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Resurrection of Ghosts

– Gothic Imagination in Akram Khan's *Giselle* –*

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I. Introduction

Classical ballet is predominantly based on fantasy. In *Giselle*, *La Sylphide*, and *La Bayadère*, for example, supernatural beings evoke wonders and emotions through a dramatic narrative that traverses between the real and the virtual, and life and death. Gothic stories and supernatural themes, such as bizarreness, anti-reason, unconsciousness, mysticism, and demonic nature, accompanied by complex emotional responses, including wonder and horror, are not only restricted to 19th-century ballet. The themes also penetrate other domains such as movies, rock music, and musicals. Gothic is usually accompanied by thoughts on ghosts and eerie beings, which compels one to ponder on why ghosts constantly resurrect and revisit.

Akram Khan's *Giselle* (2016) was selected as the subject of this study considering that this historical work is considered a suitable example to examine the probability and creativity of the dance's inherent Gothic origins to the meaning of contemporary revival. The Gothic imagination, this study's central subject, is an attempt to explore dance from a humanistic perspective and seeks to broaden humanistic thinking through contemporary dance. Thus, it examines how Gothic aesthetics are applied in socio-cultural contexts.

The term "Gothic" is derived from the Goths, nomadic Germanic people who resisted Roman rule

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in the late 4th century. Although the Romans regarded ancient Gothic culture as uncivilized and barbaric at the time, it became a prevalent architectural style in the Middle Ages and was applied to numerous palaces, cathedrals, churches, and abbeys of Western Europe. At the end of the 18th century, Gothic style, which exhibited overwhelming and sublime artistic characteristics through the architecture of steep spires, permeated the literature that was immersed in death and surrealism, predominantly in Germany and England. In the art of the Romantic era, which rejected enlightenment and reason, Gothic texts—frequently influenced by death and fear—became a romantic inspirational motif across genres, including dance, music, and visual arts.

Today, Gothic is increasingly attracting academic attention. With the emergence of Gothic novels in the 18th century, Gothic research was mainly conducted in the English literature sub-genre of "Gothic Literature." Particularly, considering that early Gothic literature was developed by female writers and readers, the analysis of works contemplating and criticizing women's issues stands out in the literature field. Since 1980s, a striking emergence of serious critical attention to "Gothic" literature and film—most notably, David Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (1980)—has ignited an expansion in Gothic studies in critical approaches. This Gothic revival is considered "an important, multi-layered, and profoundly symbolic scheme for dealing with Western culture's most fundamental fears and concerns" (Hogle & Smith, 2009). Gothic texts are not only found in novels but also adopted in dance, movies, musicals, dramas, and games, and so on, thus influencing cultural studies to pay increasing attention to various subjects, such as "re-reading through Gothic" or "Gothic as a cultural code." However, despite its expansion from novels to other art genres and, further, to culture, studies focusing on Gothic dance works are limited.

The original *Giselle* (1841) has been extensively explored by dance studies owing to its high status and recognition in ballet history. As a re-creation of the original work, Swedish choreographer Mats Ek's *Giselle* (1982) is the most notable one. Sujeong Yoon (2002), Jungja Park (2004), Jinhee Bae (2004), and James Jeon (2013) have investigated Ek's piece from the perspective of contemporary dance parody. A feminist perspective that illuminates women's issues from the viewpoint of a classical ballet remake has also been highlighted (Jiyeon Kim, 2011; Yoonsoo Kim & Kyunghee Kim, 2014; Somin Lee, 2007). Akram Khan's *Giselle* has been performed since its premiere, but this is the first attempt at an academic discussion that extends beyond the aesthetics of contemporary choreography by focusing on understanding contemporary dance through the humanistic narrative of Gothic. Although numerous studies have examined *Giselle*, the Gothic characteristic, which was the source of the creation, is predominantly traced back to a primary tendency of Romanticism.

Akram Khan's *Giselle* is a contemporary work that reinterprets *Giselle*, a romantic masterpiece, and was premiered by English National Ballet (ENB)[1] at the 2016 Manchester International Festival.

