



Dying Swans and Madmen

Ballet, the Body, and Narrative Cinema

by Adrienne L. McLean

DESCRIPTION

From mid-twentieth-century films such as *Grand Hotel*, *Waterloo Bridge*, and *The Red Shoes* to recent box-office hits including *Billy Elliot*, *Save the Last Dance*, and *The Company*, ballet has found its way, time and again, onto the silver screen and into the hearts of many otherwise unlikely audiences. In *Dying Swans and Madmen*, Adrienne L. McLean explores the curious pairing of classical and contemporary, art and entertainment, high culture and popular culture to reveal the ambivalent place that this art form occupies in American life.

Drawing on examples that range from musicals to tragic melodramas, she shows how commercial films have produced an image of ballet and its artists that is associated both with joy, fulfillment, fame, and power and with sexual and mental perversity, melancholy, and death. Although ballet is still received by many with a lack of interest or outright suspicion, McLean argues that these attitudes as well as ballet's popularity and its acceptability as a way of life and a profession have often depended on what audiences first learned about it from the movies.

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Adrienne L. McLean is a professor of film studies at the University of Texas at Dallas. She is the author of numerous books, including *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (Rutgers University Press).

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