Symphony in B

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

Following Balanchine by Robert Garis

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Following Balanchine is a work of great distinction, although it is very hard to read. Truly valuable and precise books about art are rare enough, but much rarer is a satisfying book about the exact character and importance of serious criticism. This short and aptly illustrated study is both. It is also a species of autobiography, a personal memoir, a private revelation, a kind of confession, ostensibly because Robert Garis believes that true criticism is born of personal feeling, and you can't describe the one without the other. But besides that, he is profoundly interested in himself. Writers have created masterpieces out of such an interest, but you need a lot of tact to make it work, and this writer's ability to make us share his self-absorption is variable. He is very good at searching his own feelings and memory to illustrate small critical moments and large critical perceptions, but he is less good at presenting himself apart from these, when he often seems to indulge in that insufferable habit, oblique boasting in the guise of ruthless honesty. We especially don't need this when it's beside the excellent point that he uses himself to make.

With detailed intensity, Garis describes the way in which he followed the work of George Balanchine since first encountering *Apollo* in 1945, when he was about 19, until the choreographer's death in 1983. Notably Garis has not wished to use anything like the same detail or intensity to track Balanchine back into history for our sakes: this is not a biography, even an artistic biography. Nor does Garis bring such passionate attention to considering critically the independent life of Balanchine's great works, to imagining them in other contexts beyond his own direct personal judgment engendered from his own experience. Instead he uses his immense powers of concentration to track his own perceptions into the past, into earliest childhood before he knew anything about ballet, to elucidate for us the process and materials out of which a dedicated critic was made, and then to show how he eventually came to flourish on the inspiring nourishment a particular great artist provided. It is, and it was meant to be, an exemplary tale.

Garis traces Balanchine's development through forty years by telling the story of how his own critic's heart and mind were confirmed and reconfirmed in their calling by Balanchine's genius. To do this, Garis makes a sustained critical demonstration out of the whole text, at the same time describing how it was possible to do it and how it was done. The somewhat mesmerizing result actually requires not reading but study. It is almost immediately clear that this author is not only a dedicated critic, he is also a devoted teacher—and that he would perhaps even prefer, like Miss Jean Brodie, to be a leader.

He makes the case for following him very compelling; and yet he also shows that it's impossible—he will always be way ahead. We can't be him, with his daily, weekly, yearly attendance at the ballet that kept him in such close touch with the most delicate workings of Balanchine's imagination, whether technical and practical or emotive and allusive. But that's not how he really means us to follow him. His tale is exemplary with respect to how performing art should be experienced and judged, not how often it should be attended, although these things are obviously related.

Performance is indeed the point in this book; and in this form of art criticism. Garis's attachment to art began with music and novels, went on to opera, theater and movies, only finally reaching ballet in the work of Balanchine, and finding other dance performances because of him. It is significant that Garis has remained the serious exponent only of the temporal arts, where all works have a beginning, a trajectory and an end, perhaps enclosed within an overture and a coda or an introduction and an epilogue, the opening credits and The End. Since they can only be followed in sequence from left to right or from first to last, such works must be undertaken and apprehended as journeys, no matter in what fragmentary circumstances they were actually composed. They represent the movement of life through time, as a quest with a duration, phrasing and an outcome unknown at the start. They suggest that some lives are suites of dances, some are one long, slow struggle, others are short, bitter farces. And the separate sections of such works have the same temporal cast, just like the separate parts of lives and journeys—there may be different companions, different speeds and rhythms in each, unforeseeable resolutions and changes of key, but no escape from the sequential mode. Art and life are shown to have a common onward pull. Perception and criticism require the intimate apprehension of a *process*.