1) English National Ballet was founded in 1950 as London Festival Ballet by the legendary dancers, Alicia

Akram Khan, born in London as the second generation of Bangladeshi British immigrants, majored in Contemporary Dance at De Monfort University and Northern School of Contemporary Dance, has a background in the traditional South Asian dance, Kathak. In 2000, he founded the Akram Khan Company as an independent dance company. *Giselle* was created in collaboration with ENB.

On the basis of Gothic traditions and revival, first, this study will examine the cultural origins of medieval Gothic and its evolution by era. Subsequently, it will discuss the Gothic images and choreography that appear throughout the history of Western dance from the Middle Ages to the present, by era. Finally, focusing on how the Gothic style of the Romantic ballet *Giselle* is being recreated in a contemporary way, this study seeks to illuminate the meaning of Gothic that contemporary dance conveys in this era as a fundamental emotion and cultural code that transcends time and is continually revived.

II. Concept of Gothic and its Historical Overview

1. The Middle Ages: Gothic as an Architectural Style

"Gothic," a style derived from the ancient "Goths," gained popularity in the field of medieval architecture. Architecture featuring vaults, ogival arches, soaring spires, and stained glass that fully absorbs light evolved from Romanesque architecture, which followed the ancient Roman tradition and continued into Renaissance architecture. This style was found in the architecture of cathedrals and abbeys centered on the Île-de-France in the 12th century, where the term Gothic was not used at that time. Instead, it was called "modern style (opus modernum)," which means novelty, or "French Style (opus francigenum)," which emphasizes the region of origin. However, this new French architectural style was named "Gothic (gotico)" by Italian intellectuals of the Renaissance, in a sense of contempt for the Germans. This name, derived from Italian, claims that the architectural style propagated north of the Alps was the "Goth style" in Italian (Takesi, 2009, p. 21).

In 1550, the Florentine artist and architect Giorgio Vasari used "Gothic" as a derogatory term, implying that medieval architecture was created by the descendants of the Goths and was inferior to that of the Roman period: "Then arose new architects who after the manner of their barbarous nations erected buildings in that style which we call Gothic" (Yorke, 2017, p. 5). During the Renaissance period, the irrational and anti-classical tendencies of architecture, such as cathedrals that exhibit excessive decor and height that disregarded order and proportion, were criticized. Nonetheless, the

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Markova and Anton Dolin. Along with The Royal Ballet, English National Ballet is one of Britain's leading ballet companies; it was renamed ENB in 1989 and became Sadler's Wells' first associate ballet company in 2014. Tamara Rojo, a former prima ballerina of the Royal Ballet, is the current artistic director.

rise of Romanticism following the Renaissance revived the Gothic art, losing its derogatory connotation, while recalling the “Gothic style” and heightening interest in the Middle Ages.

2. Gothic Novel and Sublime

The introduction of medieval Gothic style into the modern era gave rise to a literary genre that combines horror and romance with surreal phenomena. Gothic literature, which first appeared in England in the late 18th century with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), is a novel style of European Romanticism that evokes a sense of mystery in a medieval setting. The name was inspired by the deteriorated atmosphere of medieval architecture. Since then, the term “Gothic” has been applied to a non-medieval type of novel that creates an atmosphere of darkness or horror, depicts terrifying, eerie, and melodramatic violent events, and uncovered abnormal psychological states (Dayoung Ryu, 2016, p. 141).

Gothic, as literature, is not recognized as an independent genre, but rather as a sub-genre of the Romantic movement similar to Dark Romanticism, reflecting its irrational and macabre nature. Gothic literature is considered the shadow of the era of rationalism and intoxicating romanticism owing to sublime aesthetic and uncertainty beyond human control. Anonymous ghosts and the rise of dark sensibility also serve as conduits for the oppressed voices of social others or marginalized people. Particularly, Gothic romances by British female authors, such as Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, and Ann Radcliffe, enjoyed explosive popularity as a space to express individual inner and social problems from a woman's perspective, transcending women’s status and limitations at that time. Ironically, male Gothic writers focused on the sensationalism of the supernatural and irrational world from an anti-enlightenment perspective, whereas female Gothic writers emphasized reason and sensibility to demonstrate a rational attitude toward surreal phenomena. Thus, it is also recognized as a subdued genre that re-evaluates women’s rational ability or sensibility.

