. From the early nineteenth century, living pictures appeared in regular theaters as representations of passions and moral positions or dilemmas with accompanying music. At that time, dramatic *tableaux* also became a feature of act endings in melodramas as a means of freezing a frame of emotions and attitudes, giving added weight to the dramatic crisis or climax. See *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance online*, s.v. “Tableaux vivants,” by Ann Featherstone, accessed February, 24, 2020, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198601746.001.0001/acref-9780198601746-e-3837?rsk=9DCBme>.

*Jardin aux Lilas* (1936),\* but did frequently compose slow-paced sequences or almost static images, with no dance steps and minimal motion. These fleeting images, *quasi-tableaux vivants*, were highly expressive and expanded the dramatic potential of MacMillan's choreographic style†—by reducing significantly the pace onstage, sometimes to the point of almost freezing the action, the arrested, or slowed-down, motion invested the pictorial image emerging from the stage with powerful dramatic force, while the aural signs in the music contributed to the meaning suggested by the motionless bodies.

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\* Antony Tudor's *Jardin aux Lilas* (1936) contains a very well-known instance of a dramatic *tableau vivant* successfully integrated into the choreography and dramatic action of a ballet. It frames the heroine of the story, an unhappy Caroline in the arms of her Fiancé (whom she does not want to marry), surrounded by their friends and observed by their respective lovers. The stillness is maintained for a few seconds, and then only Caroline moves, her dancing expressing her distress. See Judy Kinberg and Thomas Grimm, *Dance Makers. Antony Tudor* (London: Danmarks Radio and WNET Thirteen, 1990), TV program, which includes *Jardin aux Lilas* performed by American Ballet Theatre.

† Photographer Leslie E. Spatt highlights that MacMillan's choreography is full of brief poses that last fractions of seconds, any of which she considers could serve to take a good picture of the ballet—"unlike Ashton, for example, where there was almost always only one definitive moment where a movement could be photographed." MacMillan's *quasi-tableaux vivants* last longer than the brief poses Spatt comments on, and are invested with heavier dramatic expressivity. See Leslie E. Spatt, "Photographing MacMillan," in *Revealing MacMillan* [souvenir booklet of Royal Academy of Dance conference of the same title] (London: Royal Academy of Dance, 2002), 42.

The most impactful *quasi-tableau vivant* in *The Invitation* is perhaps the one just after the climax of the ballet—the moment of the rape, when the two bodies lie still giving the audience time to absorb the impact of the brutal act just presented. The two characters are stage center, the Girl lying down on her back, the Husband at some distance from her, is kneeling with his head down, facing the audience, not the Girl. The pictorial composition is sustained for a while until the Husband, after a guilty glimpse at the Girl, leaves the scene. The ascending notes of the harp, after the initial distressing silence, introduce then the slow awakening of the Girl. This unhurried transition links the crime with the ensuing depiction of its physical and psychological sequels.

Another significant example is in the last number of the ballet, when the four central characters meet for the last time. In their final, brief confrontation, the spatial composition of the scene, together with the slowing down of the movement tempo, and with the return of some musical motives that recall earlier events, achieves a pictorial and aural recapitulation of the story. The Girl is downstage right, the Boy, upstage left, and in between them, are the married couple. Linked by the arms, stiff, and without looking at each other, they seem to pose, as if a picture is going to be taken.\* They keep the pose for a few seconds before they slowly walk downstage, then upstage, and finally exit. The two cousins observe this deliberate exhibition of calm in appalled stillness, for the actions of the married couple have destroyed the tentative and incipient relationship the cousins had at the beginning of the ballet. The stage composition

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\* In fact, this pose is the signature step of the married couple in the ballet, frequently used to suggest a stiff marriage of convenience. For further details about the function of this step and its evolving, richer content as the ballet progresses, see de Lucas, “Narrative Aspects,” 146–49 and 170–75.

suggests this disruption by locating the couple in the middle of the stage and the cousins far apart, one at the left, and the other at the right on the stage. The music reinforces the visual image by recapitulating the story with several leitmotifs from earlier events or situations in the ballet, such as the sweet melody to which the two cousins lively, tenderly, and innocently danced together in the garden at the beginning of the ballet (dance number 5). As this melody enters, the disruption that the married couple has produced to that youthful promise visually emerges from the stage picture.

