Swans and *Swan Lake*: from Tchaikovsky to Matthew Bourne

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Abstract

This thesis looks into how the swan in Pyotr Tchaikovsky's first ballet, *Swan Lake*, can be seen as a symbol of the impossible love the composer felt as a homosexual man in nineteenth century Russia. The connection has often been described in Tchaikovsky's symphonic writing, namely Symphony No. 6 (*Pathétique*) which should warrant similar research in his ballets. Research in the twentieth century suggesting Siegfried's homosexuality and Tchaikovsky's relationship with the ballet contribute to this hypothesis, but most notable is Matthew Bourne's 1995 production of *Swan Lake* in its use of male swans. This reimagining of the ballet was a starting point to reassess what was within in Tchaikovsky's original production.

We start with an exploration of the swan's place in culture and then using evidence from different productions of the ballet, as well as evidence about the composer, including his own letters, look at the multiple connections between the composer and his ballet. The connection between Tchaikovsky's life and the ballet suggest that qualities of the composer are projected on to the production through the similarities between Tchaikovsky and Siegfried and viewing the swan as a symbol of a love that they cannot have.

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INTRODUCTION

In the twenty first century, over a hundred years after its conception, it is difficult to find a ballet company that has not performed *Swan Lake*. It is a work that has received great acclaim, described by the Royal Opera House as "one of the most loved of all ballets".[1] *Swan Lake* was Tchaikovsky's first ballet and premiered in 1877. The original production with choreography by Julius Reisinger was not an unmitigated success, but was sufficient to encourage Tchaikovsky to continue writing ballets in the form of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Nutcracker*. Tchaikovsky's decision to compose a ballet was indeed an experiment, as Tchaikovsky himself described, "I have taken on this task partly because of the money, which I need, partly because I have wanted to try my hand at this sort of music for a long time.[2] The *Swan Lake* still frequently performed today is the version choreographed by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov which premiered in 1895, two years after Tchaikovsky's death.

Behind the story and choreography about the trial between good and evil, there is more to *Swan Lake* than initially meets the eyes, especially in terms of relationships with Tchaikovsky's own life and situation. Furthermore, and to a greater extent than his other ballets, these relationships can be grouped and associated with a particular icon, namely the swan. For example, there is evidence to suggest that the decision to write a ballet about swans relates specifically to Tchaikovsky and his situation. Tchaikovsky was a gay man in a world that did not accept homosexuality. The culture and ideas surrounding swans render them a symbol of impossible love, the overarching theme of *Swan Lake*. The cultural image of the swan has resonated throughout history; many of its ties to mythology, royalty, love, and death increase its significance to this ballet.

This thesis will explore how the swan becomes a symbol of impossible love in *Swan Lake*. It is a symbol of what the protagonist cannot have and can be related both to Siegfried, the protagonist in the ballet, and Tchaikovsky himself. Connections between Siegfried and Tchaikovsky have been explored in previous research and suggest that both saw the swan as a symbol of unattainable love. In addition, the idea of the doomed hero can be traced through the romantic ballet, especially *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*. From this perspective it can be seen that *Swan Lake* is both of its time, and innovative in its connections with its creator.

[1] Royal Opera House. "Swan Lake by Anthony Dowell." Roh.org.uk. http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/swan-lake-by-anthony-dowell (accessed 31st March 2016)
[2] Alexandra Orlova, *Tchaikovsky: A Self Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46.

Connections between events and situations in Tchaikovsky's life and his works have been more thoroughly explored for the symphonies than the ballets. In letters to Nadezhda von Meck, he describes the programme of his Fourth Symphony, in particular the finale: "Fate reminds us once more of its presence. Others pay no heed to us. They do not spare us a glance, nor stop to observe that we are lonely and sad".[3] By making reference to himself, the impression is given that Tchaikovsky addressed his own melancholy in the work as well as the relationship between himself and fate. This is further evident in the Sixth Symphony, especially in light of Tchaikovsky's description: "this programme is so intensely personal that as I was mentally composing it on my travels I frequently wept copiously".[4] The relationship between Tchaikovsky and his symphonic writing, the Symphony No. 6 (P*athétique*) in particular, is explored in depth by Timothy Jackson.

The *Pathétique* Symphony was described by the composer himself as having a sincere and autobiographical programme that he would not reveal.[5] Tchaikovsky dedicated it to his nephew Vladimir "Bob" Davidov; Tchaikovsky gave special attention to his nephew and sources suggest he was having a romantic relationship with him. Tchaikovsky wrote to Modest: "Bobik is playing an important part in my life here. We are great friends and for the first time he is returning my feelings. At first he only accepted my love but now he seems to respond to it".[6] Davidov would have been thirteen at the time. David Brown also discusses Tchaikovsky's written exchanges with Bob, claiming: "such words seem less those of an uncle to his nephew than of a husband to his wife or mistress".[7] We accept that there would not be any documented evidence of a romantic relationship between the two, however it is clear that Tchaikovsky had feelings for his nephew that were more intense than that of an uncle, also naming Davidov as his heir when he died. Jackson builds on this, quoting Tchaikovsky's "'unmentionable' love for Bob" as the programme and message he wanted to reveal to the audience in the *Pathétique* Symphony.[8]

[3] Modest Tchaikovsky, *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (London: J Lane, 1906), 277.
[4] Orlova, *Self Portrait*, 399.
[5] Timothy Jackson, *Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.
[6] Piotr Tchaikovsky, *Letters to his Family: An Autobiography*, trans. Galina von Meck (London: Dobson, 1981), 306.
[7] David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study Volume IV The Final Years (1885-1893)* (London: Gollancz, 1991), 384.
[8] Jackson, *Symphony No. 6*, 1.

Tchaikovsky's death shortly after the premiere of the work and rumours of suicidal motives, according to Jackson: "made homosexual passion acceptable … the symphonic program could become a homily for the expiation of homosexual 'guilt' through suicide".[9] This led to the *Pathétique* Symphony being interpreted as a musical suicide note for Tchaikovsky, his homosexuality explaining his unhappiness. Jackson explores this theme in his analysis of the symphony, amongst other things identifying the use of tritonality with homosexuality in the context of deviance from the social norm.

For Jackson: "Tchaikovsky *predicts* that the relationship with Bob will have dire consequences. Whether the lovers are destroyed by others or others become instruments of their own deaths remains undetermined".[10] Tchaikovsky's love for Davidov cannot happen, then, and their impossible love leads to their demise, as reflected in the symphony. What is more, Vladimir Davidov shot himself in 1906, thirteen years after Tchaikovsky's death which could conceivably be related to his love for the deceased composer. It is surprising in his discussion of the biographical nature of the *Pathétique* programme that Jackson does not make much of a connection to *Swan Lake*. As we shall see, the notion of impossible love in *Swan Lake* resonates with Tchaikovsky's life, as in the Sixth Symphony. Just as Tchaikovsky had a personal and decidedly biographical relationship with his symphonic writing, so he had a similar relationship with *Swan Lake*.

My thesis will focus on the version of *Swan Lake* with choreography by Petipa and Ivanov that premiered in 1895. Although Tchaikovsky had little direct involvement with it himself, it is the version that is still performed today. It was very successful and it is the production that most influenced subsequent choreographers such as Matthew Bourne. Although many ballets underwent changes in plot and structure after their initial premiere, the two nineteenth-century versions of *Swan Lake* kept the same plot structure. *Swan Lake* tells the story of Siegfried, a prince who is told he needs to marry, after which he goes hunting with his friends and meets Odette. Odette explains that she is bound by the evil Rothbart's curse that can only be broken when someone pledges their love to her. Siegfried does so and the act continues with a series of *pas de deux* and ensemble dancing from the corps de ballet. The next act returns to the court: Rothbart arrives with Odile who bears an uncanny resemblance to Odette and Siegfried mistakenly announces his love for her, sealing Odette's fate. The final act returns to the lake-side where Siegfried rushes to console Odette. The lovers choose to die together, ending Rothbart's curse and uniting them in death.

[9] Jackson*, Symphony No. 6*, 2.
[10] Ibid., 4.

Tchaikovsky was a keen letter writer, many letters having been preserved by his brother, Modest in *The Life and Letters of Tchaikovsky* and Galina von Meck, Tchaikovsky's grand-niece, in *Letters to his Family: An Autobiography*. In the book, *The Life and Letters of Tchaikovsky*, there are only nine mentions of *Swan Lake,* including discussion of why it was chosen as a subject and its lack of success in 1877. This is an unfortunate state of affairs: it would have been useful to know what Tchaikovsky's feelings were about the production and specifically the swan as a symbol. Given the theme of impossible love, it is not inconceivable that Modest suppressed letters that he thought might damage Tchaikovsky's reputation.

Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* will be discussed in chapter four, and mentioned in chapter three as well. This production from 1995 directly addresses the theme of the swan and impossible love and received considerable acclaim. His use of male swans in place of the female corps elicited attention, obviously changing the nature of the relationship between Siegfried and the swan and rendering it a homosexual one. This makes Bourne's production highly significant in the context of a consideration of *Swan Lake* and Tchaikovsky's own life. Bourne discussed the influence of the swan in a number of interviews, which help to demonstrate the impact that it has on the production.

Bourne's production encompasses the underlying themes of *Swan Lake* of impossible love, life and death, and reality and fantasy. Compared to the other interpretations that will be discussed in this thesis, it is both the closest and the most distant from the nineteenth-century *Swan Lake*: the narrative of the ballet remains identifiable but it flips the nineteenth-century ballet on its head by altering the relationship between the two protagonists to a homosexual one. Exactly one hundred years after Petipa's reimagining of Swan Lake, Matthew Bourne was the first choreographer to make a direct connection between the *Swan Lake* ballet and homosexuality. Although theories have been advanced that Siegfried had homosexual traits, and productions hint at it, including John Neumeier superimposing the homosexual King Ludwig II onto the character Siegfried, it was Bourne who changed the gender of the swan to create an undeniably gay Prince. Bourne claimed he wanted the ballet to be a sexual drama; although he stated that he did not want the ballet to be labelled 'The Gay Swan Lake',[11] it is this simple but distinct change of emphasis that makes his production so pertinent to my work. The homosexual relationship allows the nineteenth-century production to be assessed from the perspective of Siegfried perhaps not searching for a heterosexual partner after all.

[11] Alastair Macaulay & Matthew Bourne, *Matthew Bourne and his Adventures in Dance* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 193.

Matthew Bourne also discusses the decision to project the ideas of impossible love on to his production, describing the swan as a symbol of freedom.[12] His initial idea for the production was a corps of male swans, which evolved into the current plot about a Prince (Siegfried) who could not be the person he wanted to be because of his position in the monarchy.[13] As Bourne explains: "I consciously wanted to to make *Swan Lake* about a man – very much a man, who happened to be a prince as well – who had trouble expressing himself and couldn't, for whatever reason, be who he wanted to be. He was also a needy person: that was the centre of it. And the swan was a symbol of what he needed – rather than some tragic figure who's been magically transformed into something else – I didn't feel it needed that".[14] The idea of impossible love and its connection to homosexuality are therefore an important component of Bourne's production.

First in my thesis I turn to the cultural history of the swan to explain what Tchaikovsky and the creators of *Swan Lake* may have thought of the creature. Chapter two examines swans, *Swan Lake*, and homosexuality through the lens of nineteenth-century ballet and nineteenth-century Russia. This is followed in chapters three and four by studies of the 1895 Petipa production and Matthew Bourne's 1995 production of *Swan Lake* respectively. We look at how the swan is used in relation to Siegfried and the creators of the ballet in order to scrutinize the concept of impossible love. The final chapter examines the role of swans in two other productions of *Swan Lake* by John Neumeier and Mats Ek.

[12] Ibid., 227.
[13] Ibid., 193.
[14] Ibid.,219.

CHAPTER 1 SWANS

Before looking at Tchaikovsky's ballet, the swan's place in cultural history across Europe needs to be examined, in particular its use as a symbol of qualities ranging from power to beauty, including in mythology, poetry, and art. The swans in the ballet are probably influenced by many of these historical swans.