From the reader’s perspective of Gothic literature, enjoying Gothic novels reflects the excessive psychological tension that a civilized and industrialized society demands from individuals. Meanwhile, it can be considered an expression of the dual desire to resist the oppression imposed by such social institutions and ethics, while preserving the existing order (Heekyung Nah, 2006, p. 163).

3. Contemporary Gothic as a Cultural Phenomenon

Today, Gothic is not confined to literature or art but also extends to a subculture. The 19th century Goth culture, which emerged as an expression of individual alienation and anxiety caused by rapid industrialization and social development, was absorbed by the Gothic culture in the late 20th century, thus giving rise to the Goths, a subculture that pursues death, fear, and darkness. Goths’ attitudes, which are primarily driven by the younger generation, have been interpreted as resistance from the

older generation and the established culture, which have manifested their social and political characteristics. Contemporary Gothic culture has permeated nearly all mass media, irrespective of mainstream and non-mainstream status, and is being combined with various forms of popular art, such as Gothic horror, science fiction films, and Gothic animation. Moreover, this culture is incorporated into consumer goods and is commercialized. Additionally, annual events with a death theme, such as Halloween and Day of the Dead, have become "festivals" that transcend ethnicities and regions, allowing people to experience and enjoy Goth culture more intimately in real life.

III. Gothic and Dance by Era

1. The Middle Ages: Dance of Death

In Western dance history, dances that reflect Gothic themes, such as death, fear, and anxiety, have a long history dating back to ancient times and continuing to the present day. When the Gothic style emerged in the Middle Ages, dance was inextricably linked with the church. In the early days, dance was used positively for church worship and doctrine praise, but it rapidly declined as it became a secular object under the influence of the Stoic school of asceticism and Neoplatonic Christian viewpoint.

Nevertheless, the *Danse Macabre*, which aroused social awareness, can be linked to the Gothic style's psychological tendency. The original performers of *Danse Macabre*, which originated in France and spread to Germany, Spain, England, and other parts of Europe, were victims of epidemics, wars, or famines. This performance can be considered a procession of religious ceremonies commencing at the church, travels around the castle or village, and returns to the tomb of the church (Myeongju Lee, 2011, p. 49). This dance, which allegorically depicts the universality and inevitability of death, that "All are equal in death," has become a significant historical source from which the form and meaning of the dance can be inferred by using the dance as a motif in various art fields, such as literature, art, and music.

Horror and vanity, which is a mixture of the living and the dead and the present and the afterlife in the Dance of Death, are intertwined with the Gothic emotion, and are often expressed in stories or paintings featuring skulls, thus awakening the universality of death. *Memento Mori*, meaning "Remember you must die," and *Vanitas*[2], meaning "vanity, emptiness, nothingness, worthlessness," a religious view projected in the dance of death, continued after the Middle Ages, and became a popular style of painting. It is also the basis of the 19th century Goth culture that pursues death and darkness.

2) The term originally comes from the opening lines of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'

2. 19th-Century Romantic Ballet and Narrative

The Gothic narrative evokes irrational emotions, such as fear, darkness, and fantasy. It corresponds to the concept of Romantic ballet in that it stimulates various irrational tendencies through unclear or non-existent substance. The longing for the past and the unknown that characterized Romanticism precipitated a preference for the sacred taste of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, romantics were dissatisfied with the Middle Ages and shifted their attention to antiquity or even earlier prehistoric times. Here, ancient times refers to the "golden age" in which God, humans, and nature coexisted in harmony from ancient times beyond classical antiquity. This desire to discover the origin and archetype of the human spirit influenced romantics to collect and compile myths, folktales, legends, and folk songs. Romantic works, such as Grimm brothers' fairy tales and E.T.A. Hoffmann's fantasy novels, surpass realistic probabilities and incorporate Gothic descriptions. This can be an example of a romantic attitude expressed in the form of fairy tales or novels written with a particular audience in mind.