In the plot of the ballet, this scene is very important as it brings the story of the interconnected relationships among the four central characters to an end, connecting the ending to its beginning, when the four met in a similar four-set situation. The correlation between the two meetings is particularly emphasized by the dance cues in Seiber's manuscript scores (both the piano reduction and the full orchestra), which identify the two encounters with the same expression: "the 4 confronted."<sup>55</sup> The scenario also uses the verb "to confront" to describe the closing reunion ("the 4 confronted with each other"). The two "confrontations" are thus narratively linked, with the second one closing the narrative circle opened by the first one.

To stress the narrative significance of the two meetings MacMillan conceives the two dance numbers similarly; in both cases, there is a quasi-*tableaux vivant*. In the first meeting (in dance number 4), the dancers perform unhurried, greeting gestures stressed by a musical passage with an air of suspense. In the second confrontation (in dance number 16), there is an aurally recollecting and motionless passage, the effect of which is extended by the measured walk into which it merges.

This configuration however, was not MacMillan's first idea for the last scene. The documentation of its genesis reveals that he considered choreographing a *pas de quatre* at first.



The quartet persisted until the last stages of the creative process (the second version of the scenario still maintains it), although it seems that MacMillan was never happy with it. There are many handwritten notes redrafting and reworking this closing number. The final format, with the quasi-*tableau* followed by the slow-paced walking, removes most of the kinetic component of the original idea, reinforcing the dramatic power of the visual and musical elements of the scene. As a result, the dramatic expressivity is achieved with more economy of means. MacMillan probably drew inspiration from Tudor's *Jardin*, which has a similar marital pose and a similar (yet shorter) exiting walk for Caroline and her Fiancé at the end of the ballet.\*

In spite of the long process of pondering and reworking that MacMillan needed to craft this instance of a recapitulative *tableau*,<sup>†</sup> the strategy settled in well in his repertory. In his later

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\* MacMillan had several opportunities to view *Jardin aux Lilas* before he created *The Invitation* in 1960. Ballet Theatre (later renamed American Ballet Theatre) danced it at the Royal Opera House in 1946, when MacMillan was already a member of the Sadler's Wells Opera Ballet, the junior company of the Sadler's Wells Ballet. In July and August 1946, the company had been on tour but was back in London in late August to perform in the open-air theater in Finsbury Park. When it rained the performance was abandoned, so the dancers were able to catch the Ballet Theatre season. MacMillan's frequent travels to America in the 1950s provided him with additional opportunities to become familiar with the ballet. For further details, see Jann Parry, *Different Drummer: The Life of Kenneth MacMillan* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

<sup>†</sup> Given the plot relevance and visual emphasis of "the 4 confronted" scenes, the alterations introduced by the Royal Ballet in the last two revivals of the ballet (in 1996 and 2016) are disconcerting. The 1996 production, staged by Gary Harris with the assistance of Lynn Seymour and Anya Linden, removed the presence of the Boy in the scene and considerably reduced the

narrative ballets, MacMillan often paused motion to stress key events in the plot—for example, in *Romeo and Juliet* when Juliet lies still in her bed pondering her options of what to do with the bottle of Friar Lawrence’s potion in her hands, or in *The Judas Tree* (1992), MacMillan’s last ballet, which finishes with a pictorial recapitulation of the story not very different, in purpose, to the last confrontation of characters in *The Invitation*.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, it seems that the importance of the visual underpinnings of MacMillan’s artistic methods, as well as the relevance of the audio-visual and visual sources that he used for inspiration, are far from being incidental or secondary. His kinaesthetic and visual senses were actually deeply intertwined, with the visual component frequently playing a leading role in his creativity. In *The Invitation*, Torre-Nilsson’s film *The House of the Angel* launched the creative process, decisively inspiring the visual look of the ballet, the configuration of its main plotline, the conception of the Husband, and the dramatic power of its most important scenes. Autant-Lara’s *Le blé en herbe* played a less fundamental role, yet it featured a performance that might have inspired the casting and characterization of the Wife, while the spatial arrangement, kinetic direction, and body postures in some paintings by Goya suggest that MacMillan possibly had them in mind when he was creating the choreography. The traces that these pictorial and cinematic sources have left in this ballet are perceptible instances of MacMillan’s working method from image to dance highlighted by some of his collaborators. Interestingly, the transferal from the moving images, paintings, and cinematic techniques to the dance stage

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length of the married couple’s walk. The 2016 revival, again staged by Harris from the Benesh score (1960) and from a company recording of the 1996 production, kept both changes. As a result, the recapitulative purpose and dramatic impact of the scene has substantially diminished.

involved not only the spatial, visual, and kinetic elements of dance, but also its aural components. In building dance equivalents to film shots and practices, MacMillan assigned dramatic expressivity to all the dance components, which he conceived as a whole. As a result, the pictorial or filmic base of his choreography is not only evident in the visual imagery of the choreography or in the techniques imported from the visual arts, but also hidden in other elements of the ballet, such as the score, the plot, and the conception and interpretation of the characters.

