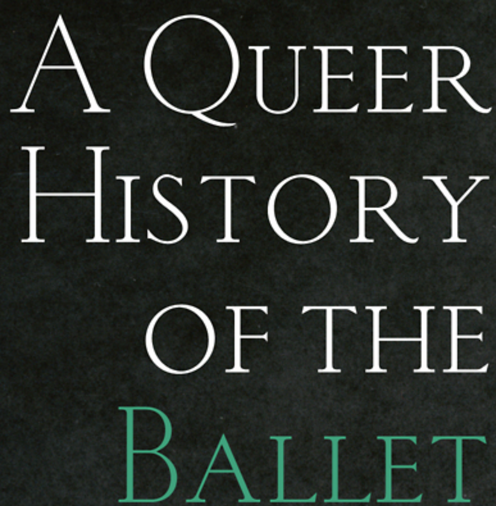

A Queer History of the Ballet

Peter Stoneley

A QUEER HISTORY OF THE BALLET

There has long been a popular perception of a connection between ballet and homosexuality, a connection that, for strategic reasons, has often been denied by those in the dance world. *A Queer History of the Ballet* focuses on how, as makers and as audiences, queer men and women have helped to develop many of the texts, images, and legends of ballet. Further, the book explores the ways in which, from the nineteenth century into the twentieth, ballet has been a means of conjuring homosexuality – of enabling some degree of expression and visibility for people who were otherwise declared illegal and obscene.

This book presents a series of historical case studies, including:

- the perverse sororities of the Romantic ballet;
- the fairy in folklore, literature, and ballet;
- Tchaikovsky and the making of *Swan Lake*;
- Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and the emergence of queer modernity;
- the formation of ballet in America;
- the queer uses of the prima ballerina;
- Genet's writings for and about ballet.

Stoneley ends with a consideration of how ballet's queer tradition has been memorialised by such contemporary dance-makers as Neumeier, Bausch, Bourne, and Preljocaj.

This lively, accessible study will appeal to students, scholars and general readers with an interest in dance and in queer history.

Peter Stoneley is Professor in the School of English and American Literature at the University of Reading, England.

A QUEER HISTORY OF THE BALLET

Peter Stoneley

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TO JENNIFER FITZGERALD

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INTRODUCTION

You might catch a glimpse of them at dusk, or as you walk home late from the tavern. They seem to approach, but then they drift away again. Are you sure you saw anything at all? Villagers run away as fast as they can, although one or two always linger, hearts pounding, hoping to get a good look at one. Fragments of gossip and legend are passed around about them. The stories, whispered on dark evenings, end with warnings. Woe betide the young man who wanders confusedly into their midst. They might seem attractive, but their values are at odds with our own. They ruin those that enter into their domain.

Who are 'they'? Undines, sylphides, Wilis, swan-maidens – they are the various swarms of fairy creatures that haunt the lakes, woods, and streams of ballet. And they, of course, are the homosexuals. One might reject the association of homosexuality with fairies, or ballet with fairies, as a dated and unfortunate kind of stereotyping. However, it *is* appropriate to begin with the shadowy presence of fairies to the extent that the connection between homosexuality and ballet has for so long been there and not there, both 'common knowledge' and 'hushed up'. If, for much of the twentieth century, there was a strong popular perception of a link between ballet and homosexuality, that link was usually denied, suppressed, or ignored by the dance world.

In recent times, historians have agitated against this state of affairs, publishing articles attesting to 'A Deafening Silence in Dance Scholarship', and a 'Dance That Does Not Speak Its Name'.[1] Important modern studies, while not making homosexuality central, have treated the topic as more than a shameful coincidence, as for instance in Lynn Garafola's *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (1989). Scholars with a theoretical orientation have also taken up the issue, as with Ramsay Burt's *The Male Dancer* (1995), and with the essays in Susan Leigh Foster's *Corporealities* (1996) and Jane Desmond's *Dancing Desires* (2001).

Even so, the topic has not received much consideration. There have been short, occasional pieces, and Kevin Kopelson's brilliant variations on a theme in *The Queer Afterlife of Vaslav Nijinsky* (1997). The relative lack of work has been due to a different kind of discrimination. Ballet itself has been treated hastily and with embarrassment by present-day scholars, who tend to see it as a politically incorrect forerunner to the radical innovations of modern dance. Ballet is seen to offer 'staid, old-fashioned images and ideas about gender', while modern dance is 'progressive, experimental, [and] avant-garde'.[2] Ballet can indeed be staid, but it also has had its adventurous figures and phases. It has proved a fascinating cultural phenomenon, and one that was vital to the emergence of a queer culture. From the nineteenth century into the twentieth, ballet provided images, legends, spaces, and institutions through which queer artists and fans could achieve some degree of visibility.

If ballet granted a presence to people who were otherwise illegal and obscene, as noted, those same people have often – and out of necessity – resisted any overt, public acknowledgment of their role. As cultural historian, Wayne Koestenbaum, observes of the relationship between opera and homosexuality, 'the point was *not* to draw the connection . . . but to pass into opera as into a safe silence'.[3] In ballet, the tradition of 'discretion' has been prolonged into the present day. It is a tactic that has protected individual reputations, and enabled ballet to promote itself as worthy of mainstream interest and support. The suppressions and distortions are painfully apparent in recent popular treatments of ballet. The documentary on male dancers, *Born to be Wild* (2002), sets out to stress that ballet is *not* about homosexuality (or at least, not in *this* instance). In the more complex, sympathetic and humorous case of the feature film *Billy Elliot* (2000), the drama and the sentiment are derived from the fear that ballet is only for 'lasses' and 'poofs'.

This book will not argue that ballet is essentially or necessarily queer. It will not argue that *Swan Lake* is, 'truly', 'underneath it all', and 'at core', about homosexuality. (It is about a young man and a strange creature who is, underneath it all, a young woman.) It will, though, show how *Swan Lake* and other works have functioned as projections of, or points of identification for, men and women who seem not to be featured in the ballet itself in any explicit way.

The first chapter sketches out some very general possibilities with regard to queerness and ballet, and especially with regard to theatrical spaces, bodies, and movement. The following chapters are more historical in emphasis. They offer a series of case studies, beginning with the visions of excess to be found in the Romantic ballet. I am especially

interested, in Chapter 2, in looking at the strange sisterhoods of the 'white ballet' of the early nineteenth century. This second chapter also concerns itself very much with fairies. It traces convergences between the fairy of folklore, the fairy of ballet, and the fairy as homosexual. The third chapter places *Swan Lake* within the context of Tchaikovsky's life, and within the wider context of mid- to late nineteenth-century homosexuality. The fourth chapter moves from Tchaikovsky to Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. It explores the early twentieth-century development of more direct, self-conscious, and experimental queer images and values. The fifth chapter looks at how Diaghilev's achievement informed the development of ballet in New York in the mid-twentieth century. It shows how New York productions maintained the queer aesthetics of ballet, but under the guise of hyper-American normality. I then devote a chapter to the idea of the prima ballerina. Using Margot Fonteyn as my example, I consider some of the prima's imaginative functions for the queer dance-maker and the queer viewer.