Gothic can be found in 19th-century ballet, which was most popular under the influence of the Romantic art movement. The spirit of the melodrama, which is the predecessor of ballet, was strongly rooted in Gothic novels, a popular literary entertainment in the latter half of the 18th century. These novels—characterized by violence and terror—had a penchant for an idealized image of the Middle Ages, for the pointed and arched grandeur of the Gothic, with gloomy castles in moonlit nightscapes (Sorell, 1981, p. 218). Since then, independently produced ballet pieces have been based on ballet librettos inspired by romantic literature, such as those written by Charles Nodier, Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, and E.T.A. Hoffmann, and have represented a passion for mysterious and fictitious beings, such as fairies and ghosts.

Also reflected in the quasi-medieval settings of numerous Romantic ballets was the passionate interest in history that had driven the Gothic revival in architecture and to what was known in France as the "troubadour style" in painting and sculpture (Au, 2002, p. 45). For example, as in *Robert le Diable* (1831), the eerie atmosphere of a moonlit medieval monastery amid tombs and the depiction of the ghosts of dead nuns captured the dance mood popular at the time (Ibid., p. 49). The origins of the iconic Romantic ballets *La Sylphide* (1832) and *Giselle* are also linked to Gothic elements in that they deal with supernatural beings and fantastic creatures based on folktales and legends. However, when used in ballet, the Gothic tendency in the original sources is somewhat weakened or adapted, and it appears in a way that emphasizes femininity.

Giselle's birth is linked to an ancient yearning for Romanticism. Théophile Gautier's *Giselle* is based on the legend of Slavic Wilis from Heinrich Heine's *De l'Allemagne* (1835). Heine describes the legend of the Wilis in his book, a collection of old German stories:

> It is of Slavonic tradition. The Wilis are affianced maidens who have died before their wedding-day, but are unable to rest peacefully in their graves, since they could not satisfy during life their passion for dancing. Hence at midnight they rise up and gather in bands on the highway, and lure any young man they meet to dance with them until he falls dead.
>
> Attired in their bridal dresses, with garlands of flowers on their heads, and shining rings on their fingers, the Wilis dance in the moonlight like the Elves; their faces although white as snow, are beautiful in their youthfulness. they laugh with such a deceptive joy, they lure you so seductively, their expressions offer such sweet prospect, that these lifeless Bacchantes are irresistible (Beaumount, 1969, p. 19).

The dance historian Cyril W. Beaumount quoted Heine's original text in his book, *The Ballet Called Giselle* and claimed that Wilis are a product of the Gothic tradition—like a ghost killed by a faithless lover and a vampire that sucks the life force of a living man (Ibid.). Although Gautier was extremely captivated and allured by Wilis, he perceived that the image of an evil and gloomy woman was inappropriate for the book's Romantic ballet libretto. Therefore, Gautier completed the libretto for *Giselle* by combining the image of the dead girl depicted in Victor Hugo's Gothic poem, *Les Fantômes* and the legend of Wilis. Finally, the 19th century *Giselle* portrayed an epic of love by illuminating the surreal Gothic sensibility separated from the present with the majestic sublime and mysterious spirituality; it remains a beloved representative work of Romantic ballet to this day (Youngjae Roh, 2021, p. 30).

Russian Imperial ballet in the late 19th century, which was followed by the Romantic ballet, is also predominantly rooted in fantasy, such as fairy tales or folktale scripts; however, the Gothic did not receive significant attention, considering that dance mostly involves the development of splendid forms and techniques.

3. Contemporary Use of Gothic Narrative

The connection between Gothic and dance, which existed in the Middle Ages, is not a trend of a particular era; it can be found up until the 21st century and is produced in more diverse forms and with a wider variety of content in modern times. Dance scholar Susan Manning says, "The traditional dance of death exists outside chronological and geographical coordinates" (Carter ed., 2003, p. 266). Works that personified death through skull makeup or props are not confined to the Middle Ages but can be found in all eras and locations. For example, the dance of death in the early 20th century became a motif for various works reflecting the horror of war and the confrontational political situation by German expressionist choreographers, such as Mary Wigman's *Totentanz (Dance of the Dead)* and *Hexentanz (Witch Dance)*, and Kurt Jooss's *The Green Table* (Bruhm, 2019, pp. 221–222).

