

A Study of Acmeism in George Balanchine's *Jewels**

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| I. Introduction | IV. Crafting the Past: <i>Jewels</i> and Acmeism |
| II. Acmeism in Russian Modern Literary Movements | V. Conclusion |
| III. St. Petersburg Art and George Balanchine | Bibliography |
| | Abstract |

I. Introduction

The legacy of a century's influential artists is definitely remembered and perpetuated by excellent products. Artistic outcomes characterize one's alter ego, reflections, and life journey. Therefore, historical archives and documents address artistic values from various perspectives by recording and classifying them chronologically. It is not possible to include all artistic works from the ancient period; in a macro view, the history of dance, like other art, focuses on particular dance forms and styles that change according to the times and trends.

In this study, I explored Acmeism—a literary movement associated with Russian modernism—in *Jewels*, the first full-length abstract ballet by renowned choreographer, George Balanchine. Actually, my interest in Balanchine's life began when I attended a live performance of *Jewels*. Monumental works in the history of ballet are attributed to Balanchine, who was born in Russia and immersed in the country's rich culture as he grew. Although entering upon a ballet career in Russia, he was recognized as a great choreographer; ultimately, he relocated to the United States. Broad questions that influenced the course of this study included “What meaning and impression did his home country have on his artistic life?”, “Did his mother country influence his works in America?”, and “If so, what aspects would those be?” or “To what extent did his mother country influence his American works?” It is, however, hard to connect all of his works to Russian traditions. Tracing Russian traditions and

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modernism in ballet in his book *From Petipa to Balanchine*, dance historian Tim Scholl has provided rich and extensive research regarding the Russian connection to Western modern ballet with diverse examples of classical and modern works.¹⁾ Drawing on Scholl's appealing ideas, the main focus of this study is the relationship between Balanchine's work, *Jewels*, and Acmeism, one of the influential Russian modernist movements; ultimately, I desired to elaborate on the roots of Balanchine's artistic beliefs and philosophy and the substance of neoclassical ballet.

In creating dance, the specific role of a choreographer or a dancer often identifies one's view of the art form. For Balanchine, a choreographer was a "craftsman" or "master artisan" who perfected the dance. Following the choreographer, in Balanchine's world, was the dancer—a "dedicated artisan" executing perfect gestures and prescribed skills required by the master.²⁾ Hence, Balanchine's ballet evokes exhilaration; it is a type of celebration, a display of ideal forms and movements. Balanchine's ballet, based on the artisan's vision, is usually defined according to Neoclassicism and abstraction. In addition, the development of these ballet principles is visualized in works with Ballet Russes and ballet companies in the United States. Balanchine's remarkable achievements are known in Western countries such as France and the United States, yet the core of his choreography (such as the use of a dancing body and three-dimensional space) is linked to the "Petersburg phase of Russian modernism, characterized by its admiration for architecture's fusion of form and function and its esteem for the art of the past."³⁾ Historical discussions from a neoclassical point of view regarding the relationship between Balanchine's ballet and Russia have focused on the deconstruction or modernist appropriation of 19th-century classical ballet. However, to understand Balanchine's choreography and his unique method for incorporating "forms and materials," the essence of Acmeism and its connection to Balanchine's dance creations were explored in this study.

Chapter II provides a theoretical overview of Russian modernism and Acmeism. Regarding the Silver Age and modern literary currents—Symbolism, Acmeism, and Futurism—I was especially interested in the characteristics of Acmeism and Acmeist beliefs in Russian modern literature since the beginning of the 20th century. To illuminate the relationship between Acmeism and Balanchine, Chapter III provides a discussion of cultural and artistic trends in St. Petersburg, where Balanchine was born and grew up; it is also the birthplace of Acmeism. Since Balanchine's family relationships, early education, and cultural sensibility are connected to St. Petersburg, I explore the unique historical and political background of St. Petersburg, considered as the heart of the arts and culture prior to the establishment of the Soviet Union. Based on the discussions in Chapter II and III, I analyze *Jewels* to

1) T. Scholl(1994), *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet*(London and New York: Routledge).

2) S. L. Foster(1986), *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), pp.42-43.

3) T. Scholl(1994), p.xi.

identify how Acmeism relates to Balanchine's principles of choreography using two Acmeist perspectives—an ideological concept of “looking backward” and a practical way of dealing with materials.

Considering Balanchine's great fame in the history of ballet, previous related research on the choreographer and Neoclassicism has been focused on the following: first, the style and characteristics of the neoclassical ballet or a comparison between Balanchine and other modern choreographers; and second, choreographic analyses of Balanchine's one-act pieces. These studies have contributed to an understanding of the trends in contemporary American ballet and characteristics of neoclassical choreography. Yet, they have been examined mostly according to the theoretical basis of European Neoclassicism; typically, they have not been discussed in the context of Russian culture, which provided fertile soil for Balanchine's artistic inspirations. Regarding choreographic analyses, Russian influence is considered only in the context of Marius Petipa's ballet and collaborations with Ballet Russes. Even though Neoclassicism prevailed throughout Europe and Russia, I propose that it is necessary to understand Russian modernism in the rich milieu of St. Petersburg culture to discuss Balanchine's neoclassic approach in a scholarly manner.