The seventh chapter considers ballet in the work of Jean Genet. It might seem odd to venture a connection between Genet's violent imagination and the niceties of classical dance. But Genet's adoption of the language and legends of ballet indicates the extent to which, by the mid-twentieth century, ballet had become a means of conjuring the possibilities of homosexual life and art. By way of conclusion, the final chapter offers readings of four contemporary works; it suggests the various ways in which, into the late twentieth century, ballet has continued to feature in explorations of sexual difference.

Readers with knowledge of dance history will realise that this is a very selective treatment. It would have been possible to produce a more comprehensive survey, or to have narrowed the focus and presented a more detailed treatment of one particular era or company. Whatever the risks, I wanted to trace a tradition, as one generation made use of what it had inherited from preceding generations. Later dance-makers often dismantled what they inherited, and this is an evolution in which queerness, as much as ballet, has been subject to change. The repertoire of behaviours and values shifts as we move from one period to another, from one country to another, and from one class or race to another. A later generation has often used ideas in ways that would not have been foreseen, approved, or understood by those from whom the ideas were borrowed.

The tradition is here for us to trace, but it is not a tradition that establishes a coherent or a complete truth. It sustains itself as best it can, and it brings a mix of wishfulness and opportunism to the task.

However, I don't know that any tradition is more or better than wishful and opportunistic. And, as with other traditions, this one is a code that effects certain exclusions. A 'queer history' may refer equally to men and to women, for instance, but this is for the most part a male tradition. Where women feature, they are more the means to male expression than subjects in their own right. Where ballet hints at lesbian behaviour, this should, in most cases, be seen as 'heteroscopic sapphism', as displays that were calculated to stimulate the imaginations of heterosexual men.[4] 'Queer' might also refer equally to people of different races and classes, but ballet has treated people very differently according to their race and class. The queer tradition in ballet has had its defining or constitutive prejudices. I hope I do not lose sight of those prejudices, even as I seek to establish the tradition's diversity and importance.[5]

1

COMPONENTS

Spaces, bodies, movement

Spaces

In *To-Night the Ballet* (1934), Adrian Stokes writes of the enjoyment that children and grownups take in arranging the figures in a toy theatre. He suggests that the toy theatre grants us a fantasy of power, whereby we determine events that, in real life, are usually beyond our control. Although we lack the same degree of control when we go to an actual theatre, Stokes suggests that there is still the same fantastical engagement. We see various 'prototypes, symbols, fears, [and] aspirations . . . externalised and dramatised within the open box of the stage'.[1]

Some decades after Stokes, Roland Barthes developed a similar argument in relation to the cinema. In Barthes's version, we enter a 'twilight reverie' even before we enter the cinema, as we move from one film poster to another. Then we bury ourselves in the 'dim, anonymous, indifferent cube' in which we see the film. For Barthes, we move from the static emblems of desire into a theatrical darkness that is 'the very substance' of fantasy, which has 'the colour of a diffused eroticism'. In the cinema we are removed from the world and placed in a relaxed posture, but in close proximity to others. Both alone and surrounded, and seduced by the brilliance of the figures on the screen, we 'slide down into [our] seats as if into a bed', and enter into a hypnotic state that is to one side of our everyday loyalties and responsibilities. For Barthes, the 'urban dark' of the cinema is a place in which 'the body's freedom is generated'.[2] The cinematic space induces a state of arousal that is both passive and aggressive. The gratification is that of passively looking, rather than of acting out, as we 'slide down into [our] seats'. But the experience of theatre – and subsequently of cinema – is structured so as to provide the voyeuristic joy of subjecting others to 'a controlling and curious gaze'.[3] While the spectacle renders us

passive, it may permit a livelier imaginative engagement precisely because it is not to be acted upon. The theatre or the cinema is a safe space in which to allow the mind some degree of erotic vagrancy, and it feels all the safer because this is not, primarily, an erotic event at all (to return to Barthes's terms, it is a 'diffused eroticism').

Barthes describes a model of spectatorship that was largely in place before the invention of cinema, and his ideas are especially evocative when explored in relation to the ballet theatre. This is because the classic design of the ballet theatre or opera house has an obviously permissive architecture. The layout is one that deliberately sets out to stimulate the voyeuristic impulse even before the performance has begun. It does this by having shapes beyond shapes, and enclosures within enclosures. To take what is perhaps the supreme example, the Palais Garnier in Paris, completed in 1875, has different styles concertinaed into each other: the Italianate, peristyled façade is surmounted by an Oriental dome, which is backed by a Greek gable. This love of excess, with different shapes and styles impacted on top of each other, is also apparent in the surface decorations. The walls are encrusted with friezes of bodies, wreathes, and musical motifs; horizontal lines are punctuated by dancing and gesturing muses and bacchantes. The Palais Garnier is, as Gérard Fontaine has suggested, an example of the 'façade as stage-set'.[4] At the summit of the building stands a handsome, naked Apollo, whose face has been sculpted to resemble that of Napoleon I. A nymph sits on either side of him. One looks up adoringly to his face, while the other stares at his groin. Even as we approach the theatre, then, there is a promiscuity of styles and images, and an unambiguous invitation to look and to be aware of pleasure.

The theatre's exterior initiates narratives of desire, in that it presents the onlooker with mythical figures acting out their characteristic pleasures, and this sense of creating a narrative is developed by the building's interior. In the case of the Palais Garnier, the audience enters through a grand entrance hall, which leads up to a much grander staircase, which takes us on in turn to the *avant foyer* and to the *grand foyer*. The building encourages us to expect a progressive intensification of visual pleasure. It achieves this by a shift in materials, from the marble of the staircase, to the mosaics of the *avant foyer*, to the gilding and crystal of the *grand foyer*. Also, with various subordinate rotundas, galleries, porticoes, and balconies, the architecture gives different views onto itself and onto the audience. Garnier fulfilled in spectacular style that part of his brief that stipulated that he provide '*plaisirs ambulatoires*'. We are encouraged to look at and to be aware of each other, and

we must make our own exits and entrances as we make our way around the theatre. At many a turn there are huge mirrors that give us a view of our own performance. Then, with our visual appetites aroused, we might wonder what splendours will be revealed in the theatre's most intimate recess, the auditorium or *salle de spectacle*. Although classic opera houses tend to be quite large and can seat several thousand people, the auditoria are cleverly laid out to create an almost suffocating, private atmosphere. In the Palais Garnier, each layer of encircling seats is divided up into a row of small boxes or *loges*. With the seats and walls of the *loges* lined in crimson plush, the *salle de spectacle* consists of a pornotopian series of vaginal enclosures. Each enclosure is itself a kind of stage, but each also allows its inhabitants to look, finally and imperiously, into the lighted box of the actual stage, and at the actual bodies displayed there. In this way, the theatre's design creates a space that is both public and private, and in which the endpoint of desire is the performer.