Furthermore, when considering *Giselle*, a relationship with the Gothic is found even in contemporary ballet. As mentioned earlier, the Gothic nature of ballet is rooted in Romanticism; since then, Russian classical ballets, such as *Swan Lake* (1877) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), have also included Gothic tendencies through the depiction of evil or architectural styles and stage sets. Today, most contemporary ballets using Gothic style or Gothic narratives that induce horror are largely reinterpreted 19th century classical ballets, such as *Giselle*, or newly created ballets based on Gothic works of other genres. In the case of full-length narrative ballets, numerous ballet librettos are based on fairy tales or original Gothic literature—for example, Matthew Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty* (2012), subtitled "*A Gothic Romance*," *Red Shoes* (2016); Liam Scarlett's *Frankenstein* (2016); and David Nixon's *Dracula* (2005). The contemporary ballet *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort* (*The Young Man and Death*) by Roland Petit is famous for personifying death in the *Vanitas* style. The film *Black Swan* (2010), which won Natalie Portman an Academy Award for Best Actress, was conceived as a psychological thriller by embedding her swan character with a Gothic image.

IV. Akram Khan's *Giselle*, Reimagined

1. Background of the Creative Work

The meeting between Akram Khan, who has predominantly pursued his own identity as a contemporary choreographer, and Tamara Rojo, the artistic director and prima ballerina of English National Ballet, who wanted to innovate the traditional ballet company, provided the opportunity to move the background of *Giselle*, an "eternal classic" with which no one disagrees, into the 21st century. Akram Khan's *Giselle* retains the original theme of love and betrayal as well as the main characters, while relocating the medieval class conflicts and gender inequality in the original work to the issue of migrant workers and wealthy landlords in the contemporary globalized industrial structure. *Giselle* is a work that combines the vocabulary of ballet, classical Indian Kathak, and contemporary dance in an extremely modern and realistic setting. However, this study focuses on the archetypal sense of the classic *Giselle*, that is, the consistent presence of Gothic imagination.

Gothic is an extremely "emotional power." The bizarre and ruthlessly cold Gothic legend that became *Giselle*'s motif is transformed into a beautiful Romantic ballet that endures in the audience's memory. However, Akram Khan recalls the primal and fundamental shock of the power of Gothic and portrays "the poetic meditation on the theme of the original, filtered through the experience of refugees and displaced people" (Sulcas, 2019).

Since its inception, Gothic has persisted and endured for centuries. The Gothic tendency has always existed in some form in numerous arts and literary works, including dance, and has been recreated

repeatedly. *Giselle* was also inspired by medieval-themed sources of romantic literature. The Gothic nature of the original *Giselle* is the main emotion of Act 2, that is, Giselle's afterlife. Interestingly, "*ballet blanc* (white ballet)," a representative aesthetic principle of Romantic ballet, is also closely related to this Gothic emotion, not merely "pure white" beauty. This emotion is directly related to the feeling of "sublime," the main axis of Gothic aesthetics, because the execution of the white Wilis' *corps de ballet* surpasses traditional and classical beauty to create a marvelous image that entails horror as well as delight.

In his book *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke, an 18th-century British political thinker, defines "terror is a source of sublime" as "it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke, 1968, p. 39). In the 19th century, romantics particularly paid attention to the emotion of delight connected to fear and horror outside the tradition, and this new and innovative double emotion is developed as a sublime emotion in terms of aesthetics (Yeagyung Kim, 2018, p. 403). In the next section, I will analyze Akram Khan's *Giselle* in detail and discuss the Gothic tendency and imagination in the piece, paying special attention to the Gothic nature of the original *Giselle* and its modern interpretation and expansion.

2. Act 1: The Community of the Outcasts in Dark

Although the Gothic tendency of the original *Giselle* stems from the presence of Wilis in Act 2, Akram Khan's 21st century *Giselle* is characterized by the presence of Gothic tendency throughout the piece. Act 1 of the original libretto exhibits a time and spatial background of the medieval Rhine River, but only few medieval-style devices exist that stimulate Gothic emotions in the characters and background. In the end, only Act 2, inspired by Heine's romantic writing, depicts a Gothic tendency, and the contrast with the realistic life of ordinary people in Act 1 further emphasizes the Gothic nature of the Act 2.