Jewels, choreographed in the late period of Balanchine's career, is a complex piece to the extent that it mixes a retrospective attitude toward Classicism, contemporary principles reflecting multicultural backgrounds, and the autobiographical sense of composition. Despite its meaningful status, very few studies on *Jewels* thus far have been performed in the context of abstractionism or according to a focus on a particular part of the piece.⁴⁾ In this sense, this study can be a significant endeavor in understanding the root of Neoclassicism in ballet from a different perspective; further, the information provided has hardly been told in the existing history of dance and in previous research.

II. Acmeism in Russian Modern Literary Movements

Nineteenth century Russian literature, in which Realism was followed by Romanticism, revealed diverse thoughts and styles as a result of socialism and political revolutions at the end of the century. The Age of Realism, led by Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Vissarion Belinsky, etc., featured detailed descriptions of everyday life, impressions of nature, and a satirical attitude toward reality.

Manifesting the freedom of art, in contrast to Realism in the 19th century, Russian modernism was affected by European modernism and represented an attempt to escape from a traditional view of the

4) K. Kim(2014), The Characteristics of Abstractionism represented in George Balanchine's *Jewels*, *The Korean Journal of Dance* 72(1), pp.19-39.

I. Hwang(2011), The Aesthetic Analysis of George Balanchine's Works through Africanist Dance Principles, *The Korean Research Journal of Dance Documentation* 22, pp.127-145.

world with a concern for individuals and diversification. Modernism in the 20th century effectively accelerated the dramatic growth of a culture; it can be compared to the Renaissance in Europe. Especially, the blooming of modern literature during the so-called Silver Age played a leading role in the modernist movement. Forming significant poetic currents, established intrinsic attributes of Symbolism, Acmeism, and Futurism had effects on each other. Unlike French Symbolism, regarded as the originator of the Symbolist movement in literature, Russian Symbolism was the first modern movement to pursue a kind of metaphysical and philosophical worldview beyond merely an artistic and literary movement; it was influenced by German philosophers including Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer.⁵⁾

This philosophical attitude inherent in Symbolism often resulted in a comparison of art with a spiritual act, connoting a religious viewpoint with its aesthetic and mystical sense of duty. The Symbolists' "ideal world" was similar to the world of the music that did not rely on concrete representation techniques, and therefore they preferred soft and ambiguous words in poems. Symbolism, as representative of modernism, had a powerful influence over most young writers of the time. Nevertheless, the social recession associated with political revolutions caused them to agonize over their awareness of and participation in reality; thus, their reflections can be likened to those of Realists from the previous century.

In this social climate, Acmeism emerged as a result of a controversy with Symbolists' ideas regarding mystic religious attitudes and musical functions in literature. In the 1910s, Acmeism, the anti-Symbolist movement advocated by Mikhail Kuzmin, Nikolay Gumilyov, Osip Mandelstam, and Anna Akhmatova, originated from the ancient Greek word *akme*, which means perfection, fulfillment, flowering, and wholeness. Acmeists insisted that "clear" or "explicit" art (not ambiguous symbols) should flourish; they were much more interested in the real world than the esoteric world veiled metaphorically. In artistic expressions, they energized poems by using direct and concrete words rather than symbolic and abstract implications.

According to an Acmeist manifesto, "the rose once again has become beautiful in itself, in its petals, scent, and color, not in its imagined resemblances to mystical love or some other such thing."⁶⁾ Acmeists wanted to perceive things individually without prejudice or stereotypes; therefore, they considered the combination of "fresh" words to convey vivid visual effects and feelings as very significant. In opposition to the Symbolist views regarding religious acts or "theurgy,"⁷⁾ Acmeists

5) C. Lee and J. Lee(1994), *The History of Russian Literature*(Seoul: Byeok Ho Publications), p.392.

6) K. B. Painter(2006), *Flint on a Bright Stone: A Revolution of Precision and Restraint in American, Russian, and German Modernism*(Stanford: Stanford University Press), p. 126.

7) "Theurgy" has its origins in ancient Greece; its meanings include a "sacred ritual" and "divine act," and it is a significant term for understanding the aesthetics and philosophy of Russian Symbolists. According to Nikolai Berdyaev, theurgy is the art that creates beauty as other worlds, other beings, other lives, and substance. He defines it not only as "the collaborative act of man together with God-the godact, the

assumed their roles as artists, avoiding the sacred attitudes of priests.

The Guild of Poets, a practical association organized in St. Petersburg in 1910, became a pivotal site to disseminate the ideology and practices of Acmeism. The term Guild of Poets represented the aim of Acmeists. “Guild” has a medieval nuance; it refers to a merchant or artisan association and suggests that affiliated members seek to be identified as artists. In other words, it was important for poets, like artisans engaged in handcrafting, “to sharpen, to polish, and to lust [for] words” to ensure clarity.