A work of literature can only sit there in print, ready to be ingested piecemeal or at random, and it thus permits some detachment on the part of the reader, a choice about how to take it in. Operas are recorded and listened to in fragments in irrelevant contexts and bits of films may be excised and enjoyed in videotic privacy, though it's of course understood that the real work of art is the whole trip, *Parsifal* from start to finish, *Our Mutual Friend* from beginning to end, the uncut whole of *Les Enfants du Paradis*, all three parts of Dante's *Commedia*. But with any of these, the point now is that there are mass-produced copies, and with operas, different performances in mass-produced copies (if the music is all you want). Lovers of all such works have easy private access to all of them or to parts of them at will, with control of how to permit their effects to work.

So far, dance is not really the same (except for movie-dancė, made on screen terms). You have to be there, to see it all and follow it through, to share in its precarious immediacy and feel the intense physical identification that it demands from its watchers. In performance, theater and opera naturally have the same immediacy as dance; but operas and plays always have their texts, just as chamber music does. Whatever the violinist, the actor and the singer may do, they produce only a version. The original is safe inside its words and its score, forever potential as a vehicle for performers, but perfect only on the page. Dance is wordless and scoreless. Traditionally it has been taught from dancer to dancer, from choreographer to dancer, from body to body, because although notation systems exist, they are always insufficient. Dance is too much like play, or like ritual, or like life. In the work of a great choreographer such as Balanchine, all of what Garis repeatedly calls the "inflections"—

the most delicate tonal effects the artist's decisions produce—depend entirely on the soul and body of the individual dancer at the moment of execution. There is nothing else. The moment of a critic's perception must be equally immediate, and the memory a direct echo of that instant.

Thus, although he made excellent ballets for the Diaghilev dancers and the Ballet Russe dancers, Balanchine's greatness was ultimately confirmed for the world only through his hands-on creative thought and work with his own forever developing group of dancers, who were perpetually being trained and chosen and cast by him in the repertory he built for the New York City Ballet, using as a source the School of American Ballet, which was also tailored for his use. Some of this repertory included works that he had made years before, like *Apollo* itself, all of which he recreated for the new dancers in the new ballet universe he was inventing. But all of his finished ballets were also transmuted whenever he used a different cast, especially different principal dancers, who set the tone and bring the whole work into focus. The crucial flavor and texture would shift slightly, aspects of the music would emerge as having a different emotive character. During his long career at the New York City Ballet, Garis tells us, Balanchine was present at every performance of every one of his ballets until the end of his life—always working, never losing contact with it and with them, his eye on the life of his art each and every time, the whole time.

That's the standard: he had to be there, and so do we. And so did Garis, following every step of the dance, every change of the cast. He wants to make clear that the work of acute personal action that goes into the creation of a performing art must be echoed by the work of acute personal receptivity in the viewer: distance and calculation are not indicated. Good critical judgment can only be filtered through "exhilaration," a vibrant recognition of the artist's thought in progress (which includes the dancer's performance, or the singer's), an apprehension of what Garis calls the work's "identity," which illuminates the consciousness of the viewer as the piece unfolds on a given occasion. "Appreciation"—that is, knowing that the work is supposed to be good or bad, and accordingly standing back to try to approve or disapprove of it—is essentially at odds with this transfigured condition, which is required for perceiving the shades of a work's real excellence and the exact flavor of its deficits. Before you can really know it, it must enter and inhabit you. Only then can your appreciative skills be put to any good use, or make any real sense.

Garis tells how, very early in life, he learned to recognize such transforming moments in himself and allow them to occur, and to distinguish them from mere progress in the sterile quest for approval and self-approval that by itself leads only to joyless expertise. He reports with precise candor his adolescent progress in seizing on music and literature with the ferocity of a contender (he was no good at sports), eager to win, wanting to like what was known to be good and for all the right reasons, checking himself out against prevailing opinion, following out its prejudices in the teeth of direct evidence until he learned better, always fighting for his views. Later we find him pursuing a standard path through recorded Glyndebourne productions of Mozart, rejecting certain performances for snobbish reasons without even listening to them, respecting others without exactly feeling the reasons why he should.