However, Akram Khan's *Giselle* begins in a dark and closed atmosphere, juxtaposing the peaceful, everyday life in Act 1 as the poverty of foreign migrant factory workers (The Outcasts). The cast and theme of the work are similar to the original. However, the time is set to the present, a globalized modern society; the setting is a closed garment factory and the identity of the protagonist Giselle is transformed into a migrant worker (Table 1). Khan was inspired by the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh, which killed over 1,000 textile workers, most of whom were women (Program Notes). Meanwhile, the landlord, who owns factories, is still wealthy, unlike the migrant workers, and appears in "exaggerated and ridiculously" luxurious clothes that the workers have been producing, which reflects a modern class society.

<Table 1> Change of Characters in the Original *Giselle* vs. Akram Khan's *Giselle*

Character	The Original *Giselle* (1842)	Akram Khan's *Giselle* (2016)
Giselle	Peasant Girl	Garment Factory Worker (Outcast)
Albrecht	Duke	A Member of Landlords
Hilarion	Gamekeeper	Fixer (Trickster)
Bathilde	Prince's Daughter	A Member of Landlords
Myrtha	Queen of the Wilis	Queen of the Ghost of Factory Workers
Wilis	Ghosts of Maidens in a Legend	Ghosts of Factory Workers

When the curtains rise, a high wall filled with palm prints is firmly established behind the stage. This massive moving wall, which was designed by Tim Yip—known for his vivid work on Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*—is the only stage set with a symbolic and metaphorical significance throughout the entire work. The gigantic concrete textured wall, which conveys a feel of tremendous struggle, reminds the audience of the several walls of global division that are filled with pain, grief, and suffering—such as the Berlin Wall, the Wailing Wall, and the US–Mexico border. Metaphorically, it could be "the parallels with today's political preoccupations—whether in the United States or Brexit-era Britain (Sulcas, 2019)." The wall in Act 1 seemingly emphasizes the division and disparity of wealth by symbolically separating the two worlds of modern society, which are sharply contrasted by borders, class, and status. Migrant workers at garment factories who have lost their jobs attempt to jump over the wall to obtain greener pastures, but the wall, already marked with handprints, implies the impossible reality. While the first scene of the original depicts the simple but peaceful daily life of ordinary people in the Rhineland, this work expands the narrative by emphasizing the appearance of others who are isolated in the dark from the start. As he spends time with Giselle and her coworkers, a group of migrant workers who are isolated from the rest of society, Albrecht develops a secret crush on Giselle and conceals his true identity. At this time, Hilarion, a "fixer" or "trickster" who lives while serving the landlords, takes advantage of the two worlds and endeavors to expose Albrecht's identity.

The Gothic is a mode of cultural production that pertains to the exploration of otherness and uncanny familiarity and is, therefore, focused on construction and dissolution of boundaries, the obsession with death, violence, and the grotesque. It is often set in claustrophobic spaces, either real or imaginary (Bloom, 2020, p. 8). The dark and bluish lighting emphasizes the constrained spaces and visually reveals the disillusionment and despair of the workers by directing the group dances that often cross the stage as dark as shadows.

Act 1 has a similar love story as the original, but the dance is mostly filled with newly created movement vocabulary. Classical floor patterns similar to the scene of the grape harvest festivities in

the original can be seen in the group dances and fighting scenes of outcasts, but this *Giselle* is far from the joy and lightness of those festivities. Instead, choreographer Akram Khan's experience of Kathak and contemporary dance combines with the steps of ballet to create a different energy and wild expressions; especially in the fight between Albrecht and Hilarion and the scene of the workers' group, these new movements are greatly appreciated. Giselle's "Mad Scene," which is the highlight of Act 1 and depicts the moment of betrayal and catastrophe, has great appeal owing to the collaboration with the group. While the original story focuses on individual sadness, here, the large circular group dance in a whirlwind actively participates in Giselle's dramatic situation, which represents Giselle's state of anger and despair. Another notable point here is that the mother's role (Berthe) in the original is absent in this version. In the original work, Giselle, who goes mad because of disbelief regarding Albrecht's betrayal, falls into her mother's arms, thereby arousing the audience's sympathy; however, in this work, her anger is subjective and terrifying. With Giselle's death, a blood-red light comes on the dark and rough wall, reminding the audience of the symbolic existence of the wall once again, and Act 1 comes to an end.