Beginning with Greek mythology, Leda, Queen of Sparta, was seduced by the god Zeus in the guise of a swan. The legend continues that Helen, who later became Helen of Troy, was born from the egg. The bird can therefore be seen as a divine creature as it was the one chosen by Zeus, the ruler of the Olympic gods and god of the sky. Other than the tale of Leda, the swan is also related to the god Apollo and Aphrodite, whose chariot was drawn by swans. This further suggests the royal status of the bird and its high place in Greek mythology. The swan's association with other gods suggests the guise of a swan as a logical choice for Zeus to entice Leda. The bird implied majesty and power perhaps making it recognisable for mortals. In addition, the story has some similarities to the nativity story, where a woman becomes pregnant by God. The legend of *Leda and the Swan* has been immortalised over the years in painting and poetry, inspiring many different perspectives.

While mythology describes Zeus-Leda as a seducing, William Butler Yeats's poem in 1923 treats it more like a rape in the graphic language used. In this situation, the bird in the same story can be seen as a "divine" creature that Zeus, the most powerful god, decided to become. For Yeats, the bird does not contain the majesty we would associate with Zeus. It does however display the power of the bird. Language such as "the great wings beating still / Above the staggering girl" and "mastered by the brute blood of the air" indicates force that would cause pain and fear for Leda.[15] In this situation she is being raped. Perhaps different views on women from different time periods are expressed. In Greek history it could have been seen as an honour to have had the relationship with Zeus. However, thousands of years later in the twentieth century, power for women as individuals, particularly in the era of suffrage, and disapproval of adultery make us inclined towards the view that an act of rape is taking place here.. Yeats is clear about the frightened position of Leda, describing her "terrified vague fingers" and her "helpless breast".[16] He in no way glorifies the story and the resulting poem is shocking.

[15] William Butler Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Papermac, 1982), 241.
[16] Ibid., 241.

Figure 1 - Correggio *Leda and the Swan*.[17]

The negative situation described by Yeats is not obvious from paintings of the myth. Correggio's, for example, aligns with myth (see Figure 1). The painting seems to normalise the encounter, especially with the two other swans pictured and the lack of reaction from any other people. Leda's lack of reaction could also relate to the perceived role of women in the sixteenth century as the bearers of children. The position of the swan in front of her preserves her modesty and the position of the swan's neck in front of her body appears graceful; as in mythology, events are glorified. But, it is also true that a graphic picture of this event may have been considered inappropriate in the era of Renaissance art, the majestic and divine symbolism connected with the swan being fortified as a result.

Another famous painting is *The Threatened Swan* (1650) by Dutch painter Jan Asselijin, where the bird fiercely defends its nest from a dog (see Figure 2). Centuries later, the painting was thought to be a political statement, the swan representing the Dutch statesman Johan de Witt protecting the country.[18] Compared to Correggio's painting, the swan's animal nature is communicated here, defending its young. The wings are spread, feet in a wide stance, and the beak open suggesting a hissing directed at the dog. It is an image of power and defence rather than beauty.

[17] Antonio da Correggio, *Leda and the Swan*, 1531-32, oil on canvas, 75.20 in. x 59.84 in., Staatliche Museen, Berlin.
[18] "The Threatened Swan, Jan Asselijn, c. 1650," Rijksmuseum, accessed 1st March 2016, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search/objects?q=swan&p=1&ps=12&ii=0#/SK-A-4,0

Figure 2 - Jan Asselijin *The Threatened Swan*.[19]

The portrayal of swans as majestic creatures has been further established in England and Wales with the tradition of Swan Upping. It dates to the twelfth century when the Crown claimed ownership of all mute swans. The swan was considered a valuable animal and regularly traded between noblemen, giving it a dignity and nobility also connected with the divine image of the swan portrayed in Greek mythology.

It is thought that narrative ideas from *Swan Lake* derive from a German fairy story. Beaumont, for example, described "the episode of the huntsman about to shoot a swan which changes into a beautiful maiden" as both a Russian and South German folk tale.[20] The connection to Russia suggests that Tchaikovsky and the production cast of *Swan Lake* would have been familiar with this folklore. There are also accounts quoted by Beaumont that indicate further links between Tchaikovsky and the theme of swans. Tchaikovsky's nephew, Ivan Lvovich, recorded that Tchaikovsky composed a small ballet for him and his siblings in June 1871 titled *Ozero Lebedeye*, The Lake of the Swans. He further recalls the "charming melody of the swan's song" which in the first production of *Swan Lake* became the famous theme of Odette.[21]

[19] Jan Asselijin, *The Threatened Swan*, 1650, oil on canvas, 1.44 m x 1.71 m, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
[20] Cyril Beaumont, *The Ballet Called Swan Lake* (Alton: Dance Books, 2012), 39.
[21] Ibid., 10.

In another Germanic legend with a link to swans, the God Odin presides over Valhalla, the dwelling place of the dead. After battles, he and his spirits, the Valkyries, picked the deceased warriors of their choice. The Valkyries would take on the guise of a swan, their garments with swan feathers allowing them to fly. If a maiden was seen with a human without her swan guise, she would become mortal. The majestic appearance of the swan, representing a powerful warrior associated with death, thereby comes to the fore. Another Wagnerian connection is found in *Lohengrin* where the eponymous hero travels on a boat pulled by a swan.

Lohengrin struck a chord with the King of Bavaria, Ludwig II, often known as the Swan King or the Mad King of Bavaria. Ludwig loved the swan for its "beauty and regal aloofness" and association with his family's retreat in Hohenschwangu.[22] Ludwig's love of swans was shown by the pictures of them that he owned and the sealing of his letters with a swan and cross.[23] Watching Wagner's operas brought his love of swans to life, leading to a personal friendship with the composer. Ludwig's strong feelings about *Lohengrin* are demonstrated by him arranging a performance with an actor dressed as the character *Lohengrin*, pulled across a lake by an artificial swan accompanied by an orchestra playing the relevant passages from the opera.[24] Later in his life, Ludwig used to dress up as *Lohengrin* himself.[25] The royal and prestigious status of swans here is magnified by King Ludwig II's obsession as well as his status. King Ludwig II and his swan obsession also influenced the character of Siegfried in productions of *Swan Lake*, as will be discovered in later chapters. The relation between King Ludwig II and swans brings the swan and its imagery and symbolism into the same century as Tchaikovsky.

The final association with swans is the concept of a swansong, the idea that before dying a swan, mute all of its life, would sing a beautiful melody. It can also be used to denote the final actions of someone's career. This can be dated as far back as Shakespeare, including to act five, scene two of *Othello*, where Emilia says to Othello, "Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan. And die in music".[26] This idea was explored by Simon Keefe in his book on Mozart's Requiem. The Requiem was commissioned by Count von Walsegg in memory of his wife in the summer of 1791. Mozart wrote it until his death in December 1791 and it came to be considered his swansong, especially in the nineteenth century. In the reception of the Requiem, myth mingles with facts, including the idea that Mozart wrote the Requiem swansong for himself. One outcome is that

[22] Christopher McIntosh, *The Swan King* (London: Robin Clark, 1986), 15.
[23] Ibid., 15.
[24] Ibid., 65.
[25] Ibid.
[26] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Alice Walker and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 115.

people in the nineteenth century heard the work biographically, the tale of Mozart's death therefore adding to the melancholy of the music.[27]

Keefe suggests that the fictional and non-fictional accounts both contribute in positive ways to the reception of Mozart's Requiem.[28] This can also be related to the reception of Tchaikovsky's death. Many conspiracy theories circulate about the causes of Tchaikovsky's death; biographies declare that Tchaikovsky drank untreated water in a cholera affected area, but also that Tchaikovsky took poison in a suicide attempt. Alexandra Orlova discusses information passed on to her that Tchaikovsky was faced by a court of honour formed by Nikolay Jacobi who were concerned about the attention Tchaikovsky gave to his nephew; homosexuality would have disgraced not only Tchaikovsky's family and reputation but the School of Jurisprudence where he studied, leading the court of honour to instruct the composer to take his own life.[29] Tchaikovsky scholar David Brown also claims cholera is unlikely as Tchaikovsky suffered a much shorter incubation period compared to what would be expected from cholera.[30] However there are issues of reliability with this source of information, not only is it second-hand information, but there is, unsurprisingly, no documented evidence, in diaries or otherwise, of this court of honour taking place. As Brown explains, we may never discover the truth behind Tchaikovsky's death.[31] However, in a similar way to Mozart, this situation may contribute positively to ideas about Tchaikovsky, in particular, the biographical significance of homosexuality in the context of his musical works.

In ballet, the idea of swansong is especially prevalent in Michel Fokine's *The Dying Swan*. Choreographed for Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova in 1905, just ten years after *Swan Lake*, the short piece uses *Le Cygne* from Saint-Saens's *Carnival of the Animals*. This became an important dance for Pavlova; at the end of her life she asked for her swan costume. *The Dying Swan*, even from the title, clearly draws on the idea of swansong. It is also likely, of course, that both *Carnival of the Animals* and *The Dying Swan* were influenced by Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. The rippling quavers in the piano part gives the impression of water and the high pitched cello part, written in the tenor clef, has a long line and legato melody which when coupled with the sonorous tone of the cello, create a beautiful sound. The music rises and falls, especially in the ascent to a held climax, from which the music descends in pitch. In a way, this could be related to the rising and

[27] Keefe, *Requiem*, 21.
[28] Ibid., 9.
[29] Orlova, *Self-Portrait*, 412.
[30] Brown, *Final Years*, 481.
[31] Ibid., 485.

falling of the chest of a dying animal. The solo is clearly about the idea of death as this bird tries to escape its fate before slowing as it passes away.

In related fashion Maria Goltsmann suggested that the swan is a mediator between the world of the living and dead, as well as the worlds of the real and fantastic that permeate the romantic ballet.[32] Goltsmann compares the dying swan to the outstretched arms on the cross, both the biblical cross and a crossroads between life and death.[33] This further demonstrates the swan's connection with both life and death, which will become important as the role of the swan is discussed in the ballet *Swan Lake*. As we shall see, links with nobility, mythology, beauty, sex, romance, life and death inform our understanding of *Swan Lake* and relationships forged between the themes of the ballet and experiences of its composer.

[32] Maria Goltsmann, "Symbols of the Soviet Empire: Dying Swan," *in Place and Location,* ed. Eva Näripea et al. (Tallinn: The Research Group of Cultural and Literary Theory, 2008): 311.
[33] Ibid., 312.

CHAPTER 2, PART I BALLET IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

To place *Swan Lake* in context, it is important to consider where it is situated in ballet history. As in music, the terms classical and romantic were commonly used to describe nineteenth-century developments in ballet. Whereas the classical movement focussed on form and structure, the romantic looked towards plot and story. Susan Au described classical ballet as: "a concept of choreography that stresses formal values such as clarity, harmony, symmetry and order. The academic ballet technique is paramount…although classical ballets are not entirely devoid of emotional content, this aspect usually takes second place".[34] In particular the importance of emotion in the Romantic ballet is emphasised.