For Acmeists, creating a poem was likened to an architectural process. Kuzmin was a leading proponent of Acmeism; in “On Beautiful Clarity (1910),”⁸⁾ he suggested that the “architectural conception of arts” stresses the significance of “literary craftsmanship” for aspiring writers:

We study, so to speak, the laying of the stones in the building whose architect we wish to be; and we must have a sharp eye, a true hand, and a clear feeling of systematicity, perspective, proportion, in order to achieve the final result. It is necessary that the entire structure should not collapse from an improperly placed arch, that the particulars should not obscure the whole, that the most unsymmetrical and disturbing project should be realized by conscious and regular means. This will be precisely that art about which it was said: *ars longa, vita brevis*. Besides unmitigated talent, it is imperative to have a knowledge of one’s material and form, and the correspondence between it and content. A story, by its form, does not ask for and does not even particularly admit of an exclusively lyrical content, without anything being narrated (of course, not a story about a feeling, an impression).⁹⁾

Echoing Kuzmin, Mandelstam, in his first book of poems entitled *Stone* (1913), also envisioned the principles of architecture through the placement of clear and realistic poetic words, as if an architect was building and embellishing his work with delicate materials. Whether a poet or an architect, one’s skill or technique is not accentuated; instead, creative ability is the focus. It has been suggested that “the Acmeist artist must first be a craftsman, knowledgeable of his materials, and possessing the

godman’s creativity but also the artist’s collaborative continuation with [the] God of Creation.” Symbolist Vladimir Solovyov considered the unity of the earth and the heavens as the highest form of beauty, and he believed that unity could be achieved through the divine power of creativity. See A. Weiner(1998), *By Authors Possessed: The Demonic Novel in Russia*(Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), p.141, and N. Rzhevsky, ed.(2012), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Culture*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.310.

8) In fact, it is quite difficult to locate Kuzmin within any of the dominant literary movements in the Silver Age because his works bear certain affinities for Symbolism and Acmeism. However, because of publication in the Acmeist journal *Apollon*, this essay—influenced by Walter Pater’s essay “Style”—is highly valued as marking a turning point whereby Russian poems moved away from Symbolism toward the aesthetics of Acmeism. In fact, it became a general rallying point for Neoclassicism. Further, it is accepted as an Acmeist literary style manual. See R. Polonsky(1998), *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.177-179, and B. Raffel, trans.(1971), *Russian Poetry under the Tsars: An Anthology*(Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), p.197.

9) <<http://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/21661/clarity.html?sequence=203>, 2014. 5. 22>.

courage to affect their transformation.”¹⁰⁾

Although Acmeism coexisted with Futurism, which emerged as another anti-Symbolist movement in 1912, it did not last long in the history of Russian modern literature. Nevertheless, Acmeism was significant for awakening a renewed appreciation for realistic and classical beauty; accordingly, the poet’s mission and attitude were considered carefully when creating every piece, shifting Symbolists’ vast spiritual interests to everyday life in the physical world.

III. St. Petersburg Art and George Balanchine

St. Petersburg, the birthplace of Acmeism, is located in northwestern Russia on the Neva River near the Gulf of Finland, a part of the Baltic Sea. Since Tsar Peter the Great founded it in the early 18th century, St. Petersburg was the imperial capital of the Russian Empire until the Russian Revolution in the early 20th century.¹¹⁾ For over 300 years, St. Petersburg—known as “Peter the Great’s window on the West”—was a bridge between Russian and Western art, illustrating the tsar’s connection to the rest of Europe.¹²⁾ Despite the turmoil of the revolutions reflecting the *fin-de-siècle* mood, culture and the arts in St. Petersburg prospered more than in any other region. Gradually, interest in national identity in the tendency of Westernization escalated as well. Russian journalist and musicologist Solomon Volkov provides a dynamic look at St. Petersburg art:

[T]he capital of the tsarist empire, [St.] Petersburg had been founded by Peter the Great in 1703 explicitly for the purpose of challenging the ancient ways and habits of Old Mother Russia. Of course, this maddeningly complex culture also had a capacity for jingoistic feelings and ideas, but there was always a hard-core artistic elite for whom Western impulses and trends [were] of paramount importance. Employing Western devices for great effect, St. Petersburg culture produced such masterpieces as Pushkin’s “French” elegies, Glinka’s “Italianate” operas, and Tchaikovsky’s “Germanic” symphonies.¹³⁾

St. Petersburg was known as “the capital city of culture and [the] arts” because it was the place where representative Russian writers and artists—Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol, Modest

10) T. Scholl(1994), p.108.

11) In 1914, the name of the city was changed from St. Petersburg to Petrograd; then, in 1924, it was renamed to Leningrad to honor Vladimir Lenin. Leningrad became St. Petersburg again when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

12) B. A. Pavlac(2011), *A Concise Survey of Western Civilization: Supremacies and Diversities throughout History*(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), p.213.

13) S. Volkov(1998), *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky: A Poet’s Journey Through The Twentieth Century* (New York: The Free Press), p.7.