By 19, the young Garis was inwardly prepared. He was hearing a live performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Metropolitan when Licia Albanese sang "*Deh vieni, non tardar*," and he experienced his first artistic epiphany in the born-again mode. He fell in love with that music at that moment, accepting it totally without reservation, preparation or rationalization. At last he could recognize this true ravishment as quite different from all the musical knowledge and operatic sophistication he had been pursuing:

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GEORGE BALANCHINE AND VIOLETTE VERDY, 1961

> My surprised reaction to Albanese's *Deh vieni* still seems to me the sine qua non, the experience without which I would never have become more than officially and generally involved in music instead of personally involved, and the same kind of thing was soon to happen with Balanchine. Before seeing any of his ballets I was ready to approve and like his work. I was even ready to fight for it, since I had conceived of him from my reading as a great artist whom it took unusually fine and bold and unconventional taste to admire. And yet my first experience with Balanchine was as powerful as my first experience of *Figaro* and as surprising. I had anticipated approving and loving *Apollo*, but I had not expected to be helplessly overcome by it to the point of shedding tears at the apotheosis....

Critical ambition and authentic pleasure could finally combine, and yield eventual self-knowledge and a satisfying life, not just a successful career. This sort of candid self-appraisal is good to read, along with the other confessions throughout of failure of nerve or will or joy along the critical path. Garis shows the training of artistic judgment to be vulnerable to weakness of spirit and character, not just to aesthetic misperceptions. False steps in perception can never cease to come from instances of pride or vanity, which forever threaten to cloud the judgment and to produce the need for new conversions. Under it all is the desire to be a true judge, to seek the truth of art directly. By

this means, it is implied, even character might improve.

Garis goes on to unfold his critical journey through Balanchine's career as if it were the core of his own life, relating all personal encounters and relations and professional experiences to this unswerving passion and detailed preoccupation. To keep his responsive balance, he refrained from trying to know the dancers or the choreographer personally, or from taking any ballet training himself. He is proud of not knowing the technical terminology. Such ignorance seems to ensure that he keep his eye and heart fresh for the direct perception of Balanchine's work, untainted by the poisonous enjoyment of inside dope.

During all this time, Garis became a distinguished critic and professor of literature, and eventually wrote and taught about theater and movies as well as ballet. But the autobiographical material about all this is here presented as if it fell into line behind Garis's practice of active critical love upon Balanchine's art. The flavor of this practice as he describes it is indeed musical, functioning as a sort of pedal-point, or an underlying private song unfolding its delicious unpredictable phrases to accompany or even to direct the progress of living, with all other critical and practical or emotional work undertaken on the model of this intimate, constant and satisfactory effort.

Notably, Garis had no earlier experience with ballet at all. He discovered Balanchine and ballet at the same time, and he is not the only literary critic to do so, nor the only music-lover. I think of Richard Poirier and Irving Howe, who got interested in the art of ballet through the exfoliated modern version single-handedly created by Balanchine, the version that for the first time patently aspired to the condition of music. On Balanchine's stage the bodies of ballet dancers came to be liberated from the chains of spectacle and pantomime, while the course of their stage behavior through any work was no longer weighted by the demands of an externally applied plot. The dancers could manifestly enact pure human situations through a ballet vocabulary that was newly honed, deepened and expanded expressly for the purpose, and composed into works of unadulterated artistic exploration, like poems. And there lay the secret.

Balanchine knew how to transform traditional ballet into modern ballet without dreaming of abolishing its basic formal character, in the manner of those revolutionaries who wished to escape ballet's strictures by throwing ballet out entirely and reinventing dance, thus assuming the risk of looking quite ridiculous. I believe Balanchine's works were so deeply satisfactory to modern literary people because they were clearly created in a supple and seasoned traditional language. He was making new and cogent and believable use of old rules that had already been repeatedly modified, refined and strengthened, tempered by fire and time like those of the French or the English in the making of their forever-modernizing literatures. Musical language had had a similar trajectory of perpetual reform by inspired innovators. Ballet could be modernized by Balanchine because he understood how to take advantage of its evolving matrix, to perceive ballet as infinitely elastic rather than rigidly confining.