In the nineteenth century femininity dominated the ballet: it was ethereal, expressive, and the advanced techniques supported the female dancer.[35] As a result ballet became the province of women. In the romantic ballet, as Knight explains: "the themes or stories of ballets were most often concerned with supernatural creatures such as water-sprites or sylphs, and the leading female dancers were consequently required to express the utmost delicacy and lightness in their movements, hardly seeming to touch the earth at all".[36] Women, as sylphs, swans, and ethereal creatures, occupied the air. The image of an ethereal creature became a frequent plot device, as she appeared not to be human, as a delicate creature often with wings. Scholl suggested that "the success of romantic ballets like *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* ensured their imitation: the martyred sylphs of the 1830s and 1840s are replicated endlessly in Petipa's ballets".[37] These canonic works in the ballet repertoire appeared at the start of the nineteenth century and served as a model for ballet of that era. As Gadan explained, the female lead was the "absolute Mistress of the Romantic ballet".[38]

The invocation of supernatural creatures is also supported by the development of the pointe shoe allowing women to rise prominently on their toes. Marie Taglioni danced *La Sylphide* in 1832 using pointe shoes, and is sometimes credited as one of the first dancers to use them. This 'blocked' toe allowed women a further image of weightlessness. By rising on to pointe, the dancer's leg is elongated, creating a perfect line from their thigh to the tip of their toe. The act of

[34] Susan Au, *Ballet and Modern Dance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 62.
[35] Lynn Garafola, "The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet," *Dance Research Journal* 17 (1985): 36.
[36] Judyth Knight, *Ballet and its Music* (London: Schott, 1973), 27.
[37] Timothy Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet* (London: Routledge, 1962), 6.
[38] Francis Gadan, *A Dictionary of Modern Ballet* (London: Methuen, 1959), 97.

rising on to pointe puts the body's weight on to each big toe (sometimes supported by a male dancer) suggesting that they are airborne. This weightless image suited the Romantic ballet as the feminine subjects of the ballet were so frequently winged creatures, wilis, sylphs, fairies, and in our case swans.

The choice of the swan for Tchaikovsky's first ballet already emerges as noteworthy. Swans were considered beautiful, especially in the context of their relationship with mythology and gods (see chapter one). Their white colour and the fact they are birds with wings further added to the ethereal climate of the ballet. The choice image of weightlessness can be manipulated using a creature that was intended to fly, similar to the sylphs used in *La Sylphide*. And the white of the swan, a colour that suggests purity, is also associated with marriage, the traditional colour of a wedding dress. The plot of many romantic ballets involves a man and woman overcoming obstacles to their union; wedding and court dances are a common occurrence.

It can also be noted that swans have much in common with the classical ballet dancer. A swan appears beautiful on water, yet beneath the surface paddles frantically to stay afloat. This can be said for the female ballet dancer who has to work incredibly hard in her training and in her execution of moves to continue to look flawless. Even in the ballet itself, much movement occurs with the feet; the female dancer is often on pointe executing a tiny number of steps to move across the stage. This is evident in Odette's first entrance on to the stage in Ivanov's choreography of act 1 scene 2 executing a number of small steps while the arms create wing-like movements. In the ethereal climate of the Romantic ballet, where women's feet barely touch the ground, this supports the use of a winged creature as the subject of the ballet.

In the choice of supernatural creatures, it can also be related that the ballet of the nineteenth century was a turn away from realism. Oleg and Scholl explained that: "the grand ballets of Petipa and the swan scenes of Ivanov in *Swan Lake* demonstrated the possibility of an idealized look at the world that did not yield to analysis from a realistic, revolutionary-democratic point of view".[39] This suggests that the ballet was moving away from the realism expected in other art forms, even compared with other forms in music. The 'mighty five' were Russian composers who sought to develop a Russian musical tradition and the realism can be seen, for example, in the psychological realism of Modest Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*.

[39] Oleg Petrov and Timothy Scholl, "Russian ballet and its place in Russian artistic culture of the second half of the nineteenth century: The age of Petipa," *Dance Chronicle* 15 (2008): 48.

The focus on realism can also been seen in the Russian literature of the nineteenth century. Brown noted that at the end of his life, the only person that overtook Tchaikovsky in fame was Leo Tolstoy,[40] the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* which are both examples of fiction focussing on realism. Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, for example, documents the public and private lives of fictional individuals during Russia's wars with Napoleon. Russian literature's focus on realism can be further seen in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Oleg and Scholl named the two authors, amongst other culture figures including the 'mighty five', as figures who "looked fixedly at reality, attempting to capture the epoch in the sights and sounds they were given".[41]

Amongst this focus on realism, Volkov explained Laroche's view on Tchaikovsky's decision to compose a ballet: "the composer wanted to test himself in a fantastical musical drama, to get away from opera's realistic limitations … In that magical world there was no room for words, it was pure fairy tale expressed by pantomime and dance … Tchaikovsky could not stand realism in ballet".[42] Laroche believed it was this escape from realism that drew Tchaikovsky to the ballet. Warrack also stated this, describing opera as an expression of life and ballet as a relief from life.[43] This could be reason, perhaps, for Tchaikovsky's feelings to be projected on to the swan. In an art form that was seen to be far away from realism, no one at the time would judge that the ballet could have been a projection of Tchaikovsky's inner feelings. This is unlike his symphonic writing where the autobiographical programme and connection to his nephew in the Sixth Symphony clearly created the connection that Tchaikovsky was homosexual, as previously discussed. In this way, the ballet was both an escape from the theme of realism, but also an escape from the real life in which Tchaikovsky could not have the life that he desired.

Marius Petipa

The Russian ballet in the latter half of the nineteenth century was dominated by Marius Petipa, a French ballet dancer and choreographer, who conveyed the ideas and traditions of the French ballet school. Beaumont points out that, in particular, he brought the "purely dance element" to

[40] Brown, *Final Years*, 482.
[41] Oleg and Scholl, "Russian Ballet and its Place," 41.
[42] Solomon Volkov, *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky: Conversations with Balanchine on his Life, Ballet and Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 112.
[43] John Warrack, *Tchaikovsky Ballet Music* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1979), 13.

the Russian ballet which showcases the acrobatics and technical virtuosity of the classical ballet.[44] When choreographing in Russia, Petipa produced over fifty ballets.

With Petipa's move from France to Russia ten years after *La Sylphide*'s premiere in Paris, he brought the ideas of the romantic ballet with him to Russia. Although Petipa favoured classical ballet, many prominent themes in *Swan Lake* in particular align with the Romantic Movement, including ideas of love and betrayal. The romantic ballet began in the west earlier than it did in the Soviet ballet as can be seen by the influence of two French ballets (*La Sylphide* in 1832 and *Giselle* in 1841) before the Russian developments including the Tchaikovsky ballets at the end of the nineteenth century. *Swan Lake* ultimately encompasses both classicism and romanticism. As Garafola explains: "although the romantic ballet had already identified the ballerina with the feminine mystique, emphasising her elusiveness and ethereality, Petipa added technical brilliance to the formula".[45]

Petipa's ballets invariably tell the story of two lovers, often focussing on the female and the choices she has to make. According to Garafola: "Many were romances touched with old-fashioned melodrama, with heroines who died of broken hearts or suffered in some way before wedding their rightful mates".[46] This fits the romantic ballet ideology in highlighting the female dancer, who often gives her name to the ballet title, such as: *The Daughter of Pharaoh* (1862), *La Bayadère* (1877), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), and *Raymonda* (1898). From a different perspective Burt suggests that in ballet love stories such as *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*, *La Peri* and *Swan Lake* the male protagonist has to choose between the woman he ought to settle with and the other who is "more romantic and unattainable",[47] in effect explaining how male decisions in romantic ballet have an impact on plots.

Looking through Petipa's work, it is clear that his ballets take love stories from the viewpoint of both genders. Many focus on women's perspectives, for example in *La Fille du Pharon*, where Aspicia has to choose between Ta-Hor, the man she recently fell in love with, and the King of Nubia who her father would prefer her to marry. Elsewhere, Petipa viewed the love story from the male perspective. The story of *La Bayadère* looks at Solor and his oscillation between Nikia and the beautiful Gamsattu offered to him by the Rajah. *Swan Lake* is obviously

[44] Cyril Beaumont, *Complete Book of Ballets: A Guide to the Principle Ballets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London: Putnam, 1949), 476.
[45] Lynn Garafola, "Russian Ballet in the age of Petipa," in *Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, ed. Marion Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 154.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995), 59.

relevant here with Siegfried choosing Odette rather than a woman recommended by the Queen, and then making the mistake of choosing Odile. However, it is generally the stories told from the male perspective that fall under the heading of romantic ballet. This could be explained by the successes early on. As Scholl suggests: "the success of romantic ballets like *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* ensured their imitation: the martyred sylphs of the 1830s and 1840s are replicated endlessly in Petipa's ballets".[48] The achievement of these ballets will have created a standard expectation for plot structure which went on to influence many of Petipa's ballets. Although the love stories and choices made by characters were told from the perspectives of both genders, the male-orientated ones are the best known. *Giselle*, *La Sylphide* and *Swan Lake* are all canonic works in the ballet repertoire.

Swan Lake exemplifies the romantic ballet under Petipa with its focus on women and female dancing and with the swan, the symbol of impossible love, becoming the highlight of the story. As Burt explains, men had to choose between the 'right' person and the one who is "more romantic and unattainable".[49] In this context it is important to consider connections between *Swan Lake*, *La Sylphide*, and *Giselle* as three ballets that are also tragedies. Although they are based on the romantic model, each has a tragic outcome and promotes the theme of impossible love.

<u>*Giselle* and *La Sylphide*</u>

Focussing on *Giselle* and *La Sylphide*, which Scholl refers to as Petipa's inspiration, brings to light the dainty figure as a ballet type. Giselle as a heroine becomes a wili: the spectre of a young, female virgin who dies before her wedding day who will rise from her grave to haunt any men who pass by. As a corps of wilis, this ballet emphasises feminine qualities, not to mention foregrounding an association between the colour white and wedding dresses. In *La Sylphide*, the female corps are a corps of sylphs, namely mythological winged creatures. In *La Sylphide*, the sylph avoids James's embrace but continues to entice him until a fatal move from him results in her wings being removed and ultimately causes her death. This highlights the fragile nature of the sylphs that Scholl believed to be one of the reasons for them becoming an important theme in romantic ballet. In addition, the nature of these two creatures demands a female corps de ballet.

[48] Scholl, *Petipa to Balanchine*, 6.
[49] Burt, *Male Dancer*, 59.

In the context of the classical or romantic ballet, *Swan Lake* is not unlike the other ballets in terms of its underlying story: a man falls in love with something he cannot have. As well as *La Sylphide* telling of James ripping the wings from a sylph, *Coppelia* concerns a man who desires the appearance of a doll. When we consider the story of *Giselle* however, it is interesting to note the gender reversal: the woman kills herself when she finds out the true identity of the man. This relates back to Burt's idea that in ballets such as *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*, *La Peri,* and *Swan Lake* the male protagonist has to choose between the woman he ought to settle down with and the other who is "more romantic and unattainable".[50] *Swan Lake*, where Siegfried is genuinely tricked by the appearance of Odile and rather than coming off wiser loses his life in the tragedy, is somewhat different, but ultimately a variation on the same theme.

Marian Smith discusses the changes in choreography that occur in *Giselle* over the years after its premiere. It is interesting to note the influence Smith believed Tchaikovsky's ballets had on later productions of *Giselle*. She describes the grand *pas de deux* from the finale of *Giselle* as: "familiar to us from the Tchaikovsky ballets", where the development of the plot was not the primary consideration.[51] Smith relates this particularly to the highlighting of the female dancer,[52] an idea we have discussed in this chapter. This suggests that although *Swan Lake*, and Tchaikovsky's other two ballets, were influenced by *Giselle* in terms of plot and style, his ballets clearly themselves influenced *Giselle* productions later in the nineteenth century.

As mentioned earlier, the thread that Scholl used to connect *Giselle*, *La Sylphide*, and *Swan Lake* was tragedy, the "martyred sylphs".[53] However, it could only have been coincidence that *Swan Lake* fitted Petipa's standard plot choice as this ballet's plot and characters were set in the 1877 choreography by Reisinger. Perhaps this is one reason why Petipa chose to re-choreograph it. In any case, the tragic nature of the ballets highlights impossible love. For Tchaikovsky at least, it could have become a symbol of something more than just the plot of the ballet, looking towards aspects of his life.

[50] Burt, *Male Dancer*, 59.
[51] Marian Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of 'Giselle'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 197.
[52] Ibid., 198.
[53] Scholl, *Petipa to Balanchine*, 6.

Impossible Love

According to Beaumont: "*Swan Lake* resembles *La Sylphide* and *Giselle* in that it is based upon a romantic conception leading to an emotional conflict, which springs from a mortal man's love for a fantastic being, the balance swinging between a love returned and a love frustrated."[54] The male character has to choose between their obvious or pre-determined choice and: a sylph, a village girl, a peri, or a swan princess.