MacMillan's quasi-*tableaux vivants*, of which this ballet contains some seminal examples, share some of those features. They possess a strong visual drive, as the absence, or considerable reduction, of the motion privileges the dramatic effect of the stage composition, and the music has a prominent role in shaping their semantic connotations. In this ballet, the most compelling quasi-*tableaux vivants* enact key events in the plot (the aftermath of the rape and the "4-confronted" meetings) thus becoming powerful tools for dramatic expressivity.

The illustrative examples of quasi-*tableaux vivants* and of dance analysis presented here additionally demonstrate that the detailed study of MacMillan's visual and audio-visual sources,<sup>\*</sup> made in conjunction with a close analysis of his dance sequences, can expose important aspects of his craftsmanship. Future research on other ballets of his repertory and of the sources (of all types) that inspired them will surely lead to new insights into his creative process, potentially resulting in unexpected findings, such as the paintings by Goya that may lie behind specific moments in *The Invitation*.

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\* I have intentionally focused here on the sources for *The Invitation* that relate to the visual arts. For more information about the two literary sources, see de Lucas, "Narrative Aspects," 70–75 and 154–67.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Jann Parry, *Different Drummer: The Life of Kenneth MacMillan* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 21 and 100–101; and Lynn Seymour and Paul Gardner, *Lynn: The Autobiography of Lynn Seymour* (London: Granada, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Susie Crow, "Kenneth MacMillan 1945–1955—Emergence of a Choreographer" (master's thesis, University of Surrey, 1987), 92–94.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Solomons, in Parry, *Different Drummer*, 101.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Seymour and Gardner, *Lynn*, 134

<sup>6</sup> Marcia Haydée, quoted in Parry, *Different Drummer*, 462.

<sup>7</sup> Clive Barnes, Noël Goodwin, and Peter Williams, "Danses Concertantes," *Dance and Dancers* (May 1959): 11.

<sup>8</sup> Crow, "Kenneth MacMillan 1945–1955," 121.

<sup>9</sup> Natalie When, "Kenneth MacMillan and Music" (guest lecture, University of Oxford, Oxford, March 16, 2019).

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- <sup>10</sup> Kenneth MacMillan, interviewed by Crow, in Crow, “Kenneth MacMillan 1945–1955,” 92.
- <sup>11</sup> Parry, *Different Drummer*, 100, 404, 526 and 661.
- <sup>12</sup> Kenneth MacMillan, quoted in Sarah Woodcock, “MacMillan and Design,” *Dancing Times* 93, no. 1108 (December 2002): 19.
- <sup>13</sup> Sarah Woodcock, “MacMillan and Design,” *Dancing Times* 93, no. 1108 (December 2002): 25.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>15</sup> Clive Barnes, “Dances Concertantes,” *Dance and Dancers* (March 1955): 15; and Clive Barnes, Goodwin, and Williams, “Dances Concertantes,” 10–13 and 26.
- <sup>16</sup> Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me: A Memoir, 1898–1956* (1957; repr., Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1992) 58-60, 72.
- <sup>17</sup> Helena Hammond, “Ninette de Valois, the Bloomsbury Group, and the Role of Visual Culture in the Formation of the Early Royal Ballet,” in *Ninette de Valois, Adventurous Traditionalist*, ed. Richard Cave and Libby Worth, 183–92 (Alton, UK: Dance Books, 2012).
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 184 and 192.
- <sup>19</sup> Katherine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions* (London: Hamish Hamilton: 1987), 64.
- <sup>20</sup> Parry, *Different Drummer*, 166–67.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>22</sup> Clement Crisp, “Romeo, Juliet and Kenneth MacMillan,” *Dancing Times* 55, no. 653 (February 1965): 234.
- <sup>23</sup> Kenneth MacMillan, quoted in Robert Penman, “Doing It His Way,” *Dance Research Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 11.