He didn't need to throw anything out, only move on with a reformed purpose and new ideas, as the famous ballet-masters of the past—Noverre, Bournonville, Perrot, Ivanov, Petipa, Fokine—had always done. Certain kinds of scenery and costumes had to go, so as to leave the character of the reconceived dance more clearly intelligible, and to emphasize the distinct body and talent of each dancer. This time, in the formally integrative modern period, Balanchine could move on to bring ballet into a newly ambitious relation to music, where each could illuminate the other's character and neither detract from the other's power. Representational and narrative effects, what Whistler called "clap-trap," were strictly subordinated to formal considerations. The formal stakes were thus sharply raised, since the form itself became responsible for conveying the drama. Balanchine would say to each dancer, "Don't act! Just dance the part!" The dance and the individual body would do it all.

Garis deals wonderfully with the long relationship of Balanchine and Stravinsky, two Imperial Russians-turned-Americans-via-Paris, twenty years apart in age. Both were youthful stars of the Diaghilev enterprise, at opposite ends of its astounding course during the early years of this century, with some overlap in the '20s. Later the two collaborated in America—producing, among other works, *Card Game, Orpheus* and *Agon*, with various reworkings of *Firebird, Le Baiser de la Fée* and *Apollo*—and Balanchine set several Stravinsky works not meant for dance. Garis shows how Balanchine had to deal with Stravinsky's idea of what a musical ballet scenario should be, and he thinks that Balanchine could not always fully express himself through it. The occasional dulled-down result, under Garis's intense gaze, could seem like Balanchine trashing his own ideas, when he found himself dissatisfied with what he had first done (as in the case of a reworked *Orpheus*) and wished visibly to destroy it rather than be seen to have allowed his choreography to succumb to Stravinsky's plan for it.

Garis thinks that Balanchine came to feel his own choreographic imagination to be at odds with the composer's idea of ballet music—and this composer was a past master fully confident that a choreographer's purpose was to produce a dance version of the composer's score, not to make an independent work of choreographic art that might open the music beyond itself. Stravinsky, despite his relentless modernity, had been brought up knowing the Imperial Ballet tradition, where there was no choreographer by that name, only a ballet-master who by definition arranged stage dances to fit stage music, as courtiers had once danced formal dances to court music.

Balanchine had been a full-course student at the Imperial School of Music in St. Petersburg after finishing his ballet training, and his father and brother were musicians. He understood music perfectly, but his genius was for choreography, with no thought that it was the servant of the composer. He had choreographed to Bach and Mozart as well as Bizet and Tchaikovsky, using works that had never been intended for the stage. Stravinsky was offering his highest praise when he said about his *Agon* score that "George will compose a matching choreographic construction. He is a master at this." He obviously felt, Garis believes, that the music was "a sort of assignment for the choreographer." But Balanchine eventually converted him. Later on Stravinsky was to say that Balanchine's art "explored" his music, as it clearly did that of so many other composers.

To a lover of Balanchine who arrived there by an entirely different route, Garis's account has an alien cast. He refers to himself as "interested in the arts" from the age of 10 or 11, but it was an interest founded on the power of music, never straying far from that deep stream into which can be troped the whole enterprise of film, novels and poetry, with ballet and opera linked to them all by the musical skein, the phenomenon of the structure developing through time. Absent from all of this is any pictorial art, the art that bursts on the eye all at once—except one irritating remark about having always preferred Géricault to Delacroix, with no further comment, a vain utterance that he ought

to have resisted. Of himself Garis reports no moments under the spell of an apparition that proposes an alternative universe, or in front of an image in which all movement is entirely illusory, built into the charged dynamics of the motionless picture, or where the artist's thought must be perceived in layers, in the tension between alternatively or equally vivid figure and ground.