Scholars have debated the idea that these ethereal creatures may be a symbol for something more that the romance of the ballet, namely homosexual love. In his book A *Queer History of the Ballet,* Stoneley suggests that *Swan Lake* and other similar works may be "a projection or point of identification" for men and women not featured in the ballet.[55] He also discusses *La Sylphide* as a ballet where the man wants something he cannot have, asking: "How might the sexual dysphoria and impossible loves of Romantic ballet have served as a projection for other confused souls and their impossible loves".[56] Nowhere in Europe was homosexuality publically or legally acceptable during the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by the trial of Oscar Wilde in the United Kingdom. In Russia, the law forbidding men to lie with other men was passed in 1832. Homosexual love, in short, was closeted.

The relationship between ballet and homosexuality also enters the equation. Stoneley opens *A Queer History of the Ballet* with an acknowledgment that ballet and homosexuality were connected in the twentieth century, describing this situation as "both 'common knowledge' and 'hushed up'".[57] In particular it relates to the work of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in the early twentieth century, especially as Diaghilev was open about his homosexuality and relationship with Nijinsky. Given the laws and attitudes towards homosexuality in the nineteenth century, as will be discussed shortly, openness was uncommon. However, fears of homosexuality can be related to the move away from male dancing in the nineteenth century.

While Marius Petipa clearly favoured female dancing, there are additional reasons for re-orientating ballet away from men. According to Siegmund, the male physique, especially that of a working class man, would not be ideal in this new ballet.[58] Men did not possess the grace to dominate it; as a result he was best placed to lift the female ballerina and remind the audience of

[54] Beaumont, *Ballet Called Swan Lake*, 55.
[55] Peter Stoneley, *A Queer History of the Ballet* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2.
[56] Ibid., 34.
[57] Ibid., 1.
[58] Gerald Siegmund, "Turning into Subjects: The Male Dancer in Romantic Ballet," in *Performing Masculinity*, ed. Rainer Emig & Antony Rowland (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 30.

her fallen nature. If a man had the physique of a female, he would effectively lose his manhood.[59] Siegmund's observations are relevant to major ballets of this period, all of which (including Petipa's ballets and the works that inspired him) focus on the female dancer. The marginalisation of male roles at this time is further suggested by Garafola who discusses the onset of the *danseur en travestie*, where women would take on the male parts.[60]

Even today, associations are made between male dancing and homosexuality. The film *Billy Elliot*, where a young boy chooses to take dance lessons rather than boxing, and is subjected to negative reactions from his family, is a case and point. After Billy's grandmother says she used to do ballet, his father retorts, "All right for your Nana, for girls. No, not for lads, Billy. Lads do football... or boxing... or wrestling. Not friggin' ballet".[61] The film is set in 1984, almost one hundred years after the highpoint of romantic ballet, but clarifies that people associated ballet with homosexuality. In Billy's own words: "Just because I like ballet doesn't mean I'm a poof, you know".[62] Although fictional, this idea is backed up by scholarly work. Mennesson found that men in the ballet had to fight the stereotypes of being feminized and labelled gay by taking part in "highly gendered and heterosexualized behaviors…in both their body movement and social patterns.[63] This reveals how fear of an association with homosexuality is often still relevant in the twenty-first century.

In considering de-emphasising male dancing and the fear of homosexuality in the nineteenth century, Stoneley suggests that the ballet was "a projection or point of identification",[64] thereby implying that the audience could identify with the theme and characters of ballets. Writing on *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*, and *Swan Lake*, Stoneley states that the impossible love that features in them could be something that homosexuals outside of the ballet were able to relate to. As he explains: "how might the sexual dysphoria and impossible loves of Romantic ballet have served as a projection for other confused souls and their impossible loves?".[65]

[59] Ibid., 32-3.
[60] Garafola, "Travesty Dancer," 35.
[61] *Billy Elliot*, DVD, directed by Stephen Daldry (UK: Universal, 2000).
[62] Ibid.
[63] Trenton Haltom & Meredith Worthen, "Male Ballet Dancers and their Performances of Heteromasculinity," *Journal of College Student Development* 55 (2014): 761.
[64] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 22.
[65] Ibid., 34.

Even if ideas of forbidden love did permeate ballet, it would be impossible to tell from reviews, given the status of homosexuality at the time. However, many writers have commented on the possibility of Siegfried being gay. It is highly unlikely that the ballet creators were purposely trying to convey a representation of this particular impossible love at the time. Homosexuality is an important subtext in *Swan Lake* nonetheless, as we shall see.

CHAPTER 2, PART II HOMOSEXUALITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

When considering Tchaikovsky as a homosexual and its implications for *Swan Lake*, it is important to situate homosexuality in Russia in nineteenth-century context. Research reveals little public information about homosexual relationships, particularly before the 1917 revolution. Healey describes the prevailing Russian attitude: "Soviet and Western accounts of Russia's history of gender and sexuality have all but ignored dissenting genders and desires".[66] Russian laws incriminated acts of homosexuality. Peter the Great imposed a military prohibition in 1716, extended to civilians in 1832 in Article 995 forbidding men lying with men and threatening punishment of exile to Siberia. The legal threat of exile would certainly have been motivation enough for homosexual relationships to go underground.

Information on homosexual relationships before the Russian Revolution generally comprises discussion of a culture of favours between masters and their servants.[67] According to Stoneley the upper class man in the late nineteenth century "recognise himself – as having consistent and particular desires that set him apart".[68] He goes on to identify the choice of a lower class man as having, "fewer implications for his social authority";[69] upper class men take advantage of their position and lower class men try to improve their standing or gain money. A specific example of this is the culture in male bathhouses in the late nineteenth century where the attendants would serve the clientele.[70] Healey claims that this homosexual culture cannot be confused with homosexuality in the modern sense; in this period men exploited their position rather than having a relationship as they would have done with a woman.[71] These examples serve as evidence of underground homosexuality in Russia.

[66] Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.
[67] Ibid., 48.
[68] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 51.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 27.
[71] Ibid., 22.

Homosexual acts thus appear to have happened behind closed doors, concurrently with marriage, and included occasional "gentlemen's mischief".[72] There is no information at all about any man openly having a single homosexual relation with a significant other as in the western culture of today. As Healey claimed: "Soviet hostility toward and incomprehension of male homosexuality grossly distorted much biographical scholarship when Russian chauvinism felt itself threatened by evidence of same-sex desire".[73] It was a "popular and elite indulgence of masculine sexual release" also suggesting that the female prostitute alternative as an "outlet for male "lustfulness"" could be expensive or have issues with disease.[74] The invocation of female prostitution here is interesting as it suggests that most men in this culture may not have been 'full-time' homosexuals. The private acts were often acts of pleasure, a hobby almost, that were entirely separate from public features of the family home.

A clear impression is given, then, of the world in which Tchaikovsky lived. Stoneley describes this subculture as a "fearful culture" as men were being publically tried for acts of homosexuality.[75] Even after Tchaikovsky's time, Stalin linked homosexuality with fascism and believed that the eradication of homosexuality would lead to the eradication of fascism.[76] Banting et al go on to explain that, "It is surely not accidental that the recriminalisation of homosexuality in Russia came soon after Hitler's accession to power in 1933"; this was Stalin's attempt to exercise control over physical processes, as well as validation of medical opinion that presented homosexuality as an illness to be treated.[77] It is unsurprising that a culture of fear brought a new set of rules imposed by each new government and ruler and provides evidence as to why writing at the time would not create a connection between the ballet, themes of impossible love and homosexuality. Nevertheless, modern perspectives on the life and ambitions of Pyotr Tchaikovsky provide an opportunity to relate his experience to the ballet *Swan Lake* and potentially to show what the swan meant to him.

[72] Ibid., 48.
[73] Ibid., 3.
[74] Ibid., 48.
[75] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 52.
[76] Mark Banting et al., "Sexuality," in *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Catriona Kelley & David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 319.
[77] Ibid., 322-4.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

How does Tchaikovsky fit into the scenario outlined above? Although Tchaikovsky never spoke of it himself using the term, many scholars have discussed his homosexuality. The leading Tchaikovsky scholar David Brown, for example, described how the "'vices' of which Tchaikovsky wrote were homosexual ones".[78] The correspondence with Nadezhda von Meck and with his brother Modest together make this point. The references are allusive and understandably so, since any direct references to homosexuality would not make it to print, or could have made life dangerous for him had the letters fallen into the wrong hands.

> [Tchaikovsky to Modest] I have decided to get married. It is unavoidable. I must do it, not just for myself but for you [Modest] as well, and for Tolya, and Sasha, and all those I love. For you particularly! You too, Modya, should think about this carefully. [Your inclinations and your duties as a tutor] cannot be reconciled. During this period I have changed many of my ideas about myself, about you and about our future. The result of all this thinking is that from now on I will make serious preparations for entering into a lawful marriage alliance, regardless of the identity of the other party. I think that for both of us our dispositions are the greatest and most insuperable obstacle to happiness and we must fight our natures to the best of our ability.[79]

Modest was also a homosexual and this letter makes connection between their "dispositions". Tchaikovsky himself related his inclinations to overwhelming melancholy, thinking that marriage to someone of the opposite sex would solve these problems, his homosexuality thus representing his "obstacle to happiness". He also suggests that Modest should not admit to his relationship with Kolya, referring to the homosexuality as "that".

Tchaikovsky apparently did not want the kind of master-servant homosexual experience outlined above. Stoneley claimed that he was searching for a proper relationship: "he yearned for something different. He wanted a full and successful experience of romantic love. At the same time, however, he seemed unable to accept that such a thing was possible for a homosexual".[80] From the earlier quote, it seems that Modest was more open about his homosexuality than his brother. Perhaps Tchaikovsky's fame as a composer made him less conducive to openness. Nonetheless, the impossible love in *Swan Lake* could still relate to Tchaikovsky's own desires.

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[78] David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study: Volume 2, The Crisis Years (1874-1878)* (London: Gollancz, 1982), 103.
[79] Orlova, *Self-Portrait*, 57.
[80] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 56.

In 1877, Pyotr Tchaikovsky was married to Antonina Miliukova, a decision made out of necessity rather than love. As Tchaikovsky described in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck:

> I have got married in accordance with the dictates not of the heart but of some incomprehensible conjunction of circumstance … To pretend for the whole of one's life is the greatest of torments … I began passionately, hungrily to long for death.[81]

It is clear that Tchaikovsky married Antonina out of a sense of duty and to silence rumours of his homosexuality. After the marriage, as Tchaikovsky's life began to fall apart, his brothers implored him to seek a divorce from Antonina. Warrack stated the grounds for divorce they came up with were adultery on Tchaikovsky's part.[82] But Antonina responded that she could not deal with the shame of adultery as an excuse. From Tchaikovsky's perspective it would have been significantly worse to admit his homosexuality than to confess to adultery.

Tchaikovsky's unhappiness culminated in a suicide attempt in 1877: "I sought death; it seemed to be the only way out".[83] He chose to immerse himself in the Moscow River in an attempt to catch pneumonia and die; he could tell his friends that he fell into the river and no one would identify it with suicide.[84] This shows the extent to which Tchaikovsky felt trapped in a country that simply did not accept life-long relationships between men.

Tchaikovsky's powerful melancholy can be related to the impossible love in the ballet *Swan Lake*. In the romantic ballet, the male protagonist must choose between his obvious choice and the romantic, unobtainable one (which for Tchaikovsky is represented by a relationship with a man). It is interesting to consider the extent to which Tchaikovsky himself embodies the underlying theme of impossible love in the romantic ballet. Volkov described ballet as an escape for Tchaikovsky from his unhappy life, "tormented by his homosexuality".[85] Yet so much of his first ballet seems to relate to his own life. Tchaikovsky could have regarded himself as a doomed hero unable to live the life that he desired. *Swan Lake* revolves around the doomed fate of both Siegfried and Odette: Siegfried struggles between his private and public life accidentally swearing love to the wrong woman; and Odette cannot escape her enchanted life as a swan after being betrayed. It is unfortunate that none of Tchaikovsky's letters remain about the writing of *Swan Lake*. Given the parallels between life and work, it is strange, perhaps, that he did not mention

[81] Orlova, *Self-Portrait*, 70.
[82] John Warrack, *Tchaikovsky* (London: Hamilton, 1973), 120.
[83] Orlova, *Self-Portrait*, 72.
[84] Ibid., 73.
[85] Volkov, *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky*, 14.

them to his family, given his keen exchange of letters with his brothers and Nadezhda von Meck. Or Modest may have destroyed any such letters, needless to say.