Mussorgsky, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, etc.—lived, worked and died. Therefore, their heritage has remained intact in the city. Most of all, St. Petersburg had historical significance and artistic value as a base for Acmeism, and the ideology of Acmeism flourished through publications in the coterie magazine *Apollon*. Its brilliant writings crystallized the Acmeist point of view.

Needless to say, St. Petersburg is absolutely significant in the history of ballet because it was not only Balanchine's hometown but also the birthplace of the 19th-century Imperial Ballet in state-sponsored theaters, following Peter the Great's aspirations. Led by French ballet master Petipa, the Imperial Ballet was historically associated with Russia's golden age of ballet, accomplishing the finest conventional ballet techniques and theatrical spectacles. The prosperity of the Imperial Ballet in the late 19th century suggested that the center of ballet had moved from Europe, where classical ballet had enjoyed privileges for centuries, to Russia. Yet, because of turbulent social and political circumstances in Russia at that time, the Imperial Ballet's heyday, during which monumental masterpieces were created, did not last beyond 20 years.

However, artists affiliated with *Mir iskusstva* (*World of Art*), a journal that followed the Symbolist movement, organized a new ballet troupe called Ballet Russes to emphasize a modern form of theatrical ballet linked to the revival of nationalism, adaptation of expressionism, and collaboration with the abstract and avant-garde artists. The works of Ballet Russes led by Serge Diaghilev and Alexander Benois facilitated dissemination of the Russian style of modern art to Europe; where it flourished as it did in North America through the collaboration of diverse artists from different countries.

Balanchine, also known as the father of American ballet who brought the ballet's neoclassical style to the West, eventually died in the United States, leaving as a legacy of monumental achievements. However, in consideration of his entire life, Balanchine was a significant beneficiary of St. Petersburg, where he was born and raised in his early years with his artistic family; his father and brother were musicians, and his sister was a painter. Balanchine learned ballet at the Russian Imperial Ballet School and music at Petrograd Conservatory. Yet, the October Revolution in 1917 forced the former to close, and Balanchine lost the opportunity to continue the elite ballet education that had been provided by the tsar and his regime for centuries. Unstable political circumstances in Russia resulted in his work at cabarets and a silent film theater as a pianist and dancer; eventually, these experiences piqued his interest in Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in the West.

Considering Balanchine's family as a cradle for local artists, a direct and indirect relationship between Balanchine and St. Petersburg was formed in his childhood and youth as a student at the ballet school. Thanks to his Georgian father, Meliton Balanchivadze—composer, opera singer, and a pupil of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov—Balanchine had easy access to music and the stage. His mother, Maria Nikolayevna Vasilyeva (Meliton's second wife), was a ballet enthusiast; she directed

Balanchine to the ballet, which reflected high social status at that time in St. Petersburg. In addition, Balanchine's uncle, Vassily Balanchivadze, learned to paint from the renowned artist Konstantin Makovsky, the father of Sergei Makovsky, the founder and chief editor of *Apollon*—the highly influential and exclusive Acmeist journal.

Because the Imperial Ballet School years for Balanchine took place at the time that Acmeism was spreading, he was introduced to Russian modernism, which included not only Acmeism but also Futurism and the avant-garde in academic curriculum. Akhmatova, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Sergei Yesenin were widely read in schools; in fact, Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Kuzmin, and other prominent Acmeists visited ballet performances as balletomanes.¹⁴⁾ Later, Akhmatova recalled that she was not only influenced by Acmeism but also by great dialogues on the arts from Igor Stravinsky and Balanchine, who often attended theater performances and poetry readings.¹⁵⁾

Balanchine stated that he especially loved Akhmatova's poetry. Clearly, in light of his educational background and artistic works, there is no doubt that Balanchine, when in Russia, was influenced by diverse Russian modern movements. Nonetheless, *Apollo*, his successful piece in the late period of Ballet Russes, and other contemporary pieces developed by Balanchine in the United States, were evidence of his interest in the reinterpretation of the classical school rather than romantic retrospection or the astonishing avant-garde innovation that often overwhelmed audiences with the effect of "total theater." That is to say, in the milieu of the Silver Age, Balanchine's artistic vision and approaches seem to correspond more closely to the aesthetics of Acmeism, rather than to Symbolism or Futurism.

IV. Crafting the Past: *Jewels* and Acmeism

Jewels premiered in April 13, 1967, at the New York State Theater as a full-length abstract ballet based on particular inspirations from the choreographer's daily routine. Balanchine, who always passed by Van Cleef & Arpels—a boutique on 5th Avenue—on the way to his morning dance training, recalled the dramatic moment when the ballet was conceived:

I always found jewels fascinating and often also inspiring. Just think of *Palais de Cristal*.¹⁶⁾ I

14) T. Scholl(1994), p.112. See also E. Kendall(2013), *Balanchine and the Lost Muse: Revolution and the Making of a Choreographer*(New York: Oxford University Press), p.86.