The performer might be said to occupy a privileged position, in that he or she is the active persona who dominates the scene. But this sense is counterbalanced by the fact that he or she is an object of scrutiny, compelled to fulfil the expectations of the viewer (there is the sense, as Stokes would have it, that these people are our 'toys'). There are, then, both sinister and attractive aspects to the way in which the classic theatre encodes the spectacle with connotations of secrecy and privacy. In designing a theatre that seems to accentuate these connotations, Garnier was working within the traditions of theatre architecture, and of ballet as spectacle. The Paris Opéra was notorious in the nineteenth century for seeking to elicit and satisfy the 'erotic daydreaming' of a largely male clientele. Historians have noted that the ballet of this period was increasingly offered as a 'voyeuristic free-for-all', and that the layout of the theatres provided spaces in which performers and patrons could make each other's acquaintance. The architecture is permissive in that it elicits a curious and desiring gaze, but this aspect is also literally 'built in' at theatres such as the Palais Garnier, with various warm-up and retiring rooms. These were spaces in which the privileged subscriber and his guests could mix 'behind the scenes' with the dancers. Barthes's cinema offers a distant and imaginary interaction between performer and spectator; the ballet theatre enabled a more actual, corporeal exchange, as the dancers became involved in *prostitution légère*.[5]

While the relationship between audience and performer has long since changed, the connotations of the Palais Garnier's architecture are not lost on present-day dancers. Among the recent stars of the Opéra

Nationale de Paris, Nicolas Le Riche notes: 'At the Garnier, you feel "watched." I sometimes have the impression of having "voyeurs" in front of me, and I don't want to play the exhibitionist'. On the other hand, some dancers enjoy the intimacy with the audience, in that it can give them a stronger sense of their own power. Kader Belarbi observes: 'When you're at the Garnier, you have a mutual exchange with the public. I get the feeling that I'm entering into the arena'.[6]

While it is possible to establish the theatre as a space that initiates and structures desire, one could not make a case that it is an especially queer space (and throughout this book we will usually be dealing with shared ideas and territories). The theatre *may* serve to encourage otherwise illicit desires. Let's return at this point to Barthes's spectator within the 'dim, anonymous, indifferent cube'. The darkness is indifferent and anonymous in the sense that it disregards how each of us identifies with the spectacle before our eyes. As viewers, we may desire the female performer or the male, or we may experience a shifting or imprecise identification. The theatre is a place of 'free association', in that we can watch and desire as we wish. This may not define the pleasure that most of us take in attending the theatre. But the public-private nature of the space, with its conditioning of desire, its various enclosures and cover of darkness, and its very idea of acting out roles, has led to a sustained historic association between the theatre and illicit desire. Theatres have, at various times, served as trysting places for unwed couples, as relatively safe places for queer social interaction, and as locales of prostitution. The theatre, then, was a space for the diffusion of the erotic in two senses. First, in witnessing the performance, the members of the audience could variously sublimate, visualise, and reconstruct their desires in relation to the scene on the stage. Second, the theatre occasioned the dispersal and intermingling of groups and behaviours. It enabled new contacts across otherwise tightly controlled social boundaries. In neither of these senses is the theatre a necessarily queer space. But, as we will see in later chapters, deviancy could flourish opportunistically under the shelter of this unusual régime.[7]

Bodies

What of the spectacle itself, and what specifically of the ballet spectacle? At various points since the early nineteenth century, ballet has been a scandal about the body. It has been a prime occasion to see attractive young women in short or more or less see-through garments. It has also given offence from time to time because it presents a

relatively undressed male body. It offers young men as objects of contemplation, surrendered to the viewer's gaze. I want to return to the 'offensiveness' of the male body, but first the ballet body – male or female – is a particular kind of body, with its own special 'look'. It is a 'customised' body, and this has had a bearing on its queer potential. How and why did the dancer's look evolve as it did, and what queer implications has it had for dance-makers and their audiences?

Our starting-point is that the dancer's body is made over to its specialised role. Ballet is 'deforming', in that it produces an altered musculature. To some extent it requires its practitioners to give up on having a normal body, and the pain involved in this transformation is a part of ballet's mythology. The dancer carries out a series of barre exercises, repeated day after day over many years. These are done with the hips, legs, and feet projecting out in more or less extreme versions of a 'six o'clock' position. As a result, over time, the body develops a characteristic 'turned-out' appearance. Although this 'splayed' or 'penguin' look is often taken as a sign of ballet's ridiculously fanciful nature, it has rational, historical antecedents. Ballet is usually understood to date from the sixteenth-century court masque, in which aristocrats would perform a series of movements to music as part of a larger symbolic drama. These stately manoeuvres, with rich costumes and scenery, were designed to display the monarch's power. With the feet slightly turned out, the courtiers could manage the various sideways and crosswise movements with smoothness and grace. Turn-out, and a more general openness of posture, had other moral and social significances within the aristocracy. It indicated righteousness, style, and power (a slumped, self-concealing posture, on the other hand, was taken to signify deviousness and ignorance). The noble, dancerly body was also a manly body. The balance of turn-out, and having a fine control of the contour of one's upper body, were essential components of fencing. It was understood that dancing taught one to 'handle matters with seemliness and without disorder', while also helping one to 'ride horseback and carry arms'. In sum, it 'render[ed] one more skilled at serving one's Prince in battle, and pleasing him in divertissements'.[8]

As the court masque evolved, its movements became more complicated, and gradually it became an event the nobles watched rather than took part in. Acrobats and tumblers were brought in from the streets to carry out the ever-more-complex dances, and turn-out was gradually exaggerated from a 45-degree to a 90-degree angle. In taking over the ballet, the lower-class street performers aped the style and gestures of their 'betters', except that the acrobat's imitation was understood to be better than the aristocrat's original.[9]

The significance of the balletic look changed over time, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was a complex evolution, but to pick out a few key moments, we might consider France and the rise of the new classes in the course of the eighteenth century. Alongside the more widespread emergence of the middle class, there was the rise of an intellectual class that was independent of – and even opposed to – the practices and values of the court. This new faction – the thinkers of the Enlightenment – urged more scientific, rationalist modes, and they sought to demystify the authority of the monarch and the church. The writers and thinkers of the Enlightenment emphasised the laws of nature, and they urged that society should be more in keeping with such natural laws. This involved a critique of the studiously elegant persona of the aristocrat. As Sarah Cohen puts it in her analysis of dance and the *ancien régime*, 'A widespread Enlightenment effort to separate artifice from the body's natural "truth" prompted a rejection of many of the arts associated with aristocratic corporeality, including Watteau's paintings and the *danse noble*'.[10]

In the Enlightenment era, manliness was increasingly defined in terms of strength and functionality. Gracefulness came to be seen more as a womanly attribute, and ballet survived the Enlightenment in part because it could orient itself more emphatically around the female dancer. This tendency was confirmed in the early nineteenth century, as the aristocratic audience was displaced by the bourgeoisie. To the newly confident Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment middle classes, the refinement of aristocratic posture – in the case of men – was seen as frivolous and effeminate. The male ballet dancer became unacceptable. There was a sense that the male body could not and should not be graceful; that it was too grossly material for aesthetic display. As poet and critic Théophile Gautier wrote in 1838: 'Nothing is more distasteful than a man who shows his red neck, his big muscular arms, his legs with the calves of a parish beadle, and all his strong massive frame shaken by leaps and *pirouettes*'. Similarly, the critic Jules Janin wrote of a male dancer in 1840: 'That this fellow should dance *as a woman does* – impossible!' It was offensive to Janin that a 'bewhiskered individual who is a pillar of the community' should 'come before us in a tunic of sky-blue satin, his head covered with a hat with a waving plume amorously caressing his cheek'.[11]