Another connection between *Swan Lake* and Tchaikovsky's homosexuality involve the relationship with his mother. Tchaikovsky's mother passed away when he was fourteen years old and many scholars believe that he never recovered from it. For Sporton: "Brown (1992) strangely insists that Tchaikovsky was homosexual only because no woman could ever live up to the model of his mother, though this seems a contrived attempt to mitigate Tchaikovsky's misery".[86] In the context of impossible love, though, there is a strong connection to *Swan Lake*. In each production of *Swan Lake* analysed in my thesis, an unusual connection between Siegfried and his mother is identified. Having already mentioned the extent to which Tchaikovsky sees himself as a doomed hero, is it likely that the trauma caused by losing his mother also relates to the idea of impossible love. Brown could be right that initial loss in Tchaikovsky's life could have affected him for the rest of his life, providing a stimulus for the swan in his first ballet to symbolise impossible love.

[86] Gregory Sporton, "The Ballet Called 'Siegfried': The Enigmatic Prince of *Swan Lake," New Theatre Quarterly* 24 (2008): 288.

CHAPTER 3 TCHAIKOVSKY AND *SWAN LAKE*

Swan Lake was Tchaikovsky's first ballet and, whether or not he had much impact on the plot, parallels exist between his life and that of Prince Siegfried. As Tchaikovsky himself admitted, he felt the need to get married. This would solve any problems with homosexuality and presumably prevent others from associating him with it. In the same way, Prince Siegfried is told by his mother that he needs to marry for noble and court purposes. In a letter to Klimenko dated May 1877, Tchaikovsky wrote: "I am very much changed especially mentally since we last met. There is no trace of gaiety and love of fun left in me. Life is terribly empty, wearisome and trivial. I am seriously considering matrimony as a lasting tie".[87] A common sentiment exists, then, for Siegfried and Pyotr Tchaikovsky: the need to marry against their desires. Brown discusses this letter in relation to his friend Vladimir Shilovsky marrying at the start of 1877, which disrupted the relationship between the two men.[88] Tchaikovsky probably felt the pressure of others around him conforming into relationships; realising he was different in wanting something else will have isolated him, likely increasing his melancholy.

Similarities between Tchaikovsky and Siegfried can be seen in the narrative of *Swan Lake*. The ballet starts with much merriment, but quickly turns to the main theme of the plot, the Queen telling Siegfried that he must marry. Siegfried, at the end of this interaction with his mother, chooses to go hunting with his friends, implying rebellion against this action, where he then meets Odette. Beaumont suggested that "he [Siegfried] is unlike most young men of his age in that he evinces little interest in the opposite sex".[89] Similarly Sporton explained that his ambivalence towards the situation can be related to the need to marry.[90] Siegfried, in the first act, is shown drinking with his companions and not making a particular effort with anyone presented by his mother. In the 1877 version of the ballet in the first act this is demonstrated by Siegfried's friend Benno dancing with two girls while Siegfried chooses to sit out. In the context of the village dances that are orientated towards a folk style, this causes partnering issues that implicitly make a statement about Siegfried's intentions. Early in the ballet, then, a parallel can be drawn between Tchaikovsky and Siegfried: both men want something other than the love they are expected to find in marriage.

[87] Tchaikovsky, *Life and Letters*, 202.
[88] Brown, *Crisis Years*, 140.
[89] Beaumont, *Ballet Called Swan Lake*, 71.
[90] Sporton, "Ballet Called Siegfried," 287.

It is interesting in an age where ballet was conceived by the choreographer that *Swan Lake* should reflect so much of Tchaikovsky's personal situation, more so than any of his other ballets. Given the prejudice against homosexuality, Tchaikovsky likely was not wanting to make an open claim about his impossible love as he did in his Sixth Symphony. Whether connections were intentional or not, Sporton explains how the "conflicts of Tchaikovsky's life have a clear parallel in Siegfried's doomed attempts to avoid his fate".[91] He further suggests that the "absence of a named, responsible librettist leads to the conclusion that Tchaikovsky himself may have had a guiding hand in the story.[92] The connection between Tchaikovsky and Siegfried is an important one to investigate as their shared qualities give them both a reason to look to the symbolic qualities of the swan. Tchaikovsky and Siegfried both have a need to marry against their wishes, solidifying the swan as a symbol of impossible love.

The Swan

Siegfried's identification as a character who is trying to escape makes it possible to look at potential meanings for the swan. Just as the ballet was an escape for Tchaikovsky, according to Volkov,[93] meeting Odette was an escape for Siegfried. Siegfried only met Odette in the first place because he chose to go hunting with his friends after the announcement that he must choose a partner in marriage. The two characters unite over their woes, namely Odette's curse and Siegfried's need to wed. They can be seen as a symbol of escape for each other: when Siegfried pledges his love to Odette the problems of the court are eliminated for him. This pledge will also break Odette's curse cast by Rothbart. Unfortunately, things do not go according to plan: Siegfried's accidental betrayal at the ball destroys the situation for both of them, returning us to the idea that perfect, ideal love is completely impossible.

Why was a swan chosen? Is it possible that the swan meant something to Tchaikovsky? As mentioned above, Tchaikovsky's nephew, Ivan Lvovich, recorded in June 1871 that Tchaikovsky composed a short ballet for him and his siblings titled *Ozero Lebedeye*, "The Lake of the Swans". He further recalls the "charming melody of the swan's song" which in the first production of *Swan Lake* became the theme of Odette.[94] This may suggest that Tchaikovsky had an influence and chose the topic of the swan himself.

[91] Ibid., 284.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Volkov, *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky*, 112.
[94] Beaumont, *Ballet Called Swan Lake*, 10.

As we have seen, Stoneley identified a relationship between the swan and homosexuality. He mentions phallic connections, quoting *Leda and the Swan* as an example, and explains that "the paradoxical beauty of the swan is largely to do with the fact that it has too much line. With its long neck it verges on the grotesque".[95] Matthew Bourne also saw the swan as a sexual symbol; whilst discussing it as a symbol of freedom, he mentions the phallic connotations of the swan's long neck.[96] A link can be made to the idea of the line created by the limbs in ballet often from the tip of the toe to the end of the finger to create a sense of beauty. The swan's neck does have a sense of line, and surely the curve of the neck can also be seen as elegant and beautiful. Nonetheless it also makes it stand out from other birds, reinforcing Stoneley's idea of a deformed type of beauty. Stoneley continues: "the notion of redeeming an otherwise disgusting appearance serves as an embodied version of coming to terms with the 'ugliness' of homosexuality".[97]

In light of Tchaikovsky's homosexuality, many scholars have discussed the idea that Siegfried may also be gay. Beaumont, for example, in the mid twentieth century notes that Siegfried, "evidences little interest in the opposite sex".[98] This ultimately affects the perception of the swan. If Siegfried is gay, Odette is still ultimately a woman in the context of the romantic ballet. However, it could be interpreted differently: Odette is neither a woman nor a swan but half way between - a symbol, then, of 'otherness'. Siegfried is a closet gay seeking freedom and finds it in the guise of a swan princess. For Sporton:

> This helps us extend the argument by reinforcing in Siegfried the stupidity of his desire besides his worldly naivety. This might well be a portrait of the complex and melancholic Tchaikovsky as well as of Siegfried: a man who feels life has treated him harshly, and responds with an extended internal dialogue with a fantasy character that appears to him to be thoroughly real.[99]

The relation that Siegfried creates with a fantasy character shows how Odette is a symbol of the love that he cannot have. The fantasy associated with the romantic ballet directly contrasts with the court scenes in *Swan Lake*; it will be explained how this situation can suggest that Odette and the swans are not real. In addition, it connects the swan to the myths and legends discussed in chapter one.

[95] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 61.
[96] Macaulay and Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 227.
[97] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 61.
[98] Beaumont, *Ballet Called Swan Lake*, 71.
[99] Sporton, "Ballet Called Siegfried," 287.

Like Tchaikovsky (perhaps), Matthew Bourne felt a personal connection to the story and themes of *Swan Lake*, in particular the theme of relationships. In his interviews with Alastair Macaulay, Bourne admits that he "had a lot of rejections; and I hadn't been in a relationship for a while – before which I'd gone through a difficult end to a long-term relationship. So yes: I think all that must have affected it quite a lot".[100] Here, then, was a stimulus for Bourne's version of the *Swan Lake* ballet, suggesting the emotional neediness of the prince came from his own relationship status at the time.

Bourne also states that he was not thinking in particular about Tchaikovsky's homosexuality when creating his version of the ballet.[101] Nonetheless he similarly latched onto the idea of impossible love present in the plot and clearly put something of himself into the production. Whether Tchaikovsky's homosexuality was at the forefront of Bourne's mind or not, it is a factor that links the two creators to the story, making the role of the swans and what they represent to the princes important. Bourne is open about his homosexuality, which could have influenced his decision to make the swans male.

The Real and the Fantastic

As discussed in chapter two, the world of a homosexual man in nineteenth-century Russia was a closeted one. His relationships had to be kept secret, explaining Tchaikovsky's attempt to marry and create a seemingly normal life and separating his public and private lives. This is not unlike the real and fantastic worlds of *Swan Lake*, the world of the Queen and court versus that of Odette and the swans. When *Swan Lake* first premiered in 1877 it was divided into four acts but became three acts for the 1895 production. This creates a noticeable distinction between what can be considered real and fantastic. The first and third acts show Prince Siegfried's world in the life of the court mirrored by the world of the swans in the second and fourth acts. "Asafiev claimed that the fantastic world of the swans should not be taken literally but as a conception of the sensitive artist (Siegfried in the ballet, and in turn Tchaikovsky himself) … the romantic fairy-tale images of Swan Lake, he contends, 'are humanized by Tchaikovsky to such a degree that the drama of the swan and Siegfried moves [us] as a drama of actuality.'".[102]

[100] Macaulay & Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 191.
[101] Ibid., 194.
[102] Roland Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty and the Nutcracker* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 79-80.

It can be hypothesised that the second and fourth acts do not happen in the real world, but rather in the prince's mind. This develops from the idea that the prince does not want to have a relationship with any of the girls from the first act or with any of the suggested women from the court scene of act three. The only woman he chose to marry, to appease his mother, was the one who closely represented the woman from his 'imaginary' world of act two. Matthew Bourne plays on this idea, exploring the real versus the fantastic. The use of a psychiatric hospital in the final act indicates that the prince's sanity is in question. The ballet shows a number of people in white coats assessing the prince and helping to deal with his madness by sedating him. With the Prince's mental state in question, it seems likely that the swans are a figment of his imagination or a hallucination. Petipa's production reduces the number of acts to three, bringing the entrance of Odette into the first act and thereby perhaps obscuring distinctions between real and fantastical worlds.

Even in the Petipa production, though, a distinction may come to light in the division of labour between the choreographers. The choreography was carried out by the esteemed ballet master Marius Petipa and his contemporary, Lev Ivanov. An advocate of the Italian style of ballet dancing, Petipa's work often focussed on court-style scenes, a division of ballet and mime and on sets of international dances. All of these are present in the 1895 *Swan Lake*. Ivanov, in contrast, was responsible for both lakeside scenes, so therefore was the only one of the two choreographers working with the character Odette. Each ballet master commanded a different style, potentially adding to the contrast between the real and fantastic worlds. Unfortunately, in Ivanov's memoirs he makes almost no mention of his work on *Swan Lake*; it is unclear, then, whether the figure of the swan had an influence on his choreography.