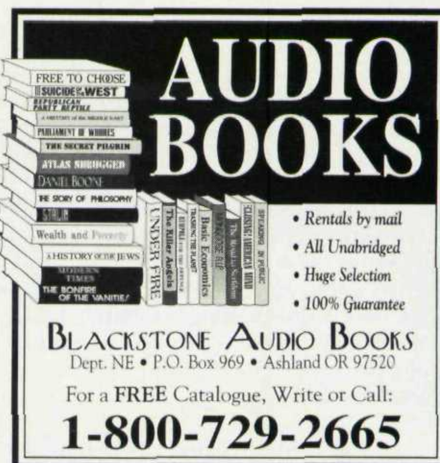
Garis distinguishes minutely and specifically among the qualities of dancers' performances and among the bodily styles of different dancers, precisely perceiving and delighting in Balanchine's relation to each one's "dance identity"; but he seems to have no comprehensive perception of the effect created by clothing each time any of them appears—no sense of the immediate visible apparition, with its unique combination of layered meaning and feeling, only of the perpetual process by which each identity is confirmed. He does not say nothing about costume; but nobody could miss the effects that he singles out. I was hoping for an exact elucidation of those sartorial choices that made the Balanchine ballets and their performers look exactly that way, and created those radically reconceived stage figures. The photo on page 229 shows Jacques d'Amboise in *Who Cares?*, but Garis hasn't mentioned the necktie around his waist in imitation of Astaire, who always wore ties for belts when he practiced. By contrast, he compares the décor and the costumes for *La Valse* contemptuously to "a Bonwit Teller window," and says that the ballet eventually "transcended this chic mode," showing that he has no more eye for window display than for painting, and hence not much for stage dress and setting.

I was raised on the ballet, and I was its born-again infant. Expertise came later. I saw the Fokine masterpieces and the early Balanchine masterpieces, along with Massine masterpieces and Petipa masterpieces, plus *Giselle*; I saw Danilova and Baronova, Toumanova and Riabouchinska, Lifar and Lichine, all beginning in 1934, when the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo had already been coming to Cleveland every year for some time, and my mother rightly decided that at 4 I was old enough to go. I was also old enough to accept it into my soul. Later there was the Ballet Theater with Markova and Dolin, Nora Kaye and Alicia Alonso, Eglevsky and Youskevitch, other ventures such as the Littlefield Ballet, Mia Slavenska and her ballet troupe, and finally the New York City Ballet. When I was in college in New York, I was also able to get standing room down front for the first visit of The Sadler's Wells Company to New York, another transforming experience, standing a few feet from Margot Fonteyn, watching her solar plexus radiate energy like the sun.

My mother had studied the ballet in Cleveland and so did I, beginning as a child, with an Imperial School survivor called Sergei Nadejdin. We stared in the mirror, mastering the line with eye, will and muscle, forcing the path toward perfection while Mrs. Hershberg thumped out Tchaikovsky, suffering the occasional small thwack of the master's slim baton. At the end of each class we practiced our *révérence*, for serene graciousness, and *port de bras*. In fact we were too fat, it would never really work. But how the soul and body sang with the effort! We studied the souvenir programs, full of pictures, and soon I was off to the library to immerse myself in the history of ballet, and brood further over all the ballets and dancers I would never see, the prints of Taglioni and Elssler, the photos of Kschessinska and Preobrajenska, Nijinsky and Bolm, Lopokova, Pavlova and Karsavina, whose memoir, *Theatre Street*, I read many times, along with Nijinsky's excruciating book about himself.

Central to me for these experiences was the figural vision, the dancer's body performing its exalted movements in its characteristic shoes, clothes and headgear, so erotic, so exact, so magical in its transcendent artifice—so like the characters in the great paintings I was busy staring at in books. Ballet costume was part of each dancer's dance and each dancer's soul; all three made the vision together, and the pictures from the past confirmed and augmented the beauty of present visions. You could see the source of the new in the old. The immense difference between the tutu that fell to the ankles, the tutu that flounced to the knee from a low hip-line, and the tutu that burst from the dancer's loins in a small, stiff spray were all crucial to the personal drama embodied in each dancer at the moment of appearance, not just to the role.