In a bourgeois culture, the mock-aristocratic male dancer was disturbingly feminine, and he was irrelevant. Who, after all, was supposed to enjoy the display of the male body, and on what grounds? Janin declared of the 'pretty dancing girl' that he knew 'what this lovely

creature wishes us', whereas he could not see the point of watching a man 'as ugly as you or I'.[12] What kind of a pleasure can one man take in another's body, and, especially, in this body? Turn-out seems to make a display of the genitals, while the muscular roundness and 'pulled-up' look of the male dancer's buttocks might seem to have made its own invitation. The supposition becomes ever stronger that the presence of the male dancer could only appeal to abnormal men, and to immodest women. The bourgeois man did not wish to be confronted so obviously by another man. The male dancer seemed to intervene between the male spectator and the object of his desire. There was a sense of competitive resentment. The newly wealthy subscribers expected unimpeded access to the female dancers, and the male dancers were an even greater nuisance because they tended to be the husbands, brothers, and fathers of the female dancers.[13]

The changes in the social composition and preconceptions of the audience produced great changes in the spectacle itself. In the processional form of the courtly masque, ballet tended to be performed by single-sex groups. As the ballet professionalised, boys were often cast in women's roles, though towards the end of the seventeenth century women too began to be cast. But the restrictive costumes worn by women meant that the man performed the more skilful and varied movements. He remained the central and most admired performer. It was only in the nineteenth century, with the extensive use of pointe-work in Romantic ballets, and with the advent of the bourgeois audience, that women displaced men. Increasingly, ballet centred on a world of sylphs and ingénues. The great stars of Romantic ballet were all women: Marie Taglioni (1804–1884), Fanny Elssler (1810–1884), Fanny Cerrito (1817–1909), and Lucile Grahn (1819–1907). And, in a complete reversal of the early court ballets, women now took men's parts.[14]

These shifts in the perception of the dancing body might lead us toward the way in which queer theory intersects with – or has exploited – the debates that it inherited from feminism to do with 'nature versus nurture', or 'biology versus social construction'. It has become a founding idea of queer theory that gender is not an innate, biological destiny, but a social construct or cultural performance. Judith Butler invites us to see masculine and feminine values not as natural and undeviating qualities that depend on one's sex, but as roles that we assimilate as we grow up. She argues that 'gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*'.[15] Even the most normative of gendered identities is a carefully and

continuously rehearsed performance, though the performer may not recognise it as such. Normative identities acquire a power that allows them to be understood as natural and inevitable, rather than as 'tenuously constituted in time'. But even the most readily accepted or powerful of identities should be seen as a 'sedimentation of gender norms',[16] which can be thrown into crisis by a skilful impersonation. The man who is skilled at taking a 'woman's part', or the street performer who is skilled at performing the king, may invite the troubling thought that all identities are not so much innate as achieved. A man dressed as a woman performs femininity, but so does a woman.

Ballet manifests this idea that identity is performative, or achieved over time. The dancer's work at the barre, day after day over the years, is an overt instance of Butler's 'stylised repetition of acts', as the dancer gradually achieves and maintains the physique that will enable him or her to give a persuasive performance. Ballet seems to know only too well that its presentation of natural beauty is a carefully produced image of 'the natural', and not some 'true' expression of 'nature itself'. The excessively worked dimorphism – the *pas de deux* of delicate feminine and noble masculine – indicates a mastery of convention rather than a spontaneous expression of natural male and female. The balletic identity is always intensely conscious of its own constructedness, and it constantly monitors the quality of its impersonation. As such, ballet also undermined the naturalised truths – the new 'laws' – of Enlightenment philosophy.[17]

The post-Enlightenment distaste for the male ballet dancer has persisted, to some extent, to the present day. There have, though, been moments at which the male dancer regained his preeminence. The audience in early twentieth-century America, for instance, was preponderantly female. It was legitimate for this audience to enjoy the presentation of the man's body. This was not so much because it was a heterosexual exchange, but because the women were assumed to have had aesthetic and sentimental motives. When American women became very enthusiastic, however, their supposedly 'artistic' interest became open to question. Their enthusiasm seemed to raise doubts about middle-class woman's supposed inherent chastity. This much is evident from the humour that was generated by the tremendous success of Mikhail Mordkin. Although his fame is now lost behind the legend of his partner, Anna Pavlova, Mordkin became the subject of undisguised female adulation during a tour of 1910. A humorous commentator for the *New York Telegraph* captured the way in which ballet elicits an unsettling interest in the body. He joked of the performance that Mordkin's legs were 'particularly magnificent', and 'received a

round of applause all to themselves yesterday'. The journalist noted that the 'enthusiasm of the elderly ladies in the audience was remarkable', and he suggested that the programme credits might have acknowledged dancing by Pavlova, music by Stier, wigs by Hepner, and legs by Mordkin. The women's interest – as this sly review indicates – was not entirely covered by the cause of art. Whatever else was going on, this was clearly about looking at a man's body.[18]

The queer potential of the ballet, then, can be understood in terms of its presentation of the body as a stylised object, and of the male body in particular as a conspicuously desirable object. There is a queer or destabilising potential in ballet's hard-won look, as the historical examples demonstrate. There is nothing *inevitably* queer, or otherwise subversive, about what ballet does with the body. The subversive or conformist power of a performance will always depend on context. Even the subversive performance can, over time, become a 'sediment' – a regulatory or coercive fiction – in its turn. Nor should we try to define ballet's queer potential too much in terms of the male dancer. The woman's body is also turned out, but from the mid-nineteenth century onward, she has been defined by the technique of rising onto pointe. While she may produce soft and lyrical movements with her upper body, the straightening of the leg and foot gives her a phallic aspect. Rose English argues that the male dancer stands in for the male viewer; the male dancer enjoys handling the ballerina as he would enjoy handling his own penis:

> Fondly he holds the phallus in his arms, longingly he looks into his princess's eyes, ecstatically he lifts her, his hands around her long, stiff tube of a body.

In this interpretation, even the heroine's doom provides an oblique gratification:

> Her death, the point at which she at last goes limp, [is] the orgasm of the phallus that she represents in the fantasy of the hero.[19]

The idea of the phallic pointe, though, needs to be treated with some historical sensitivity. The hard, straight line corresponds more nearly to mid- to late twentieth-century dance. Earlier ballerinas tended to have a slightly bent knee in arabesque, and it is more particularly with the Balanchine dancer that the bodies become thinner and harder. Whether thin and hyper-extended or not, the aspect of line and pointe

has been offered as a rationale for a heterosexual male interest in ballet. The ballerina is a masturbatory projection, a subliminal vehicle for the movement towards and through ejaculation. But this also suggests that the spectacle of ballet – even in the form of the ballerina – is always in part homoerotic. Even the female dancer's body can be construed as a loving depiction of male sexuality. Again one thinks of Barthes's 'diffused eroticism' (and particularly of the implication that eroticism, or its sources, must be volatile in order to 'diffuse').[20]

There is more to say about the woman's physique in particular, however. While ballet makes the female dancer's body conspicuously present, it has tended, especially in recent times, to favour a particular type of body. The quality of the prima ballerina is related to her ability to attain purity of line. That is to say, she must dance in a way that emphasises poise, and that creates a sense of coordination and of clear, unbroken shapes. It is easier to project an impressive sense of line with lean limbs, and hence the female dancer's preoccupation with weight. As noted, ballet has not always privileged a very thin look, and in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries some dancers were praised precisely because they had a fuller figure than the other stars. But even these 'full' dancers were by no means 'fat', and were usually slim in comparison to the non-balletic ideal of their time.