The world of the swans, a fantastic one occupying the lakeside scenes of the ballet, comes to represent the freedom that Tchaikovsky and Siegfried desired. For both Siegfried and Tchaikovsky, the swan represented the freedom that neither man could have. The theory that the swans are not real strengthens this interpretation, as it means that Odette is not a real human, but a projection on to an animal. Had Siegfried actually been in love with Odette, it could be argued that he would not have been tricked by the wicked Odile in the second court scene, in spite of their similar appearances. Why would Siegfried have fallen for the sensual love of Odile when he fell in love with the gentle nature of Odette? As Sporton proposed: "the racy Odile is often performed with a sense of alluring sexual potency, quite a contrast to the demure Odette, who can barely muster a variation of her own".[103] The distinction between the two is seen

[103] Sporton, "Ballet called Siegfried," 285.

particularly when Odile performs her famous thirty-two fouettes, a virtuosic display that cannot be related to the dancing seen previously by Odette. The contrast between the two characters, in their manner and style of dancing, suggests that Siegfried has been fooled by his desire to escape. Asafiev's statement about the fantastic world of the swans is "thus imbuing fantasy with a potential for social relevance" according to Wiley.[104]

As we have seen, Tchaikovsky wanted to keep his public and private lives separate: his marriage was an attempt to conceal his true identity. Sporton discussed Tchaikovsky's patron and blackmailers as the black and white swans respectively.[105] Poznansky explained that Tchaikovsky was being blackmailed and paid off people who threatened to expose him.[106] This brings to the fore how dangerous Tchaikovsky's position was and how fearful he must have been about being uncovered. Light and dark occur throughout the ballet. The betrayal in the third act, where Siegfried declares his love for the wrong person and his two worlds suddenly collide, could signify Tchaikovsky's worst fears of his homosexual desires becoming public knowledge. *Swan Lake* may represent for Tchaikovsky a culmination of his worst fears: if the world found out about his swans, his impossible love, he would have to die.

The swans of *Swan Lake* fit in with the historical idea of the swan discussed earlier in that they are beautiful and noble creatures. Therefore, it is fitting that they should come to symbolise the ideal worlds of Tchaikovsky and Siegfried where public and private lives do not need to be kept separate. For Tchaikovsky, this would be a world where he could openly and comfortably be homosexual and for Siegfried it would mean him marrying whomever he chose and not worrying about the stresses of noble life. *Swan Lake* shows that Siegfried and Odette have similar goals. Both are severely restricted, Siegfried by the monarchy and Odette by Rothbart's curse. The distinction between reality and fantasy therefore becomes associated with the swan, which in turn represents the desires of both Siegfried and Tchaikovsky.

[104] Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, 80.
[105] Sporton, "Ballet Called Siegfried," 288.
[106] Michel Hoffman, *Tchaikovsky* (London: Calder, 1962), 107.

Swansong

The connection of the swan to swansong, and in turn, death has an important connection to *Swan Lake*. Tchaikovsky, as a Russian man, mused about his fate, especially in his Fourth Symphony where he utilises a fate theme that begins the first movement. In a letter he also claims: "I consoled myself with the thought that we cannot escape our fate".[107] In fact, Tchaikovsky often discussed ideas around death. As an anxious and depressed man he thought about suicide and attempted it in 1877 by walking into a river in an attempt to get pneumonia. His death in 1893 can be related to intentionally drinking cholera-infested water. The fact that he asked for untreated water in an area affected by cholera also suggests that he wished to die in the same way as his mother who passed away from the same disease in 1854.

In *Swan Lake*, the announcement that the two main protagonists have to die solidifies the idea that the love Siegfried requires is impossible. Death is a theme of *Swan Lake*; after Siegfried's betrayal Odette announces that she must die. As Siegfried has broken his vow of love, Odette is doomed as a swan forever, so throws herself into the lake. Siegfried follows her, and this action destroys Rothbart and all of his power. While the death of both protagonists renders the ballet a tragedy, it is possible to see a happy ending: the lovers are reunited; the evil Rothbart is vanquished; and the swans are free. For Siegfried as well, he is free of the restraints of the monarchy and brides that his mother has chosen. Although this would go against Beaumont's idea that Siegfried was gay, showing him united with a woman at the end of the ballet, in this situation Odette is neither a human nor a swan but an ethereal 'other'.

Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* brings a new perspective on death and the swansong. In his equivalent of the final act, the swans turn on their leader, the Prince's love, killing him. The Prince, grief stricken, returns to his bed where his mother finds him dead. Asafiev's comment about the swans occupying a fantastic world is invoked: the swans are a figment of the artists' and of Siegfried's imagination. For Bourne, the final encounter with the swans, the death of the leading swan, and the Prince's madness all appear to be going on inside Siegfried's head. This inner turmoil leads to his destruction and to the Queen finding him dead. The swans believe their leader has betrayed them by interacting with a human and choose to kill him. At a symbolic level, this could represent the homophobia that Tchaikovsky believed surrounded him, which prevented him from having the fulfilling relationship he desired. In Bourne's production, there are no visible clues to suggest what actually kills the Prince. He could have died, in fact, from a broken heart. Bourne

[107] Tchaikovsky, *Life and Letters*, 218.

creates this message powerfully after the Prince's swan has been killed: he turns to the audience weeping as the final act music reaches its climax.

For Goltsmann the dying swan is a Soviet symbol, which draws on the notion of the swans as mediators between the worlds of the living and the dead.[108] She relates it to the short reigns of the Soviet leaders in the twentieth century,[109] thereby lending a distinctive Russian quality to the swans of Tchaikovsky's ballet. *Swan Lake* and *The Dying Swan* were both premiered in Russia, a country that mused about fate, so it is interesting how this symbolism surfaces through the symbol of the swan. Furthermore, this connects the swans to the Valkyries: their position as mediators shows how they link the world of the real and fantastic, and symbolise the line between life and death.

[108] Goltsmann, "Dying Swan," 311.
[109] Ibid., 312.

CHAPTER 4 BOURNE AND *SWAN LAKE*

Alastair Macaulay, in interview with Matthew Bourne, discussed those parts of *Swan Lake* that related to Bourne's own life. The relationship between the Prince and his mother was not one of them, although Bourne admits that the emotions of the Prince may have been driven by his recent end to a relationship: "that may be what drove some of the Prince's emotional neediness in my mind – also the strange worship of a symbol".[110] Biographically, then, Bourne's life had an effect on his production, just as the original production probably related to Tchaikovsky's own experiences.

The swan had meaning for Bourne as a symbol of freedom. He suggested that for him it was a pagan creature, claiming "my Swan was never just a swan".[111] For both the Prince and Bourne, then, the swan was a symbol of the love they required. As stated in the previous chapter, the neediness of the prince was also influenced by the recent ending of a relationship for Matthew Bourne.

The Swans

What do the swans signify in Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*? Bourne takes a modern approach to his production invoking features of the monarchy, such as the corgis that are associated with the current Queen Elizabeth II, and the character of the Prince's girlfriend that Bourne explained was based on Fergie (Sarah Ferguson) with her short dresses and behaviour considered inappropriate for a royal.[112] Perhaps Bourne created this new character in the *Swan Lake* story to emphasise the idea of protagonists who were unfit for their positions for one reason or another.

Bourne's swan appears to the Prince at the same time in the story as in the original production, in a lakeside scene. By this point in the ballet, Bourne's Prince is already visibly troubled, as he is seen writing a suicide note before attempting to take his own life. It is at this point that the male swan makes his entrance, repelling the Prince away from the water. This would suggest that, if the swan had not arrived on the scene, the suicidal Prince would have drowned. The swan effectively saves the Prince by pushing him back. If considered a real-world event the swan could be seen to be defending its territory, like the powerful and defensive creatures that

[110] Macaulay and Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 191.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 197.

were discussed in chapter one, as the Prince would have been at the water's edge. In the context of the ballet, though, and in a fantastical context, the Swan becomes a saviour for Siegfried and then a symbol of his desires. Similar to Tchaikovsky's swan, Bourne's male swan is free of the burdens that weigh down the Prince. Rather than backing away from this creature, the Prince chooses to pursue it, much to the swan's dislike as he attempts to move away. This creates an interesting take on the famous *pas de deux*.

The Mother

One of the more intriguing relationships in Bourne's production is the one between the Prince and his mother. In the traditional *Swan Lake* story, the Queen only arrives in the story to remind the Prince of his coming of age and need to marry. In Bourne's production, this relationship is developed, showing the Prince aging through childhood and having troubled interactions with his mother. The mother in Bourne's production is a cold character, illustrated early in the production where the young Prince has a nightmare and the mother, without any embrace or display of emotion, checks his temperature and leaves. And such emotional disconnection provides an explanation for some of the Prince's subsequent behaviour.

As in Petipa's production of *Swan Lake*, the mother is the only relation of the Prince encountered in the ballet. Neither production has a father figure and we can assume, since the Prince has to marry due to his coming of age, that the wedding will be part of the ceremony for him in becoming King. The mother appears in Petipa's 1895 *Swan Lake*, first to remind the Prince of his need to marry and secondly at the ball where the Prince is to decide on his choice of bride. But assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the two have to be made in the absence of any further information.

The lack of a father figure brings Freudian issues to light in Bourne's production. The Prince is shown to have an over-protective relationship with his mother, displaying discomfort when seeing his mother with another man. This is exemplified when the Queen flirts with the guards and more so in the second act when the 'stranger' that most of the audience will identify as the black swan dances with her and the Prince attempts to stop it. The Prince's feelings towards his mother can be related to the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex, where the boy has feelings of desire towards his mother and feelings of jealousy towards the father. In the context of *Swan Lake*, where the father figure is absent, jealousy is aroused by any other man who comes near the Prince's mother.

In Bourne's production it is the mother's cold attitude towards the Prince that drives him to worship the swan figure. For the Prince who feels he has nothing, the Swan appears at his moment of need and changes his life. In comparison to the 1895 *Swan Lake*, much more empathy for the Prince is in evidence in Bourne's production. Odette is under the enchantment of the evil Rothbart in nineteenth-century productions, something clear to the audience from the opening. In Bourne's *Swan Lake*, though, nothing is known about the swan and we experience the story entirely through the Prince's eyes. From the perspective of a ballet that premiered in 1995, seeing the ballet through the eyes of one character invokes a film-like narrative.

The Male Swan

Unlike nineteenth-century productions where the swan is an ethereal ballerina, Bourne's makes the swan a fearful creature feeding off their well-known aggression, especially when protecting their young. The *pas de deux* between the Prince and the swan is one such example. There are numerous times where the Prince tries to embrace the swan but is rejected and pushed away. The swan often extends his leg to move the Prince away and they embrace often only for a moment before the swan takes off. The use of the arms as wings raised behind the back also creates an aggressive stance and relates to Matthew Bourne's admission of a fear of swans (see Figure 4).[113]

The swan in Bourne's production contrasts significantly with Odette. Firstly, the swan does not even have a name, compared to Odette who is named in the programme and known across the ballet world. The animalistic identity of the swan is thereby accentuated. In addition, there aren't many factors that distinguish the main swan from the flock. They have the same beak mark on their forehead, bare chest and trousers. They can be separated only through the choreography. Odette is often distinguished through the adorning of a crown, also a sign of her status.

[113] Ibid., 191.

The idea of the swan as a creature brings to the fore the idea that the Prince projects his feelings and emotions on to the swan. As discussed in the previous chapter, Asafiev suggested "that the fantastic world of the swans should not be taken literally but as a conception of the sensitive artist".[114] If the swans occupy a fantastic world, then by definition all of the incidents with the swans happen inside the Prince's head. This is reinforced by Bourne's 'fourth act': after the Prince has been heavily sedated in hospital, the swans appear out of his bed for their final encounter with him.

This projection of the Prince's emotions on to the swan brings Tchaikovsky's ideas forward to the late twentieth century. When relating Bourne's production to the one from 1895, we witness an emphasis on the idea of impossible love and a desperation for freedom, bringing to mind Tchaikovsky's own feelings. With Bourne's suggestion that the swan is a projection, we are reminded of the man who longed for freedom. Bourne's Prince is probably more similar and relatable to Tchaikovsky than the 1895 Siegfried was.