On stage each shape and flavor of skirt had its own relation to each toeshod foot, to the ensemble of head and arms, to the tight focus of the torso; and each sat on each dancer differently, even as she simply crossed the stage in a preparatory walk. Disciplined hair, always hiding the artless ears, gave prominence to the dancer's rapt face, to the arch of the individual neck, to the precision of its turn. A crown or garland might sit regally high, or tenderly frame the face. And the men! The endless



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leaping legs that went all the way up to the waist, offering glorious fore-and-aft landscapes sculpted in brilliant color or dazzling white, below noble torsos glittering with fervor or villainy, each different set of sleeves forming its own composition with the rippling legs and stately head. Suddenly *Schéhérézade* had everyone in oriental trousers even in toe-shoes, and even the men; and suddenly each captive princess in *Firebird* had a dozen long, swinging black braids—all potent evidence of earlier reforms now strengthening a comprehensive visual language.

Along came Balanchine's dancers wearing what everyone, including Garis, persists in calling "practice clothes." But a glance at Degas's works and other pictures, or into Karsavina's memoirs, shows that ballet practice was undertaken in tutus for generations, and custom has lately run to leg-warmers and a whole range of individual gear not prescribed by any common rule. The characters that burst brilliantly onto the Balanchine stage were *costumed*, in those black or white tights, black or white bodysuits, tunics, socks and t-shirts. The ensemble might suggest gymnastics, the carrying out of ritual exercise, and indeed does suggest not only ballet practice but modern-dance practice, just as the *Schéhérézade* costumes suggest the harem; but it also suggests the black-and-white formal garments of the symphony orchestra, as if these bodily instruments were now dressed to match them, to create a new sympathetic visual resonance with the musicians' own full-dress echo of Neoclassical simplicity. Both are clothes for performance.

It was soon clear that the range for this new costume theme is immense, like that for tailored suits: What were the decisions about when the black leotards should have tight leather belts, or each white tunic a little skirt? Why must the men with black legs always have white feet, and black-legged women never? In the abstract dances, the sweep of female leg remains unbroken to the toe's end, but all men are chopped off at the ankles, as never in classical dance. How was this arrived at? For the emotional ballets, how was it decided when to release the dancer's hair and ears, male and female,to produce yet another tonal variant in the vision and the motion? Why white legs here and black there? Why stiff skirts here and limp skirts there?

Garis has the answers to this sort of question only when the dancer, the music or the choreography is the subject. Still, the clothes affect him, even if he's not paying attention. He reacts strongly but obscurely to the difference between what he calls "ugly leotards" and "elegant white costumes." Garis gives the impression that all the variously austere and dramatic clothes for Balanchine's ballets were simply conjured by Balanchine himself, or even by the dancers themselves, and that hard-working designers and craftsmen, naturally dull-witted and ham-fisted, were responsible only for costumes that needed to be stripped down, changed or discarded. But dance costume is a refined theater art, and though all visual effects were subject to Balanchine's authority, dress was not his métier.

Whom did he engage to produce all these subtle variants? I do know one, from of old; and I was shocked to find no mention of the great Karinska in this book, another old Russian survivor who—unlike Chagall, Picasso, Dali and other painters who presumed to design ballet costumes with no knowledge whatsoever of cloth, cut and seam, let alone dance—was an exquisite craftswoman and interpreter as well a designer herself, with the highest standards of skill and materials, and unfailing balletic taste, both in the traditional and the modern vein. A lot of her work is still on the Balanchine stage. By the look of it, she understood him.