3. Act 2: The Ghost Factory Awaken

As I mentioned earlier in the section of Romantic Ballet, Act 2 is a part of the original *Giselle* that contains the roots of Gothic. Considering the spatial background of the ghost character and the graveyard in the original work, Act 2 commences with a rather realistic struggle. When the curtain rises, Albrecht is seen arguing with the aristocratic and popinjay landlords on the other wall, the landlords' space. Interestingly, in Act 1, the massive wall symbolically separating status and class is transformed into a set of two floors displaying their own space, striking a contrast between the two worlds, and still explicitly emphasizing the solidity of their class. Albrecht, who lost Giselle, expresses his fury toward them, refuses to connect with them, and then walks into the dark space inside the wall where the workers are isolated.

Act 2 in the original, which begins in the shabby cemetery where Giselle is buried under the moonlight, is filled with a cold and grotesque atmosphere due to the group of Wilis, the spirits of dead virgins. Meanwhile, in Act 2 of Akram Khan's *Giselle*, the main location is a broken-down "ghost" factory. In the original version, Wilis are a surreal Gothic character handed down orally in Slavic legends; however, here, the choreographer sets Wilis as the spirit of migrant female workers who died owing to harsh conditions and extreme labor as beings from reality. That is, they are defined as "ghosts of factory workers who seek revenge for the wrongs done to them in life."

As in Act 1, the giant wall is the only stage set in Act 2, symbolizing the space of a factory—an abandoned and concealed space where dead female workers are buried and haunted. The confrontation between Hilarion descending from a high wall and Wilis makes the audience imagine

this ghostly space as an underworld or an afterlife.

Myrtha, the queen presiding over dead workers' souls, appears with a bamboo stick, and breathes her movements into Giselle's droopy body, drawing her into Wilis' world. These miserable souls correspond to the original Wilis, and they are completely different from the original white Wilis. Here, Wilis do not appear as an "alluringly beautiful" ghost in a white veil and dress, but with long messy hair and achromatic old clothes, thus adding to the grotesque appearance of a persecuted worker.

Like Myrtha, the Wilis all wield a long bamboo stick and use it to show various powerful movements. The sticks are used as a tool to awaken the dead body like what Myrtha does, sometimes as a weapon to brutally execute Hilarion, who came down to the underworld to seek forgiveness. With the stick, the Wilis unleash the brutality of inflicting violence by vengefully hitting and stabbing, imprisoning the target to be executed like a caged animal, and finally killing the target. Additionally, the bamboo stick relates to the souls' identity and is also a double instrument reminding the audience of the pre-industrial past. That is, the sticks refer to "the structure of the hand loom and early weaving machines, and to traditions of skilled craftsmanship before the advent of factory piece work" (Program Notes). Compared with the original work, this 21st century *Giselle* can be perceived as maximizing "collective women's anger" regarding social inequality and economic struggle, setting aside traditional ballet's splendid beauty. The work retains the original theme of love and betrayal, but in representing this theme, a strategy has been chosen to arouse anxiety and fear regarding people-to-people and people-to-huge society.

The final duo of Giselle and Albrecht lasts longer than it did in original; notably, the scene where *Giselle* chooses forgiveness instead of the Wilis' brutal revenge and farewell is well portrayed. Particularly, the choreography that combines classical ballet and contemporary movement maximizes the charm of creative works by creatively depicting excellent partnering and emotional sympathy. Finally, Giselle disappears into the darkness within the wall, in front of which Albrecht is left alone, caressing it. In contrast to the blood-red lighting at the end of Act 1, the wall with black palm prints is more clearly exposed with bright lighting; here, the curtain closes, reminding the audience of existence's symbolic meaning yet again.

V. Conclusion

This study aimed to illuminate Gothic imagination and its meaning in Akram Khan's *Giselle*, a contemporary reinterpretation of *Giselle*, a masterpiece of Romantic ballet. To this end, first, I explored the concept of Gothic and its historical overview, and the Gothic tendency revealed in the history of dance. Thereafter, I analyzed the theme and narrative device of Akram Khan's *Giselle* and

illuminated the meaning of the resurrection and utterance of ghosts represented through dance.