The provocative use of a male swan in contrast to the ethereal ballerina who dominated the feminine ballet of the nineteenth century is one of the features that caused so much controversy in Bourne's production. The alteration of the female swan to a male swan, in addition to the change from a heterosexual to a homosexual relationship, moves us far away from the femininity of the nineteenth-century protagonist and continues the twentieth-century emphasis on the contribution of the male dancer, attributable initially to the work of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and their star dancer, Nijinsky. Bourne admitted that pictures of Nijinsky influenced his conception of the lead swan. In addition to his characterisations and virtuosity in dance, Nijinsky was known for his androgynous appearance.

As Siegmund suggested, the romantic ballet idealised a weightlessness and grace that was only possible for women, not for men with their muscled bodies.[115] Whilst the classical and romantic ballet were to focus on the female ballerina, the Ballets Russes production of *Le Spectre de a Rose* (1911) made Nijinsky the object of the audience's gaze. Siegmund suggests that this was possible on account of the female character in the story gazing at Nijinsky; the audience were looking at him through her.[116] Just sixteen years after Petipa's *Swan Lake* Nijinsky had become ballet's leading star, paving the way for choreographers such as Bourne to take advantage of the elevated status of the male dancer.

[114] Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, 79.
[115] Rowland & Emig, *Performing Masculinity*, 32.
[116] Ibid., 38.

The Swan and Publicity

One of the first publicity images released of Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* shows the Prince naked and embracing the Swan. Matthew Bourne described this image as one inspired by Anna Pavlova with a swan.[117] Through comparison of the pictures (see Figure 3) the influence is clear. Anna Pavlova's relationship with the swan was mentioned in chapter one, especially *The Dying Swan* that brought her fame.

Ramsay Burt's discussion of the work of Richard Dyer relates the romantic ballet to ideas from portraits and paintings: "Dyer argues that images of men must appear active in some way in order to appear in line with dominant ideas of masculinity".[118] While women in pin-ups and nude paintings avert their eyes allowing themselves to be surveyed as erotic objects, men in pin-ups look out actively, often upwards, barely acknowledging the viewer, resisting a gaze so as not to be objectified.[119] Women, after all, were the stars of nineteenth-century ballet, the focus of both the story and choreography, and thus elicited admiration. As Berger explains: it was "not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of woman is designed to flatter him".[120] Although women were the stars both as soloists and in the corps de ballet, it was a man's world. Men were the choreographers, composers, and audience. But the situation changed with the Ballets Russes, when men created male images to look at. In addition to the homosexual subtext here, "the development of female audiences for dance during the twentieth century has been a factor in the development of male dance".[121] The use of male swans in Bourne's *Swan Lake* again builds on twentieth-century developments in ballet culture.

Dyer's ideas are reinforced through comparison of the photos of Bourne's *Swan Lake* and Anna Pavlova. Both feature the character looking away from the camera. Bourne's in particular brings the image of the swan to the fore as the white of the swan stands out from the purple background, with the Prince included in that purple. The embrace can also be compared to the paintings of *Leda and the Swan*, where the swan is used to cover her modesty. In Bourne's picture the Prince appears to be naked, adding a sexual context to the pose. This highlights the symbol of love that the swan came to stand for, including sexual love relative to the story of *Leda and the Swan*.

[117] Macaulay and Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 218.
[118] Burt, *Male Dancer*, 53.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 49.
[121] Ibid.

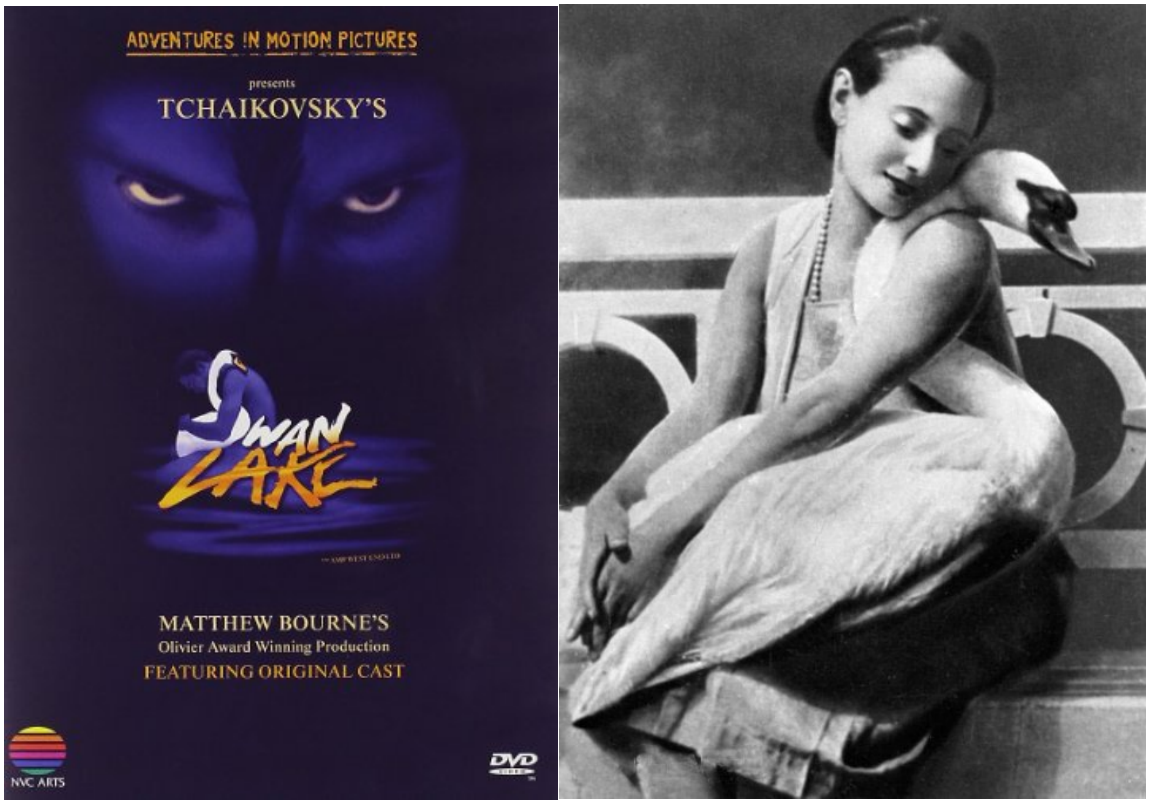

Figure 3 - Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake and Anna Pavlova.[122] [123]

However, Dyer may not have considered the paintings that do display women actively looking out in paintings, the obvious example being Manet's 1865 painting, *Olympia*. *Olympia* displays a nude, white woman actively looking at the viewer almost challenging them. However, the disdain that the painting received at its reception suggests that a painting like Olympia is uncommon, particularly as it appears to feature a prostitute. It would be fruitful to know Dyer's standpoint on this painting, nonetheless the 'feminine' aspects that Dyer described come across in these photos as they do in the *Leda and the Swan* painting discussed earlier.

For Pavlova and *Swan Lake*, the swan, a creature of beauty, is an obsession. For Pavlova, *The Dying Swan* was her signature performance. Through *The Dying Swan* solo about the fragility of life, Pavlova gained an evident connection to the swan. Photographs of her from that era often picture her as the swan, despite a career where she portrayed many characters, both as a soloist and as a ballerina in productions including *Giselle*. As previously mentioned, Pavlova asked to be reunited with her swan costume as she died. It is, then, more than just an ethereal creature of choice in Bourne's *Swan Lake*, but an important symbol of love, life, and death, the key themes of

[122] Swan Lake, DVD, directed by Matthew Bourne (UK: NVC Arts, 1998).
[123] Anna Pavlova on Screen – London, dancetabs, accessed 3rd May 2016, http://dancetabs.com/2012/08/anna-pavlova-on-screen-london/

the ballet. This demonstrates the influence of the swan and of Anna Pavlova's relation to the swan on to Bourne's production.

Bourne released another image of the swan with the head lowered, looking directly at the camera and giving a strong, intimidating and aggressive impression (see Figure 4). This stance would not have featured in photography or pictures of nineteenth-century ballet, where women averted their eyes. Nineteenth-century men in ballet would also look towards women, highlighting them as the objects of desire. The second Bourne image can be described as more masculine than those discussed earlier. The swooping back of the arms and the bent legs create an impression of a bird about to attack or pounce, highlighting its predatory nature. As mentioned earlier, Matthew Bourne was afraid of swans, a fact captured perhaps in this image.[124]

Figure 4 – The Swan.[125]

[124] Macaulay and Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 191.

[125] Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake, the design school, accessed 12th February 2016, http://www.thedesignschool.co.uk/thefilter/2016/01/18/matthew-bournes-swan-lake/

Bourne discussed the influence of Nijinsky on many of the poses, including the pose with the arms wreathed above the head.[126] In particular he mentioned *Le Spectre de la Rose* and *Narcisse*. Bourne claimed the pose appears a lot in his works: "It feels sensual to me, and sexy as well, because it's about touching your own body".[127] It is clear that Bourne was influenced by Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes and chose to bring forward the sexual component of *Swan Lake*.

The two contrasting publicity images used by Bourne each toy with the idea of gaze. The first involves the Prince clearly looking away from the camera, allowing him (following Dyer) to be viewed as an erotic object, further reinforced by the Prince's naked appearance and the connection to Leda and the Swan. With different concepts of the swan, obsessive and sexual then aggressive and masculine, ideas of gender and masculinity become a significant feature of Bourne's version of *Swan Lake* and provide context for his most radical departure from classical ballet, namely the use of male swans.

[126] Macaulay and Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 190.
[127] Ibid., 239.

CHAPTER 5 OTHER SWANS

Ideas surrounding Siegfried, the swan, and impossible love discussed in Bourne and Petipa's *Swan Lake* productions can also be examined in productions before and after Bourne's. This chapter will focus on two contrasting versions of *Swan Lake*, Mats Ek's *Swan Lake* (1987) and Neumeier's *Illusions like Swan Lake* (2001).

Mats Ek's *Swan Lake*

Mats Ek's *Swan Lake,* like several other productions, uses the swan as a point of projection for the Prince. The story occurs in a dreamscape, with only the costume and props to indicate what is going on in the ballet. It can be assumed that the ballet moves into the world of fantasy where the lakeside scene would normally have featured: a smoke machine is used as is an auger-like statue that is laid on the ground rather than positioned upright at the start of the ballet. As Sporton suggests, these elements give "free reign to a theory of hallucination and irresponsibility complicated by sexual confusion".[128] The use of a dream world, where the audience are unsure of what is real, means that the swans can reflect the Prince's feelings in a more powerful way than most other productions: Ek's ultimately seems furthest from nineteenth-century versions.

In spite of its distance from early productions, Ek's *Swan Lake* demonstrates connections to *Swan Lake*s examined hitherto. The Prince is portrayed as a needy character; as Sporton suggests, one of the focal points in this respect is the Oedipal relationship with his mother, which motivates his actions.[129] Early in Ek's production, two figures are presented: the one in red is his mother; and the one in pink at first can be assumed to be a girlfriend figure. The credits of the ballet describe the woman in pink as a "birthday present". This is followed by a series of dances where the Prince dances with said birthday present for a short amount of time, but then pushes her away in favour of his mother. Such childlike behaviour supports the Oedipal interpretation put forward by Sporton. The Prince does not show the same interest for the woman in pink as he does for his mother and attempts to split up the dancing that occurs between her and her partner, including by kissing him. There is a similarity here with Bourne's *Swan Lake*: in both cases the relationship with the mother receives significantly more attention than in the nineteenth-century *Swan Lake*.

[128] Sporton, "Ballet Called Siegfried," 290.
[129] Ibid.