15) M. Broemer(2009), War and Revolution in St. Petersburg: Modernist Links in the Poetry of Edith Södergran and Anna Andreevna Akhmatova. Ph.D. diss. Helsinki University, P.85.

16) As Balanchine mentioned, *Le Palais de Cristal*, originally choreographed by Balanchine for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1947, is considered a forerunner of *Jewels*, presenting movements corresponding to four gems—rubies, diamonds, emeralds, and pearls. However, the piece was revived one year later for the New York City Ballet(NYCB) with a different title, *Symphony in C*. For NYCB's new repertoire, Balanchine simplified sets and costumes as well, only emphasizing the classical "diamond look" for about 30 minutes. In 2012, the

don't know what moved me that particular morning. There was a showcase with diamonds, one with emeralds, and one with rubies. In the middle of the window display, there was a wonderful tiara like those at the court of the Czar. I was mesmerized and went thoughtlessly from one showcase to the next and back again.¹⁷⁾

Balanchine's preference for gemstones seems to have its origins in his family background rather than from the idea of a contemporary luxury product. After seeing splendid jewels in Arpels' collection, he mentioned his father's country, Georgia, known for its rich mineral resources:

Of course, I have always liked jewels; after all, I am an Oriental from Georgia in the Caucasus. I like the color of gems [and] the beauty of stones, and it was wonderful to see how our costume workshop, under Karinska's direction, came so close to the quality of the real stones (which were of course too heavy for the dancers to wear!)¹⁸⁾

The jewels in the shop appealed to Balanchine's artistic and historical sensibilities, making him think instantly of choreographing a new ballet. It is known that when creating the ballet, he first reified the idea by selecting proper music for each jewel to form an instant visual impression, rather than thinking of a concrete plot or characters in advance.

In this chapter, I discuss *Jewels* from two perspectives to illuminate the relationship between *Jewels* and Acmeism: first, "nostalgia for a world culture" shows the Acmeists' ideology as consistent with Mandelstam's definition¹⁹⁾; and second, as a practical attitude for crystallizing ideas, dealing with materials (words or logos) based on the metaphor of architecture.

First, "nostalgia for a world culture" refers to the "backward glance" to fulfill the "poetic craft and cultural continuity" that Acmeists worshiped.²⁰⁾ That is, the perspective of art in the past is not derived entirely from an emotionally nostalgic sense but as a fundamental artistic attitude. In other words, modern artists do not look back to the past for a representation or imitation of classical art but rather as a kind of model or example that they should be familiar with as a reference for the stimulation of creativity.²¹⁾

Actually, a classical revival prevailed in modern St. Petersburg that was not characteristic of a

ballet featured brand new costumes designed in collaboration with Swarovski Gemstones, following Balanchine's original thought, "I want it to be classic or timeless." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUsqGn_ZMP4, 2014. 1. 27>.

17) F. V. Damme(Producer) and H. Petri(Executive Producer)(2006), *Jewels* [DVD], (United Kingdom: Opus Arte), p.9.

18) G. Balanchine and F. Mason(1975), *101 Stories of the Great Ballets: The Scene-by-Scene Stories of the Most Popular Ballets, Old and New*(New York: Anchor Books), p.231.

19) B. D. Woodworth and C. E. Richards(2005), *St. Petersburg*(New York: Chelsea House Publishers), p.85.

20) T. Chevalier, ed.(2012), *Encyclopedia of the Essay*(London and New York: Routledge), p.523.

21) S. Boym(2001), *The Future of Nostalgia*(New York: Basic Books), p.141.

singular art form. Especially, architecture and the plastic arts affected the environment of the city, as Acmeists often relied on architecture to assert their view of work²²⁾ and inspire the artistry of people in everyday life. It may be regarded as an interest in the re-thinking of Russian identity in a modern era as a movement against Westernization retained in the policies of Peter the Great. Compared to “modern style” in England and “*Art Nouveau*” in France, the “Russian style” of architecture in the modern culture suggests that alterations occurred to transform Europe’s baroque rococo style seen in St. Petersburg into a Greek style that appeared in the architecture of Russian Orthodox churches. To be more precise, it may a return to Byzantium and Neoclassicism.²³⁾

As in Western modernism, there was a popularization of the avant-garde in Moscow, and St. Petersburg was regarded as a “world (cosmopolitan) city” in which classical and modern styles and ancient (i.e., Hellenic, Roman), European (i.e., baroque, rococo), or native (Slavic, referring to Classicism) cultures co-existed.²⁴⁾ Acmeists assumed an accommodating attitude toward the peculiarities of the modern city, rather than being swayed by its ambiguity and variety. They often found the canon and standard for vivid beauty in the heritage of the past; therefore, they developed a sophistication and approach that corresponded to their ideology.