The requirement of line necessarily favours slenderness, and this leads us towards a paradox. Although the female dancer's body is placed on display, in its need to reduce to line it is also a body that hardly dares to be present at all. The ballerina's body suggests an ambivalence. Through her use of line, she can project a bodily coherence that may be especially attractive to those whose desires have given them a sense of social incoherence. This is how film theorist Richard Dyer explains his attraction to ballet. When he first saw Margot Fonteyn appear onstage, the supreme poise of her opening gesture revived in him 'a dream of living in harmony with one's body'.[21] On the other hand, though, ballet's idea of 'purity' suggests a fear of the complexities and betrayals of the body. As Kevin Kopelson notes, the light and prancing body has often been a feature of homophobic discourse. Kopelson quotes Lee Edelman to the effect that:

> the gay male body seems to enact a certain resistance to its own embodiment, to turn against itself as if refusing the substance, the weightiness, the gravity of bodiliness as such.[22]

This argument appears in flatly homophobic form elsewhere. It has been argued that 'it is partly because a ballerina isn't a woman but an

abstraction of a woman that ballet attracts homosexuals in such large numbers'.[23] The implication is perhaps that homosexuality is founded on a horror of the female body, and so the homosexual likes to identify his own femininity with the reduced and relatively sexless form of the female dancer. I am not convinced that a fear of the female is particular to, or more marked in, homosexual than heterosexual men. I would rather argue that the ambivalent embodiment of the ballerina is readily available to homophobic and to queer identifications.

Classical ballet's queer potential seems to lie most obviously in its display of male bodies, and with the female dancer, in the interplay of strong and weak, rounded and phallicised. There are, though, further factors one might explore in thinking about how the balletic body is perceived. From the court masque onward, the nature of ballet and the response to it have been heavily determined by relations of class. This factor is also inevitably present in how people perceive or live out same-sex relationships. In some of the chapters that follow, it will be hard at times to distinguish classed motives from queer motives. The classed aspect of ballet – the fact of ruling-class patronage – offered some protection to people who were otherwise extremely vulnerable. But precisely because the ruling class granted itself the theatre as a 'zone of tolerance', queer dance-makers could also see their careers as a way of fulfilling their social aspirations. One thinks of Kenneth Tynan's comment that ballet is 'status-spawning'.[24] There is at times a mutual exchange, whereby ballet offers an aesthetic prestige to the ruling class, and the ruling class confers a measure of social prestige on creative artists.

Another factor to reflect on here is that of race and the staged body. To what extent is the ballet body automatically a white body, and how might the non-white dancing body have to negotiate or appeal to a different set of values with regard to masculinity and femininity? These questions have appeared in acute form in the United States. There have been moments in African-American culture when homosexuality has been declared a 'white disease'. At times the Black male classical dancer may have appeared to have turned aside from his more immediate cultural inheritance, while also confounding his culture's idea of masculinity. This awkward intersection of racial and sexual values extends to the dancer's relationship with a predominantly white audience. To what extent is that audience's response determined by the racial preconceptions that it brings to the theatre? What stored fantasies and resentments might be at play?

Bill T. Jones has articulated the experience of the Black male modern dancer in these terms:

> My eroticism, my sexuality is often coupled with wild anger and belligerence. I know that I can be food for fantasy, but at the same time I am a person with a history – and that history is in part the history of exploitation.[25]

If Jones has been able to transform his particular brand of theatre dance in such a way as to raise these issues, ballet has exercised a more comprehensive exclusion. Black dancers have spoken of the difficulty of gaining acceptance as classical dancers, and at least one prominent critic in twentieth-century New York published his opinion that a Black presence in ballet was inappropriate for ballet and for Black dancers. With the notable exception of Arthur Mitchell, who achieved prominence with New York City Ballet and went on to found Dance Theatre of Harlem, Black ballet dancers felt excluded, and were often forced to work abroad if they were to work at all. As historian Richard Long has suggested, there is the blatant racism that could cause an audience to reject the intimate interaction of a *pas de deux* when performed by a man and a woman of different race, and there is a 'subliminal' objection 'based on a notion of color harmony which, particularly in large ensemble dancing, seems implicit in the idea of "white" ballet, despite the supposed reference of that term to costume rather than skin tone'. Given the near-complete whiteness of ballet, Black dancers tended to focus their efforts on modern dance. There have been Black classical companies, and Black companies that made use of ballet technique. It is surely proper to a 'queer history of the ballet' to consider how such companies embodied or negotiated queerness, though it is sadly beyond the scope of the present book. Equally, one might wonder about the equation of sexuality and ballet in non-Western societies in which ballet is popular, such as Japan. In each and every case, the terms – 'queer', 'class', 'audience' – would have to be thrown into question, and reconstructed with close attention to the specifics of the 'host culture'.[26]

Movement

If ballet raises questions about the body, and about the audience and its perceptions of the body, what about the formal properties of ballet? What queer potential can we locate in ballet's constitutive features? What, first of all, can we say about the body in movement? Although ballet invites us to look at the body, this is something of a tease. The dancers seldom stay still long enough for our gaze to feel that it has fully possessed them. The experimental choreographer Yvonne Rainer comments:

> I remember thinking that dance was at a disadvantage in relation to sculpture in that the spectator could spend as much time as he required to examine a sculpture, walk around it, and so forth – but a dance movement – because it happened in time – vanished as soon as it was executed.[27]

Rainer detested what she characterised as the evanescence, magic, and campness of ballet. She wanted to replace this with banal or unspectacular action. Her dances featured 'found movement' and 'task-like activity', which is to say that she staged people moving as they do in everyday life. But most forms of dance seek to capitalise on what Rainer saw as a disadvantage. Ballet in particular is an art of effect rather than substance. It seeks to please and intrigue the eye via a process of constant diversion. It has its slower, more sculptural moments (and the white tights and powder of classical ballet produce a 'marble-ised' look). But for much of the time ballet functions in terms of borderline visibility, of 'now you see it, now you don't'. Ballet raises doubts about what is there and what is not, and especially what is possible and what is not. Movement becomes a process of visual distortion, of projecting one self while obscuring another. The critic Jacques Rivière, who observed the tremendous impact of the Ballets Russes in the early twentieth century, made this point about Fokine's choreography for *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911):

> Nijinsky's body literally disappears in its own dance. The only thing that remains visible of that muscular being, with its so strong and prominent features, are exquisitely fleeting contours, constantly evanescing forms.[28]

Rivière did not like this effect, and preferred the brutal clarity of Nijinsky's own subsequent choreography. For him, the Fokinian 'fleeting contours' were suspicious, indicating a 'certain lack of inner truth'. He locates an authentic solidity in Nijinsky's manly physique, and would rather contemplate that than the 'exquisite' pretence of Nijinsky as the spirit of the rose.