Bourne was familiar with Mats Ek's *Swan Lake* but only mentioned it briefly in interviews: both utilise the swans differently from Tchaikovsky, ultimately in more animalistic ways. In Ek's production the swan-as-animal is signified by a Rothbart character appearing with a chair and bag to feed the swans. Without this activity, it would be hard to tell that they are swans from the choreography, which contains no references to the animal, although the white tutus provide a clue. The pas de deux between the Prince and Odette is minimal compared to the amount of time spent on the corps of swans. The swans have an impact as a group, then, perhaps orientating the ballet a little away from the romance typically associated with *Swan Lake*. Notably in this *Swan Lake*, the corps contains male and female swans. The women wear bald caps, including Odette and the Queen, de-emphasising gender distinctions in contrast to Bourne's who wanted the swans to be masculine; in his book Bourne talks about wanting the men not to shave their chest hair to add to the masculine image.[130] In spite of gender differences, both productions employ the swans as a flock of animals: in Ek's production, the swans go back to Rothbart when he calls them, showing a desire for food more than interaction with a stranger. Ek's hallucinogenic vision for his production, occurring within a dream-style setting, reinforces the plausibility of the Prince projecting desires, feelings, and emotions orientated towards his mother on to the swans. In this way, Ek's impossible love uses the swans as a point of projection rather than as the actual protagonists of the ballet witnessed in the romantic predecessor.

Bourne thought Ek's production was "a little too radical for me in some ways" especially in the cutting of the music and the use of vocalisations.[131] However, he does suggest that the production inspired his own *Swan Lake*, stating that "he [Ek] was the first new choreographer I'd seen for years whose work actually felt like something that I tuned to".[132] In particular, Bourne favoured the use of contemporary movement to the original ballet score, a philosophy also yielding success for Ek in his choreography of *Giselle* and *Swan Lake*.[133]

[130] Macaulay and Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 238.
[131] Ibid., 204.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 205.

In Ek's production, Siegfried is also shown to be unfit for the court: the Prince's unwillingness to do his court duties is demonstrated when his servants hand him the crown and he has a glum expression as they carry him off stage. Further on in the ballet when the Prince announces he is going to leave, the same servants are shown gleefully packing his suitcase for him to hand over to the Prince as he leaves, giving a general impression of unfitness to rule as is also highlighted in Bourne's production. This in turn provides a context for the Prince to project his feelings on to the swans.

Illusions like Swan Lake

The second recent ballet under consideration is *Illusions like Swan Lake* choreographed by John Neumeier. Even just from the title, it is clear that issues of reality and illusion will be brought to the fore. The synopsis shows that Neumeier's ballet follows the four act *Swan Lake* plan: the acts are not labelled as such, but are divided into sections comprising reality and memory. In particular, Stoneley explains how Neumeier's production provides "a psychological rendering of the 'double life' of the nineteenth-century homosexual".[134] This is clarified both by the accommodation of memories and reality and by Ludwig II, the mad king of Bavaria also famously known as the Swan King, appearing as the male protagonist of the ballet.

From the opening of Neumeier's production, the King is transfixed by the model of his castle, which leads into his first memory of the castle's construction. King Ludwig II was also known for building castles, including Linderhof Palace and The King's House on the Schachen. The use of a historical figure contributes to Stoneley's statement about the nineteenth-century homosexual. According to Stoneley, Neumeier believed that the character of Siegfried was fairly thin and that superimposing King Ludwig II on to Siegfried would create a character who "met the choreographer's own taste for psychological realism".[135] Neumeier was able to impose ideas on to his male protagonist, especially in using King Ludwig II to bring out ideas about homosexuality.

As McIntosh explains, Ludwig was homosexual: he was in a similar position in nineteenth-century Germany to homosexuals in nineteenth-century Russia as his desires were considered unnatural. Ludwig's diary, for McIntosh, "remains a poignant testament to the anguish of sexual guilt and repression".[136] This provides an important point of connection between Ludwig and Siegfried. Homosexuality allows the impossible love that the King cannot show to come through in this production. From the outset, the relationship between the King and his fiancée is shown to

[134] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 154.
[135] Ibid.
[136] McIntosh, *Swan King*, 159.

be unsteady: they barely dance together as the opening *pas de deux*s are mostly between the Count and his fiancée; and the King rushes between them to hug the Count. Some of the intimacy between the two men, and the greater amount of time spent with the Count than his fiancée, contributes to an invocation of the King's homosexuality: the King is not appropriate for Court life as his homosexuality represents an impossible love.

In Neumeier's production the King's obsession with *Swan Lake* illustrates how he identified with the character of Siegfried. In his second memory, the King recalls seeing the ballet. Not only that, but he takes over Siegfried's role in the *pas de deux* often alternating with him on the pair and lift work. The King's action of putting himself in the ballet demonstrates a desire to escape: for this King, as well as the Siegfried in the other productions discussed, the swan is symbolic of a way out of the imprisonment of his noble life. The King cannot find a romantic partner who lives up to his expectations in the real world; he can only do so when he enters his fantasy and dances the role of Siegfried in *Swan Lake*. Neumeier appears to have drawn a connection to the impossible love present in the nineteenth-century *Swan Lake*.

The ballet as a symbol of both impossible love and a desire for escape also emerges in the third memory, which aligns with the third act in the original production. The King's fiancée arrives wearing a costume of Odette, resulting in the King's full attention and devotion. Noticeably, she dances one of Odette's solos from the lakeside scene in Petipa's exact choreography, then the famous thirty-two fouettes from Odile's variation in the court. It is interesting that the King's fiancée dances the choreography of both Odette and Odile in her attempt to woo him. This is a sign, perhaps, of the contrasts of light and dark throughout the production, and that even the King's fiancée embodies both. It could also suggest the King's innocence and his inability to see between the good and evil in the production of *Swan Lake*, and in turn in life. Nonetheless this demonstrates the level of the King's obsession with the ballet: Odette and *Swan Lake* meant everything to him, and were symbolic of his struggles.

An interesting feature of Neumeier's production is the casting of the character, 'the Man in the Shadows'. Dressed entirely in black, he can be identified as a Rothbart figure, first appearing after the King has been imprisoned in his cell. As Stoneley explains: "Neumeier has confirmed that he sees the Man in Shadows as both Ludwig's and Tchaikovsky's alter ego, a figure who is the embodiment of their desires and, therefore, their angel of death".[137] In this way, the character reminds Ludwig of the impossible nature of his dreams. The character is there both in reality and

[137] Stoneley, *Queer History*, 155.

in fantasy, claiming the King at the end of the ballet. The man in the shadows also foregrounds the relationship with death that is central to *Swan Lake*, invoking the swansong and relating the death of the King to the fate of the doomed heroes in the ballet.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE BALLET *SWAN LAKE*

More than one hundred years after *Swan Lake* was premiered in Russia, it remains a cornerstone of the ballet repertory. Looking at different productions in the twentieth and twenty first centuries shows the extent to which certain characteristics and themes are deeply ingrained in the ballet, the idea of impossible love in particular. Impossible love as a representation of the characters and the creators of the ballet, illustrates how *Swan Lake* is both of its time in the context of the doomed hero of the romantic ballet as well as unique in its perspectives on the homosexuality of its creator.

The 2010 fictional film *Black Swan*, focusses on a ballet company that puts on a production of *Swan Lake*, also has an interesting take on impossible love. The film invokes the idea of swansong in featuring ex prima ballerina Beth Macintyre in a car accident shortly after losing her position in the ballet. The story follows the innocent Nina Sayers who struggles to commit to both the white and black swan, and constantly strives for perfection. Her "hots for teacher" show and projection of a relationship between him and the black swan toys with the idea of impossible love, while her desire for perfection is also to some extent impossible. Nina strives for a person and an ideal that she cannot have.

Black Swan also blurs the line between reality and fantasy, a feature of the four *Swan Lake*s that have been discussed. The inclusion of a homosexual love scene, likely a drug-induced hallucination, makes a direct connection to aforementioned interpretations of homosexuality. The swansong theme returns at the end as Nina fights her hallucinated alter-ego and dies performing the final act after mortally wounding herself. Ultimately Nina cannot comprehend the line between reality and fantasy: her position as the swan queen in the ballet is a symbol of unattainable perfection; and her fate is the same as Odette's.

Discussions of *Swan Lake* and Matthew Bourne also bring to mind the 2000 film, *Billy Elliot*, which follows the story of a boy who wants to be a dancer, much to the dismay of his family who believe it to be a female activity. After Billy's acceptance into dance school, the film fast-forwards to Billy's major role in *Swan Lake*. Interestingly, the film chooses Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* featuring Bourne's dancers and costumes. Billy's family arrives at the theatre as the oboe solo from act II begins. There is no mention of the ballet being *Swan Lake*, but it is assumed that viewers will make the connection, in spite of it being a difficult one to make as they are faced with male swans, rather than the more usual tutu-clad Odette.

The film ends with the message that Billy overcame stereotypes about dance and got the principal role in *Swan Lake*. In this case, the, the principal role is not Siegfried as Billy is cast as the lead male swan. The film shows Billy striving for something that in theory he cannot have. His family struggled with the idea of him dancing: being able to afford dance lessons, or to go to the academy seemed out of reach. The film ends happily with Billy achieving his dream, becoming the male swan of Bourne's production and in effect achieving the impossible.

Swan Lake has therefore become a cultural symbol. The use of the ballet in twenty-first century cinema, continuing to explore the theme of impossible love, demonstrates the power of the ballet's message and the extent to which it is still relevant today. It is interesting that both films have links to homosexuality as Tchaikovsky's homosexuality was an important factor in the swan becoming a symbol both to him and to the character of Siegfried. Although it is no longer illegal to have a homosexual relationship in Russia, there is still considerable negativity surrounding it, with a law forbidding the promotion of "non-traditional sexuality" to children under the age of eighteen in 2013.[138] The danger that Tchaikovsky felt is still relevant, then, in today's Russia.

Throughout this thesis, we have considered what the swan could have meant to Tchaikovsky. Existing research has demonstrated the connection between Tchaikovsky and Siegfried, drawing attention in turn to Tchaikovsky's relationship with the swan. As a symbol of both life and death, the swan mediates between the two. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that this creature, having been used by Tchaikovsky in an earlier production for his nephews, becomes the symbol of his first full ballet. The swan represents the life that Siegfried, and Tchaikovsky, cannot have, seen through the eyes of a prince who was not suited for royalty, and who is drawn to the swans. Odette and the swan corps become a symbol of impossible love through their choreography and character status, including the notion that they occupy the realm of fantasy. The use of a swan is also appropriate to ballet of its time, the relationship to a doomed protagonist also being witnessed in *Giselle* and *La Sylphide*.

[138] BBC. "Where is it illegal to be gay?" bbb.co.uk. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-25927595 (accessed 14th April 2016)

The theme of impossible love in the music of *Swan Lake* has implications for future research. According to Timothy Jackson, Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony can be seen as autobiographical and related to Tchaikovsky's homosexuality. This is particularly noticeable in the dedication to his nephew that conceivably led his classmates from the School of Jurisprudence to demand the composer take his own life. Matthew Bourne, in discussing Tchaikovsky's homosexuality, suggested that although the repressed homosexual composer was not an idea that influenced his own version of *Swan Lake,* "that feeling is somehow there in the music".[139] As we have seen, the notion of Tchaikovsky expressing his feelings through his music is hardly new. Referring to the end of the final act, Beaumont explained that Tchaikovsky "felt the mood of this scene very deeply and expressed in the music his own sad thoughts and the frustration of some of his own cherished ambitions".[140] Furthermore Warrack claimed that the finale of *Swan Lake* contains Tchaikovsky's inner most feelings.[141] Throughout this thesis, we have explored the fate of the doomed hero and heroine in a production premiered in the year of Tchaikovsky's first suicide attempt that more than likely related to the impossible nature of his desires in nineteenth-century Russia. This provides fuel for the theory that Tchaikovsky invested his personal feelings into the ballet, a theory that will benefit from further musically-based analysis in the future.

[139] Macaulay and Bourne, *Matthew Bourne*, 194.
[140] Beaumont, *Ballet Called Swan Lake*, 79.
[141] Warrack, *Tchaikovsky Ballet Music*, 14.

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