Reflecting very brilliant periods in history of ballet, *Jewels*, the three-act abstract ballet, pays homage to classical heritage and history (thereby tracing the development of ballet). Paying attention to the artistic value of history is similar to the focus on classics that Acmeists regarded as important. Each act captures a moment from the past. By overlapping time, place, music, and dance during the same period, the work emphasizes the symbolic looks and aesthetics of the period. First, each different jewel (emerald, ruby, or diamond), accurately captures significant currents in classical ballet history. Interestingly, at the same time, each moment indicative of a period signifies a key place in the history of ballet that has changed over time. In other words, we are reminded of Romanticism in France, where ballet flourished as a theater art; Classicism in Russia, where academic fundamentals were prominent; and Neoclassicism in America, where Balanchine devoted much of his life to contemporary choreography.

The first act, “Emeralds,” features music by the French Romantic composer, Gabriel Fauré (i.e., “*Pelléas et Mélisande*” and “*Shylock*”); such works represent the flavor of Romantic ballet. This act was constructed by impressions of France rather than the framework of a dramatic plot that typifies most Romantic ballets. Balanchine’s observation follows:

22) Mandelstam vividly describes St. Petersburg’s cultural diversity in his “architectural” poems, covering various ideas from classical tradition to mass culture. See, for example, M. Rubins(1998), The “Telling” Image: Ecphrasis in Russian Acmeist Verse, *Mosaic*, 31(2), pp.72-74.

23) D. Lee(2009), *Millennium of Russian Culture and Art*(Seoul: Saenggakui Namu), pp.664-666.

24) Y. Seok(1996), *Russian Modern Poetry*(Seoul: Mineumsa), p.236.

To try to describe for you the dances themselves would be boring, for they have no literary content at all. I suppose if this part of ballet can be said to represent anything at all, it is perhaps an evocation of France, the France of elegance, comfort, dress, perfume.²⁵⁾

Act 2, entitled “Rubies,” is set to Stravinsky’s “Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra”. Even though some people identify “Rubies” with America, Balanchine did not have that mindset as he choreographed the act.²⁶⁾ Instead, he was attempting to embody attributes of Stravinsky’s music or his collaboration with Stravinsky. It suggests that he carefully avoided generalizing or typifying an image of America as a whole; rather, he wanted to refine his interests to modern works in New York.

The final act, “Diamonds,” depicts the glorious moment of the Russian Imperial ballet and the Mariinsky Theater, a symbol of Petipa’s connection to Classicism. “Diamonds” successfully portrays lavish and spectacular grandiosity, also thanks to “Symphony No. 3 in D Minor” by Petipa’s talented collaboration partner, Tchaikovsky. As ballet historians Mary Clark and Clement Crisp noted, “If the entire imperial Russian inheritance of ballet were lost, ‘Diamonds’ would still tell us of its essence.”²⁷⁾ This final act differs from the previous two acts in that it clearly reveals the identity of the Imperial Ballet.

Second, I suggest that the analysis of the relationship with Acmeism can be discussed as a way of working with materials. As I discussed in Chapter II, whereas Symbolists pursued a certain resonating but somewhat mystic musical function in the text, Acmeists defined a fresh and vivid word as the essence and main material of poetry. The “beautiful clarity” shows the ideal of Acmeism. In Balanchine’s work, the Acmeist attitude toward materials is revealed. There is no doubt that if the essential material in poetry is a word or logos, the essential material in dance must be the dancer or the dancing body. Like the Acmeists’ rose metaphor that emphasizes the use of clear and direct words, Balanchine also firmly refused to have symbolic implications in dance; his statement follows:

When you have a garden full of pretty flowers, you don’t demand of them, “What do you mean? What is your significance?” Dancers are just flowers, and flowers grow without any literal meaning; they are just beautiful. We’re like flowers. A flower doesn’t tell you a story. It’s in itself a beautiful thing.²⁸⁾

Balanchine depicts the visual vividness of the body individually and further maximizes images by completing an entire structure through organic combinations and interaction with the individual body.

25) G. Balanchine and F. Mason(1975), p.232.

26) Ibid.

27) The George Balanchine Trust <<http://balanchine.com/jewels/>, 2013. 4. 1>.

28) A. Croce(January 26, 2009), Balanchine Said, *The New Yorker*. <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/26/balanchine-said>, 2013. 10. 24>.

This process is similar to Mandelstam's idea of refining and constructing words elaborately in a poem, as he mentioned in *Stone*. In the same context, Balanchine's famous saying, "God creates, man assembles,"²⁹⁾ also suggests the architectural fashioning of artistic materials.

Only utilizing diverse combinations of movement vocabularies without incorporating any dramatic structure, *Jewels* captures the essence of the historical moments that each act illuminates. As if reminding us of the aesthetics of a *ballet blanc*, "Emeralds," dwelling in the era of Romanticism, consists of smooth and flowing movements. Elegantly moving curved *port de bras* in the air and numerous delicate and repetitive *bouffées* point to a supernatural being, the female symbol in the Romantic ballet. Like the masterpieces of Romantic ballet, *La Sylphide* or the second act of *Giselle*, the *pas de deux* creates an elegant line of Romantic tutus and unrealistic lightness, using frequent *pensées*, lifts flying in a long and high arc, and the arrangement of smooth movements followed by turns, rather than stops with bold poses.