The body of a dancing ghost is a site where the invisible becomes visible, and the suppressed silence is replaced by synesthetic language. Consequently, the Gothic nature of *Giselle* in the 21st century more actively represents contemporary anxiety and fear by replacing the hidden "facts" and "truth" that must be told with ghosts, focusing on lending the oppressed other an opportunity to speak. Like Gothic novels in the 19th Century, postcolonial Gothic writers use the power of the Gothic, and its revelations of dark hidden secrets, legacies, and hauntings in the present, to expose—and, thereafter, transcend beyond—oppressive misrepresentations of people, places, and cultures historically constructed as different, "othered" in colonial and imperial contexts. (Bloom, 2020, p. 105). The realism (or current issues) inherent in the revival of this Gothic, or the "postcolonial" perspective that illuminates others' voice, has been seemingly influenced by a confluence of a choreographer, an immigrant, and an artistic director interested in women's issues as an active prima ballerina.

Regarding the minimal stage set, Akram Khan's *Giselle*, which symbolically shows the narrative of absurdity accumulated from the past through a giant moving wall, can also read traditional elements in modern Gothic literature. In Gothic texts, the past is a site of terror, of an injustice that must be solved, and an evil that must be exorcised (Spooner, 2006, p. 18). Thus, like the mythical horror inherent in ghost stories in many city legends, such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, this *Giselle* reveals accumulated and realistic social issues while grotesquely dealing with the moral corruption, which was tolerated in the globalized urban space, and the ghosts of others.

Akram Khan's choreography, which combines the vocabulary of traditional Indian dance Kathak and classical ballet, is useful for facilitating a distinctive means of expressing anger in the work. Akram Khan, who has already achieved international success by combining contemporary and Asian dances, respects the conventional lines and flexibility of classical ballet in *Giselle*. Simultaneously, he develops contemporary movement vocabularies that embody anxiety and tension through the elaborate hand and feet gestures derived from Kathak, the flexible pelvis and contraction/release of the upper body derived from contemporary forms, wide floor patterns, and frequent changes in the height of movement. The development of such a complex vocabulary solidifies the sublime feeling of the Gothic aesthetic by providing a majesty and unique energy to traditional storytelling.

Additionally, this reimagined 21st century *Giselle* emphasizes the process leading to tragedy by excluding most lyricism of the original, especially in Act 1, and focuses on the intense emotions in the tragedy by spreading Gothic horror throughout the entire piece. Rather than the refined image of classical ballet, the choreographic composition, which predominantly comprises primitive intensity and dark and provocative expressions, utilizes the "politics of contradiction" inherent in the Gothic tradition along with horror. Thus, the Gothic style allows for voicing a kind of encroached contradiction, and the contemporary form of dance vocabulary necessitates a more active attitude

toward facing and listening to the problem.

Focusing on Gothic imagination and its emotional power reflected in the contemporary *Giselle*, which was originally born in the Romantic era, this study sheds light on the Gothic origins and its significance of dance in connection with Gothic studies which were rarely dealt with in previous dance studies. By providing a novel academic perspective on the study of dance, I believe that this research will help readers better appreciate and comprehend the wide range of Gothic-inspired dance works.

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Abstract

Resurrection of Ghosts

– Gothic Imagination in Akram Khan's *Giselle* –

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This study aims to illuminate Gothic imagination and its meaning in the British choreographer Akram Khan's *Giselle* (2016) focusing on Gothic traditions and revival. I explore the humanistic meaning of Gothic in *Giselle* and closely analyze contemporary applications of Gothic through a multicultural approach. To this end, first, the study examines the cultural origins of medieval Gothic and the transition process of Gothic by era. Then, it discusses the Gothic images and choreography that appear in the history of Western dance from the Middle Ages to the present. Lastly, this study rereads Gothic imagination in Akram Khan's *Giselle* from a post-colonial perspective focusing on the "utterance of others" and "social inequality." As a results, the Gothic nature of Akram Khan's *Giselle* allows for voicing a kind of encroached social contradiction, and the contemporary form of dance vocabulary requires a more active attitude toward facing and listening to the problem.

Keywords: Akram Khan(아크람 칸), *Giselle*(지젤), Gothic(고딕), Romantic Ballet(낭만발레), English National Ballet(영국국립발레단)