The history of ballet that informed Balanchine's own choreographic instincts was lacking to Garis when he began following Balanchine. He had to fill in the history later, but only in the light of Balanchine's new dispensation. Consequently, with some notable exceptions, the more spectacular and representational aspects of Balanchine's work often seem to Garis like efforts to please others more than himself, and to be less basically characteristic, even if exhilarating. Garis will allow Petipa's influence on the abstract sequences of dances Balanchine developed, but not Fokine's influence on *Serenade* and others. Fokine doesn't interest Garis, nor Massine, nor Nijinsky, and certainly not Isadora Duncan. He looks at the old-fashioned aspect of Balanchine with appreciative condescension, in something of the same spirit with which he views the English maintenance of the Romantic and Classic ballet traditions.

But I remember finding the English ballet a magnificent undertaking, in which many old works—*Silvia, La Bayadère, Cendrillon, Giselle* and indeed *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*—were offered with as pure a belief as they must originally have been, with none of the ignorance, laziness and failure of conviction that has led to carelessness and sketchiness or campiness among some latter-day companies that have attempted them, nor any decay of the best standards for visual spectacle. They made a legitimate reference to the courtly tradition behind the whole enterprise of ballet, preserving a continuity with ancient non-professional effects. Nothing was ever too fast, too crisp, or too obviously difficult; it was always perfect and simple, never sloppy or hasty, poignantly beautiful and suggestive.

Garis views all this rather disdainfully as exhibiting the limitations of "good taste"; and yet good taste is certainly what Balanchine himself never failed to have. Garis just likes it better when it's modern, and doesn't see its recurrent value as a universal clarifier of artistic aims. What does interest Garis is the evidence of Balanchine's experiences in Hollywood, and his serious artistic affinity with American popular culture, which Garis wishes to contrast with Robbins's allegedly shallow and crowd-pleasing musical-comedy spirit. All this suggests to me that Garis's own relation to popular culture is uneven and uneasy, that he envies both Balanchine's and Robbins's different kinds of ease with it.

Garis has only recently come to view the modern dance with any favor, more or less as a side effect of his devotion to Balanchine. He experienced no conversion, as some of us did, upon encountering Martha Graham. (Her sense of music was very spotty, and you could often imagine the dances better accompanied by nothing but a drum.) Garis evidently cannot love or even clearly see any dance that doesn't have a score he loves, and he admits it, not without pride. So he's not able to place Balanchine inside the modern-dance context either, and allow for any current lateral influences, along with possible past vertical ones he hasn't personally experienced and digested. Garis believes in the immediacy of dance criticism, which is based on the immediacy of dance itself. He thinks that getting all the allusions is fun but not essential for getting the point. But some points are made through references and echoes. He says confidently, about a ballet he can't exactly pin down the style of, "... in fact, not having a term for this style is the best way to experience it." Maybe.

Garis often hints that the great Balanchine works may not survive. With the death of the master, the ballets have lost their own living power, even their power to engage viewers as they once did. This is owed to the nature of the medium. We know how a painter or poet can make something held to a standard of

perfection which will survive him and his culture, even taking with it into the future the beloved who was the excuse, as Shakespeare often said and Rembrandt showed; but Balanchine worked with live human material inside an institution, itself a complex organism made of humanly fallible members and managers. So long as he had undisputed artistic authority over every aspect of his work, the ballets developed and changed as Balanchine re-envisioned them, or were discarded altogether, for a time or forever, if the right combination of dancers was wanting. Individuals who couldn't stand the tyranny of his artistic will had to leave. Since his death, however, it is the institution that survives. The ballets must simply stand by and patiently await their fate.

Under Peter Martins's direction, Garis writes, the spirit of democracy is invading the repertory, sowing artistic death. Indifferent or ill-suited dancers are cast in roles to the detriment of the pieces, to serve an ideal of institutional fairness. Two casts may dance a ballet alternatively, simply to give more performers a chance, instead of one perfect cast dancing the piece until another is developed to be perfect in another way, or more so. While Balanchine was using his beloved Suzanne Farrell in ballet after ballet, other dancers felt neglected and ground their teeth; but Garis follows Balanchine in these decisions, too, with sympathetic fidelity to the choreographer's artistic compulsion, out of which his love was made.