"Rubies," which contains Balanchine's philosophy of modern choreography, portrays abstract attributes also shown in his famous pieces, *Agon*³⁰⁾ and *Four Temperaments*. This act, which emphasizes cheerful and witty movements in Stravinsky's dissonance, illustrates the standard of the neoclassical dancing body. Dancers in short tunic dresses boldly and confidently execute movements with angular arms, legs turned inward, flexed wrists and ankles, swaying pelvis, and so on. "Rubies" intensifies the contemporary sense of the scene by adding sharp and rigid poses, excessive extensions, dramatic contractions, and quick and radical changes of direction. Balanchine, who is also known for contributing to the "Americanization of ballet," skillfully integrated American multicultural aspects and concise and condensed movement vocabulary in his inspired works, based on his extensive knowledge of contemporary popular culture (e.g., Broadway musicals and Hollywood films). Thus, it can be said that the dancing body in "Rubies" is similar to a "refined crystal" that absorbs the attributes of various contemporary cultures, along the lines of the Acmeist idea of a stone.

"Diamonds" is filled with dance dedicated to Petipa's Imperial Ballet, the basis of Balanchine's choreography. The dancers provide the variety and splendor of technique in much the same way as Petipa's spectacles of the 19th century. Thus, the entire act reflects Petipa's logically organized form

29) His famous statement, "God creates, man assembles" is attributed to the composer, Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, who worked in mid-19th century St. Petersburg. Glinka, regarded as the founder of the nationalist school, is known for saying, "Nations create music, composers only arrange it." Balanchine's saying is frequently quoted to represent his artistic vision, and it also has its origins in Russian nationalism. Ibid. On Glinka's view, see L. Olson(2004), *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity*(London and New York: Routledge), p.46.

30) In consideration of Balanchine's interest in Russian poem (discussed in Chapter III), *Agon*, one of his masterpieces, is also connected to Acmeism. Interestingly, Barbara Milberg Fisher carefully assumed that the name of *Agon* would also be derived from Mandelstam's comment on Dante Alighieri since Balanchine and Stravinsky had their mother country in mind, even though they worked with a number of movements based on Italian sources for *Agon*. See B. M. Fisher(2006), *In Balanchine's Company: A Dancer's Memoir* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press), p.169.

of choreography. In contrast with the previous two acts, Balanchine integrated diverse movements and patterns for *pas de deux* in this part, ensuring equal proportions of male and female dancers. Dancers in *pas de deux* demonstrate normative movements according to the dichotomy of conventional gender roles. For instance, a male dancer looks strong and energetic, remaining stable when leading his female partner. On the contrary, a female dancer mostly maintains her balance to perform precise movements with her male partner. As shown in many classical ballets like *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, arranging a large *corps de ballet* and changing movement patterns geometrically accentuate aesthetic elements such as refinement, harmony, symmetry, and precision—all of which the Imperial Ballet seeks to highlight. Each elegant and confident body appears bold and magnificent. Individuals combine to form a group and then repeat a series of escalating movements collectively with music moving toward a crescendo. Eventually, the dancers as an entire entity give the audience the overwhelming impression and lingering imagery in the finale of the permanence and splendid brilliance of diamonds, which are projected over the dancing bodies.

This visual and architectural technique, which the “elaborate work” and “assembly of the body” suggest, completes the full-length ballet and the organic connection with other theatrical elements such as music, costumes, and sets, based on the representation of the body (three jewels). In much the same way that an architectural plan is completed by building and assembling refined materials, all components such as music, color, costumes, and stage settings corresponding to each significant period of ballet—Romanticism, Neoclassicism, and Classicism—transform historical moments into embodied images vividly.

Considering previous researches in which Balanchine’s ballets were often analyzed in the context of Neoclassicism and abstractionism, here I argue that the abstraction of the ballet can also be connected to Acmeism. This is to say that abstract characteristics can be used effectively to emphasize the body as a material. Abstraction is defined as the act of detaching or extracting essential qualities from a given object or concrete realities. Especially, it is the central idea in non-representational arts in the 20th century; further, it has led to the birth of various styles and genre in modern art. For instance, rejecting natural portrayal and narrative expression, abstract art uses design characteristics such as color, texture, and line to represent objects and subjects. This tendency also influences changes in classical dance, which favors imitation, narrative, and, representation.

Interestingly, *Jewels* has the conventional structure of a full-length ballet from the 19th century, but it is called a “full-length abstract ballet” based on its abstract development. That is, *Jewels* portrays meaningful historical moments but extracts the essence of the dance from the history, removing any dramatic and literary content. Because of the absence of a plot, there are no dramatic characters associated with a specific time and place; therefore, dancers’ costumes are non-hierarchical. Through romantic tutus in green, tunics in red, and classical tutus in white—all pointing to the colors of three

jewels—the costumes contribute to the unity of each scene and attributes of technique without specific roles or meanings. Further, highlighting formative and architectural elements of dance, the diverse visual and spatial arrangements of the body evoke an artisan’s masterly skills of assembly and combination.