There is an implied commentary on sexual normality in both Rainer's and Rivière's remarks. Manly modern dance is set against the camp artifice of ballet. The former confronts the world as it is, while the latter is a type of narcissistic self-enclosure. The real of conventional masculinity is preferred to the perverse role-play of camp homosexuality. One might, though, agree that ballet's definitive movements do indeed turn on illusion, and that this is a positive thing. One might

see illusionism as an important part of the appeal it can make to those who have been conditioned to think of themselves as perverse and objectionable. The illusionism of ballet indicates a desire to take risks with things as they are. Ballet's characteristic manoeuvres do not indicate a preference for the artificial over the real. Rather, they jeopardise our sense of the difference between the two. In this reading, the point that ballet would seem to make is that distinctions between real and artificial, authentic and perverse, are not always factual and true, so much as products of habit and convention.

I want now to define – with brief examples – some of the tricks that ballet uses to play with conventions of the real. They are pointe-work, jumps, turns, and musicality. The effect of pointe-work varies according to the balletic style. In high classicism and in modern ballet, pointe-work may be used to create a harder look. It is often used, though, to create the illusion of lightness and delicacy. The implication is that the dancer is so fairy-like that she barely touches the ground, and may fly away at any moment. She does not walk or run from one place to another, but goes onto pointe and drifts in a series of tiny steps or *bourrées*. This produces a mysterious, hovering movement, as though she were being blown by a breeze. We are presented with the feminine ideal of nimbleness, but taken to such an excessive degree that it begins to seem uncanny. For this reason, the strange beauty of the *bourrée* often signifies dangerous or impossible loves. The movement was developed for the otherworldly characters of Romantic ballet, such as sylphs and undines. As the dancers float in and out of the hero's vision in a sparkling run of barely perceptible steps, he becomes mesmerised and is led away from the normal world.

Other fundamental illusions include the jump. In one sense, the jump is not an illusion at all. It may surprise and impress us, but this is the dancer's athletic power rather than a trick as such. That said, the jump usually incorporates illusionistic devices. In the straightforward *grand jeté*, for instance, the dancer leaps forwards and upwards. But he will try to intensify the quality of the movement – its airiness – with a moment of suspension, a freeze-frame position between the going up and the coming down. When accentuated, this technique can change the movement from a produced or worked jump to the sudden and startling assumption of a pose above the ground. Another frequently used device is that of setting a height with one leg, and rising to meet it with the other. A familiar example of this is the *grand jeté en tournant*. It is a sort of cantilevered or 'scissors' jump, whereby the dancer gains height with one leg and then seems to 'ride' it with the other. Momentarily, he seems to exist in his own gravitational pocket.

Also, the 'double-climax' of this scissors movement, of one leg rising and falling, only to be replaced by the other leg, means that the viewer feels curiously deceived as to which moment was the jump's highpoint.

There is a further illusionistic component in many jumps, in the form of *batterie*. This is the way in which the legs beat together and apart while the dancer is in the air. It is often an intense, fluttering effect, in which the beating of the legs seems almost to propel the jump higher than it would otherwise go. As with all jumps, an important part of the artistry is to avoid a long and obvious knee-bend or *plié* before and after the jump. Hiding the effort means that the dancer appears suddenly to bounce into space. These beaten jumps can create a 'flitting' look that is sometimes taken to be bird-like (the famous male solo from the 'Blue Bird' *pas de deux* consists of a series of beaten jumps on a diagonal across the stage). The strength of the illusion in beaten steps is similar to that of the *bourrée*, in that the eye detects the movement, but cannot follow it closely. It happens so fast that it is hard to know how many times the legs beat together in the air. It is a tantalising, exasperating effect as, once again, the eye tries to keep up with something that is slightly beyond its comprehension.

Spins and turns are a further illusionistic device. When the dancer turns slowly on pointe, this emphasises her poise. But a fast spin is another means to evanescence in that the dancer seems, as Rivière observed of Nijinsky, to disappear within the movement she creates. One particular kind of turn, the *fouetté*, is perhaps the ballerina's most spectacular trick. She extends one leg, and then whips it back toward her supporting leg, so that she begins to whirl like a top. This provides one of the most famous moments in ballet. In the Coda of the Black Swan *pas de deux* in *Swan Lake*, the wicked Odile performs thirty-two *fouettés* in a row. Her display of virtuosity is intended to blind Siegfried to the difference between herself and the woman he really loves, the White Swan, Odette. The *fouetté*, with its mesmerising strangeness, dramatises the Black Swan's supernatural powers of allure. Her excessively flashy dancing is instrumental to the perversion of Siegfried and Odette's true, 'White' love.

Aside from the various athletic tricks of ballet, perhaps the most fundamental illusion is simply that of moving to music. This may not seem illusory at all, in that the music is played and the dancers dance to it. But in a fine performance, the interplay between movement and music is altogether more subtle and mysterious. The average dancer may indeed follow the music, but the skilful dancer manages to confuse the motive of music and the event of dance. She seems to be simultaneous with, and even to initiate, the quality of the music. Maurice

Béjart once praised the dancing of the American ballerina Suzanne Farrell with the comment that 'she is like violin . . . the music come out from her body'. The dancer must be more or less in time with the music, but she may also be infinitesimally behind or in front of the beat. Alternatively, she may hit the beat with the legs, but bend slightly beyond it with the shoulders, arms, or hands. Via this 'phrasing' of the movement, the dancer can 'stretch' the music or 'hurry' it. This ability to play with music can have an enjoyably perplexing effect. As with Béjart's comment on Farrell, it can begin to seem that the body is projecting or 'causing' the music. Stokes writes that the 'movement is not a mere "following out" of the music'. For him, it is 'the other way round', as the 'music seems to become visible, to become a shape that is complementary to the dancer's shape'. This fascinating uncertainty is also what George Balanchine alluded to when he famously urged his audiences to 'see the music, hear the dance'.[29]

Ballet, then, sets out to intrigue and confound the viewer. It makes the body daringly, almost objectionably present, but in the illusions created by movement and music, this is also a body that hardly dares to be present at all. The dancing body desires display, but this exists in parallel with a necessary modesty. There is the paradox of the disappearance after an immensely vivid presence, so that, to the imagination at least, the body is still there. Ballet's elusiveness is often discussed in terms of its ephemerality or evanescence. As Agnes de Mille expressed it, ballet is 'written on the air'.[30] It is ephemeral in the sense of 'always in the process of disappearing', and one may recollect numerous romantically banal comments on ballet and the transience of beauty. But, as indicated earlier, evanescence also, from the nineteenth century onward, had queer connotations. In his study *The Renaissance* (1873), Pater infamously suggested that art 'comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake'.[31] This statement was offensive in the 1870s because it removed art from its social and moral obligations, from continuous narratives of marriage and progress. Taken together with his Hellenistic interests, Pater's scandalous point of view became an inspiration for the homosexual writers and artists of the *fin de siècle*, 'art for art's sake' generation.