But now Balanchine is dead, and the whole world of art has undergone much travail. The great modern ideal of art for its own sake, for the divine uselessness which invites and enjoins artists to develop their bold strokes and subversive explorations and minute refinements only on art's own terms are once more subject to crude question. Not just Balanchine but Diaghilev, not just them but Baudelaire, not just him but Delacroix and a procession of others would turn in their graves at the pretty pass to which things have come. These days art seems largely believed to be a sort of spontaneously generated personal gesture on the part of an ordinary citizen, a gesture with a natural intrinsic value equal to that of those made by all other citizens, protected under the laws of political equality and attacked under the same laws, as if its imaginative projections were subject to rules only of civil behavior.

Garis has produced a manifesto and an elegy. The elegy is for the Balanchine Enterprise, as he calls it, the serious modern art offered, for a time, at the New York City Ballet in the process of its creation by a twentieth-century genius. The fruits of Garis's critical attention to the Enterprise, set forth in this book in loving detail, are his funerary offering. The Enterprise cannot survive as Balanchine made it, and the ballets live only in their modifications by future dancers and choreographers—sometimes as undead, in zombie-like versions. Of course they share this fate with every other modern corpus of dance works, along with *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* and *La Fille mal gardée*, now made so long ago that nobody is alive to mourn the originals. Film and videotape have lately arrived to help out the situation, but Garis is only cautiously grateful for these, possibly because of their limiting character: one time, one cast, with no possibility of a future dynamic for this closed-off and artificially viewed performance.

I imagine that for anybody who has been to the ballet and found it lovely but doesn't remember it very well, this book is not going to be very useful; Garis is writing first of all for present and future devotees. But his larger manifesto is really about the continuing importance of knowing exactly what makes an art great, just how its examples embody the artist's purpose, and what they can mean to you and me. Such knowledge, in the case of Balanchine, meant going to the ballet over and over again; but in considering the examples of any art, the good work of true understanding always has to be repetitive and ruminative and slow. And describing this effort over the span of a career is similarly repetitive and ruminative. The conscientious reader needs a good set of living memories so as to follow Garis the critic without flagging, or even without exploding. He is frequently tedious about himself and gives us more than we want for the purpose, and with more weight. Since we're captives on his train, we often resent it. But we forgive him. His message is rare in our day, and any day needs to hear it.

ANNE HOLLANDER is the author of *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (Knopf).

Heretic, Yes

BY DENNIS WRONG

Letters of Sidney Hook: Democracy, Communism, and the Cold War edited by Edward S. Shapiro

(M.E. Sharpe, 416 pp., $65)

Sidney Hook was the first academic intellectual to win wide recognition as a sympathetic interpreter of Marxism and a supporter, though never a member, of the American Communist Party. He also became, in the early 1930s, even before the beginning of the Moscow trials, just about the first to end his support and to become an outspoken critic of Soviet Communism for betraying what he had originally seen as its democratic and egalitarian promise. In this volume of Hook's letters, only the opening letter, the single one dated before 1930, reflects his youthful enthusiasm for Communism. Written to his parents, in the summer of 1929, from Moscow, where he was doing research on a Guggenheim fellowship at the Marx-Engels Institute, he declared that he "has seen no Potemkin villages" and that "every brick, every road, every machine is a symbol of the new spirit." Several letters on Marxism of a strictly theoretical nature are the only others antedating Hook's emergence in 1934 as the fierce antagonist of Communism he remained for the rest of his long life, which ended in 1989 just before the disintegration of the Soviet bloc.

Hook's anti-Communism was of longer duration, more unchanging, more central to his worldview and more influential in shaping the language and rhetoric of later anti-Communists, than that of any other political intellectual. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. observed in his review in these pages of *Out of Step*, Hook's memoir of 1987, Hook "[let] anti-communism consume his life to the point that, like Aaron's rod, it swallowed up nearly everything else." This selection of Hook's letters certainly reinforces such a view, if only because it is confined to letters on "Democracy, Communism, and the Cold War." A few letters to priests and clergymen take

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