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<sup>24</sup> Parry, *Different Drummer*, 462.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sara Woodcock, “MacMillan and Design,” in *Revealing MacMillan: Conference Papers*, ed. Royal Academy of Dance, 102–9 (London: Royal Academy of Dance, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Evgenia Georgiadis, *Nicholas Georgiadis: Paintings, Stage Designs (1995–2001)* (Athens: Olkos, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, “Trans-Formal Translation: Plays into Ballets, with Special Reference to Kenneth MacMillan’s ‘Romeo and Juliet,’” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36, no. 1 (2006): 65–78; Brandon Shaw, “Effacing Rebellion and Righting the Slanted: Declassifying the Archive of MacMillan’s (1965) and Shakespeare’s (1597) *Romeo and Juliets*,” *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 2 (2017): 63–78; Lynsey McCulloch, “‘Hildings and Harlots’: Kenneth MacMillan’s *Romeo and Juliet*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, ed. Lynsey McCulloch and Brandon Shaw, 343–58 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Mátyás Seiber, “The Invitation: Music Score, Piano Score,” 1960, vol. XLVII, MUS/ADD/62830, Seiber Collection, Music Collection, British Library, London.

<sup>30</sup> Beatriz Guido, *La casa del ángel* (1954; repr., Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2008); Colette, *Le blé en herbe* (The Ripening Seed) (1923; repr., London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Seymour, interviewed in *Out of Line: A Portrait of Sir Kenneth MacMillan*, directed and produced by Derek Baily (London: Landseer for the BBC, 1990), TV documentary.

<sup>32</sup> Parry, *Different Drummer*, 224.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>34</sup> See Cristina de Lucas, “Kenneth MacMillan and the Subject Matter of Ballet,” *Dance Chronicle* 42, no. 2 (2019), 176-77.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-88.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>37</sup> André Bazin, *¿Qué es el cine?* [What is Cinema?], trans. [into Spanish] José Luis López Muñoz (1966; repr., Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1990; translated), 96–97.

<sup>38</sup> *A Dictionary of Film Studies Online*, s.v. “*Nouvelle Vague* (French New Wave),” by Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell, accessed February, 24, 2020, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0497?rskey=Q6xr0l>.

<sup>39</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Colette* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 355.

<sup>40</sup> Ricardo García Oliveri, “La casa del ángel,” in *Diccionario del cine iberoamericano. España, Portugal y América—Volumen 9*, ed. Emilio Casares Rodicio, 294–95 (Madrid: SGAE/Fundación Autor, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 295. All translations from Spanish are the author’s.

<sup>43</sup> John Gillett, quoted in García Oliveri, “La casa del ángel,” 295.

<sup>44</sup> Ricardo García Oliveri, “Eduardo Torre-Nilsson,” in *Diccionario del cine iberoamericano. España, Portugal y América—Volumen 8*, ed. Emilio Casares Rodicio, 366–71 (Madrid: SGAE/Fundación Autor, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> de Lucas, “Kenneth MacMillan,” 170-96.

<sup>46</sup> García Oliveri, “Eduardo Torre- Nilsson,” 368.

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<sup>47</sup> Clive Barnes, Noël Goodwin, and Peter Williams, “The Invitation,” *Dance and Dancers* (February 1961): 34.

<sup>48</sup> García Oliveri, “Eduardo Torre- Nilsson,” 368.

<sup>49</sup> Barnes, Goodwin, and Williams, “The Invitation,” 12.

<sup>50</sup> García Oliveri, “Eduardo Torre- Nilsson,” 369.

<sup>51</sup> Seiber, “The Invitation: Piano Score,” no page numbers are available.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Hughes, *Goya*, trans. [into Spanish] Caspar Hodgkinson and Victoria Malet (Madrid: Galaxia Gutemberg, 2004), 104.

<sup>53</sup> Valeriano Bozal, *Goya* (Madrid: Machado Libros, 2010), 21.

<sup>54</sup> Lynn Seymour, quoted in Anthony Crickmay, *Lynn Seymour: A Photographic Study* (London: Studio Vista, 1980), 71.

<sup>55</sup> Seiber, “The Invitation: Piano Score;” and Mátyás Seiber, “The Invitation: Music Score, Full Orchestra Score,” 1960, vol. XLVI, MUS/ADD/62829, Seiber Collection, Music Collection, British Library, London.

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