The queer implication of the glimpsed and transitory aesthetic moment is taken up again in the twentieth century, in, for instance, literary scholar Harold Beaver's essay, 'Homosexual Signs'. Beaver notes that, excluded from 'the common code', homosexual perception is particularly attuned to 'the momentary glimpse, the scrambled figure, the sporadic gesture'.[32] There is a similar tendency in recent

queer cultural criticism. In his influential book on opera, Wayne Koestenbaum relies on the impression more than the fact. Although he makes quite broad comments on social history, his most obvious archive is that of his own life. He does not offer us many facts about that either, so much as recollections of his endlessly fluctuating feelings. This kind of critical writing used to be rejected for being 'impressionistic', for lacking 'rigour'. But in adopting a flamboyant mode – a mode that glows with its own meaning even as it is too rapid and restless to be pinned down – Koestenbaum presents us with a further instance of the elusive and illusive discourse that is also his subject.

Recent studies by Kevin Kopelson and José Estéban Muñoz develop the possibilities of evanescence in a queer dance context. Kopelson writes of Nijinsky in a deliberately Paterian and impressionistic way. Akin to Koestenbaum's shimmering enactment, Kopelson defines his commentary as Nijinsky's 'afterlife', and the term captures Kopelson's inherently and self-consciously volatile writing practice. Muñoz makes a link between the ephemeral gesture and 'queer feeling' in an essay on the New York gay club dancer Kevin Aviance. Following Marcia Siegel, he notes that dance is a 'perpetual vanishing point', in that at 'the moment of its creation it is gone'. In an echo of Kopelson and Edelman's discussion of the 'resistance . . . to embodiment', Muñoz invites us to consider queerness, as much as dance itself, as 'being filled with the intention to be lost'. Queerness must subsist in ephemeral gestures, because it has needed to remain invisible to an official culture of 'evidence and facts'. Muñoz argues: 'To accept loss is to accept the way in which one's queerness will always render one lost to a world of heterosexual imperatives, codes, and laws'.[33]

Muñoz's argument in relation to the ephemeral might equally be tested out against earlier instances of evanescence and 'queer feeling', and particularly against the longer history of ballet's illusionism. The desire to be seen but not seen, to attract and to cheat the eye, might again be interpreted as part of ballet's queer power. The following chapters explore particular historical instances of that queer power, and of how it is created out of these various components of spaces, bodies, and movement. For now, though, it is perhaps as well to acknowledge that if the queer power is to be defined by its elusiveness, it will also be limited by that elusiveness. For all that it shows us, ballet is seldom static enough to serve as 'evidence and facts'. A negative way of phrasing this would be to say that ballet is a form of revelation that never moves too far from the closet.

2

NUNS AND FAIRIES

The audience at the Paris Opéra was presented with a sensational new work on 21 November 1831. It was Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* ('Robert the Devil'). Meyerbeer's hero, Robert, is the son of a noble, saintly woman, Isabelle, and an unknown father. Bertram, a demon, knows himself to be Robert's father, and he tries to win Robert's soul so that father and son will be together in hell for eternity. The drama ends with Bertram being taken back to hell, while Robert is saved, for a while longer, by the powers of goodness. The opera provided Meyerbeer with a success that has seldom been equalled. Between 1831 and 1893, *Robert le Diable* was performed 756 times at the Paris Opéra alone.[1] Its success was due to various factors. It presented opera on a grand scale, with large orchestra and cast, and with spectacular stage effects. There was also an unusually careful blending of the different elements. The music, the décor, and the performance style were all integrated in what we would now see as an antecedent of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* ('total artwork' or 'fusion of the arts').

One of the chief features of the success, though, was the dance episode 'The Ballet of the Nuns', which takes place in the ruined cloister of the Convent of Sainte Rosalie. A mysterious light pervades the decaying arcades of the cloister. Bertram appears, and summons from their graves nuns who betrayed their vows while they were alive. Bertram leaves, and the nuns, penitent figures in white veils and habits, arise in large numbers. It is a delicate, eerie vision. As a breathless Hans Christian Andersen recreates the scene in a novel of 1837, 'By the hundred they rise from the graveyard and drift into the cloister. They seem not to touch the earth. Like vaporous images, they glide past one another'. But then their Abbess commands them to throw off their veils and to lose themselves in sensual excess. They disrobe, and exhibit the desires that caused them to betray their vows. Andersen recounts, 'Suddenly their shrouds fall to the ground. They stand in all their

voluptuousness nakedness, and there begins a bacchanal'.[2] Andersen exaggerates – at least, the nuns were not completely naked – but his feverish excitement suggests the dramatic effect the scene had on the contemporary audience.

Bertram has summoned the nuns because he wishes them to use their wiles to lead Robert ever closer to his damnation. But after Bertram has left, and before Robert arrives, these wicked sisters indulge in their favourite pleasures. They drink, they gamble, and, above all, they dance together. They seem animated by a wildly incoherent sensuality. As one contemporary reviewer wrote, the nuns enter into a 'rousing gallop' within the 'sepulchral gloom'. They spin 'like tops', dance rounds and a farandole, and 'disport . . . themselves like women possessed'.[3] Their debauchery – the pleasure they take in pleasure – does not require the arrival of Robert. They and their Abbess seem to form an independent satanic realm. When Robert does arrive, the nuns seduce him into drinking and gambling, but he finds their sexual overtures repellent (one set of production notes records that Robert 'flees from them, for they disgust him'[4]). He is briefly charmed by the Abbess, however, who lures him into stealing a talisman. This fulfils Bertram's design, and so at that moment the nuns are driven back into hell, and Robert makes his escape.

Robert le Diable represented a significant advance in terms of unity of composition and production, but it was noteworthy for other reasons. It embodied a change in the social place and function of opera and ballet. The Paris Opéra had been under royal patronage until 1830 and the July revolution, and it had tended towards conservatism. Many of the new creative talents had managed to score notable successes in the populist boulevard theatres of Paris (with their mixed audiences of bourgeois, artisans, and lower classes), but they had not yet broken into the more privileged artistic institutions such as the Paris Opéra. From 1831, however, the Opéra no longer catered so much for the aristocracy as for the wealthier portions of the rising classes. These rising classes, according to dance historian Ivor Guest, 'were unimpressed by [the] academic conventions and classical allusions' that had gratified the old ruling class. The Opéra came under the directorship of the infamous Dr. Véron. His autobiography would be titled, *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris* (1853–1855), and he understood the July revolution as 'the triumph of the bourgeoisie'. He sensed that the bourgeois 'would be fond of having pride of place, and of amusing themselves', and he envisaged the Opéra as the 'Versailles of the middle classes'. Under royal patronage, the Intendant of the Royal Theatres had ordered that 'the dancers' skirts be lengthened so that carnal thoughts

should not occur to the gentlemen who sat close to the stage'. Dr. Véron, on the other hand, shortened the dancers' skirts. He also reduced their wages and made the warm-up room or *foyer de la danse* into a place where the most important subscribers could meet with the dancers. With these strategic decisions, Véron inaugurated the age of *prostitution légère* that was mentioned in Chapter 1.[5]