Thus, *Jewels* is not just a piece depicting images of bright gems; it also reflects the prodigious choreographer’s organized and elaborate way of accentuating the dancing body. Like Acmeists’ eclectic attitudes toward the classics, Stravinsky also noted that, in the 20th century, to merely return to or imitate a classic does not create a neoclassical work. Neoclassicism is not derived from all classics but from a deep understanding of the essence or specific points of classical works. Consequently, Acmeism as it pertains to *Jewels* suggests that Balanchine considered the ballet’s historical basis and held an artist’s attitude from the perspective of “classical arts and its transformation.” It also suggests that *Jewels* portrays the artist’s life journey from Russia to the United States via Europe, thereby embodying his great insight of the classics and a respect for underlying aesthetics from brilliant moments in the history of ballet,

V. Conclusion

This study explored Acmeism—a major poetry movement in 20th-century Russian modernism—in George Balanchine’s *Jewels*. The movement known as Acmeism, as stated previously, originated from the Greek word *akme*, meaning perfection, fulfillment, flowering, and wholeness. This Russian literature movement was opposed to Symbolism. Its leaders (i.e., Kuzmin, Gumilyov, Akhmatova, and Mandelstam) rejected the semiological approach to using words as symbols to express mythical and romantic ideals. Acmeists strongly believed in the beauty of clarity; hence, they aspired for absolute clarity of expression through precise, compact imagery using the rich rhythm of everyday language.

Balanchine, the foremost contemporary choreographer in the history of ballet, was born in St. Petersburg to a family of artists; he studied Acmeism as a teenager during his studies at the Imperial Ballet School. His ties to Acmeism continued throughout his education and various dance and theatrical performances. Although Balanchine’s choreography has been researched widely from a neoclassical point of view, in this study I attempted to illuminate the significant relationship between Balanchine’s choreography and Russian modernist movements. This relationship has been hardly discussed to date; therefore, my aim was to facilitate more discussions to build a theoretical bridge from classic to modern or from Russia to the United States beyond what has been presented in the “traditional” history of ballet.

To investigate the characteristics of Acmeism in *Jewels*, first, I provided a historical overview of Acmeism in Russian modernist movements as a way of understanding the trends in Russian culture and the sociopolitical milieu in the early 20th century. Then, I explored the artistic and cultural trends of St. Petersburg, where Acmeism flourished and where Balanchine was born. I pointed out that St. Petersburg definitely became a nutritive ground for formulating Balanchine's primary artistic beliefs to the extent that the policy of Westernization and the unique cultural environment of the city facilitated the diversification of the arts and literary movements. Third, to identify the relationship between Acmeism and Balanchine's choreographic styles and principles in *Jewels*, I analyzed *Jewels* from the perspectives of two Acmeists: from Mandelstam's definition of "nostalgia for a world culture," which reconsiders the value of traditions and classics in cosmopolitan culture; and from Kuzmin's and Mandelstam's "architectural mode of dealing with materials," which evokes the neoclassical choreographer's dedicated and creative attitude toward the dancing body in actual practice. Among Balanchine's masterpieces, *Jewels*, as a full-length abstract ballet, remains distinctive because it not only artistically captures the image of glittering gems in the abstract but it also fully embodies the choreographer's "Russianness" and journey across borders. Consequently, on the basis of the choreographic analysis, this study demonstrated that the Acmeist perspective toward classical beauty and its creative application in Russian modernism was deeply associated with Balanchine's neoclassic and abstract style of choreography, which he perfected in the West.

I propose that beyond the world of dance and its contexts, the Russian modernist movement in the early 20th century is the general basis for a profound understanding of the principles and substance of Balanchine's neoclassic style. I hope that this study contributes to further discussions regarding 20th-century modern ballet and that it is a representative example of an interdisciplinary research approach to dance based on the connections drawn between Western ballet and contemporary Russian literature.

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A Study of Acmeism in George Balanchine's *Jewels*

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This study aims to explore Acmeism, a major literary trend in Russian modernism, in George Balanchine's *Jewels*. To investigate the characteristics of Acmeism in *Jewels*, I begin by providing a historical overview of Russian modernism and the Acmeism movement so as to understand Russian culture in the early twentieth century. Second, I explore the artistic and cultural trends of St. Petersburg where Acmeism flourished and where Balanchine was born. Third, in order to identify the relationship between Acmeism and Balanchine's choreographic styles and principles in *Jewels*, I examine the ballet performance from two perspectives: from a "yearning for cosmopolitan culture" and an "architectural mode of dealing with materials." Research results reveal how Balanchine's artistic vision and ideology are profoundly associated with Acmeism and Russian culture. Consequently, this study suggests another way of understanding the root of Balanchine's neoclassic and abstract style of choreography, which he completed in the West.

Keywords: Acmeism(아크메이즘), George Balanchine(조지 발란신), *Jewels*(보석), Neoclassical Ballet(신고전주의 발레), Russian Modernism(러시아 모더니즘)