Robert le Diable was part of a larger process of change, as opera and ballet ceased to provide elaborations of *ancien régime* values, and began to offer the kind of sensations that enabled the Opéra to compete as popular entertainment. The loss of royal patronage enabled a new experimentalism (though, with *prostitution légère*, the new spirit brought new oppressions). But if 'The Ballet of the Nuns' was an early instance of erotic vulgarisation, it was important in other respects. It was the first *ballet blanc* or white ballet, and it was also the first Romantic ballet. 'The Ballet of the Nuns' was Romantic in that the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a reaction against established authorities, and against the rationalist and utilitarian philosophies of the Enlightenment. The Romantics stressed passion, the individual, fantasy, the supernatural, and transcendence. Although they were opposed to the grinding, moralistic elements of the bourgeoisie, they might be linked back to the rise of the middle classes, in that the Romantics often came from the rising classes, and their rebellious expressiveness could be said to affirm the bourgeoisie and *its* displacement of old systems and values.

Certainly *Robert le Diable* was an obvious intrusion of Romanticism into a formerly conservative area of cultural life. With its tormented hero and its twilight world of sensual nuns, it offered a heady mix of lyricism, anti-establishment critique, and melancholia. Its ballet act also brought Romantic values together with developments in dance technique. Dancing on pointe was not a new skill, but in the past it had been used as an occasional, flashy element. The Abbess in 'The Ballet of the Nuns' was played by Marie Taglioni, who was able to dance on pointe in sustained, seemingly effortless runs of steps, and it is with her that pointe-work starts to become ballet's definitive form of movement. The airiness of pointe-work, its supernatural aspect, also coincided brilliantly with the Romantic desire for fantasy. And this ghostly estrangement was in turn reinforced by the new use of gas-lamps to light the stage. Gas-lamps and reflectors were especially good for creating the soft, uneven, and half-light effects that suggested moonlight and reverie.

What more can we say, though, about 'The Ballet of the Nuns' as an erotic spectacle – the spectacle that Andersen and his contemporaries

had found so chilling and so arousing? It is hard to 'read off' the work as offering a neat or coherent significance. Our first vision of the nuns is of pathetic figures in white, but this is soon belied by their willingness to seek and to give pleasure. There is an arbitrariness in the objects or means of their pleasure. They agree readily to their Abbess's instruction that they cavort with each other, and they also follow her command to try to seduce Robert. There is a sadistic element in their approach to Robert, in that, if they are successful, it will lead him ever closer to his damnation. It might seem that, in the bacchanal before Robert's arrival, the ballet offers the audience a sort of lesbian phantasmagoria. Possibly this is an instance of the 'heteroscopic sapphism' mentioned in the Introduction. It is a spectacle of women 'disporting' with each other in a 'rousing gallop', but it seems calculated to appeal to the heterosexual male viewer. The sapphic suggestion does not preclude the possibility of heterosexual intercourse. If anything, it reassures the male viewer. It suggests that, beneath the veil of discipline and sanctity, women have a sexual appetite, and indeed, they are omnivorous. But these are nuns who have betrayed their vows, and when Robert rejects their advances they are herded back to the underworld by demons. The erotic sensation is rounded off with the moralistic implication that these women are wicked and dangerous.[6]

It might seem odd to describe 'The Ballet of the Nuns' as Romantic. In the English-speaking world, we tend perhaps to associate Romantic transcendence less with erotic visions, and more with Wordsworth's and Emerson's writings on nature. In keeping with this more chaste sense of Romanticism, we tend, perhaps, to reduce the *ballets blancs* to an asexual ideal. The *ballets blancs* are Romantic in that the whiteness indicates a concern with transcendence; the white figures are in part embodiments of the Romantic hero's search for the Ideal, for that which is to be found – if it is to be found at all – far from an everyday world of rationalism and money-grubbing. But erotic strangeness, too, has its place in Romanticism. When we admit this factor, it becomes easier to square Romantic ballet with our knowledge that ballet at the Paris Opéra in this era was increasingly associated with sexual scandal and sexual commerce.

I want to trace this aspect of Romanticism, and its impact on ballet. But I want also to acknowledge pre-Romantic sources and influences. For much of the eighteenth century, the scientists, philosophers, and writers of the Enlightenment – Voltaire (1694–1778), Rousseau (1712–1778), and Diderot (1713–1784) among them – sought to overturn the rigid forms and beliefs of the Church and the ruling class. Enlightenment critique appeared in various guises, from scientific

and philosophical treatises, to anti-clerical pornography. The pornography often told of or pictured monks and nuns having sex with each other, or monks sodomising each other and nuns having sex amongst themselves. These texts could be justified on the grounds that they had a serious political purpose – they undermined a corrupt religious establishment – but their circulation doubtless also reflected the fact that they offered the reader a voyeuristic pleasure. Indeed, Enlightenment ideals can on occasion be seen as a pretext for – or hard to distinguish from – a more generalised libertine sensibility.

A much more refined anti-clerical text that is of interest here is Diderot's *La Religieuse*. Diderot wrote his novel in 1760, but it was not published until 1780. The story is told by a young woman, Suzanne Simonin, who has been forced to take the veil against her will. In her conventual life, she is subjected to a series of cruel acts. She also draws the amorous attention of one of her superiors, Madame ***. In his attempt to subvert the authority of the Church, Diderot intends to show how unnatural passions and other behavioural disorders arise in a life of enforced single-sex seclusion. But even Diderot may have had mixed motives; or rather, he writes to mixed effect. As one scholar notes, 'While Diderot may present lesbianism as a perversion, it is the only form of human desire to be extensively depicted in the otherwise largely cold and loveless world of *La Religieuse*'.[7] Equally, Diderot represents Suzanne as someone who is not 'naturally' averse to Madame ***'s approaches. It 'costs [her] much' to reject the Mother Superior's caresses, because Suzanne herself was 'born with an affectionate nature, and [she] long[s] to be caressed'. Though very different in tone to the spectacular excesses of 'The Ballet of the Nuns', there is again the suggestion not of a 'lesbian identity', but of an affectional and erotic amorphousness.[8] Other narratives reworked the same theme with less subtlety. *Sainte-Nitouche* (1770) featured nuns who practised 'tribadism', while *Anandria* (1789; reissued in 1791 as *La Nouvelle Sappho*) told of a lesbian sect of 'Mothers' and 'novices'. Through the Romantic age itself, E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote of convents and 'Sapphic games' in *Schwester Monika* (1815), while the heroine of *Vingt Ans de la vie d'une jolie femme* loses her virginity to the Mother Superior of her convent.[9]

The revolution of 1830, then, sponsored a new sensationalism at the Opéra, a sensationalism that seems to have fed upon a renewed licentiousness in literature. In both literature and the theatre, there is a recurrent interest in orders of women who demonstrate 'sapphic' tendencies, or who display an otherwise incoherent libidinal energy. With 'The Ballet of the Nuns' and other works, the Opéra after 1831 is part of a Romantic and populist continuation of Enlightenment

anti-clericalism, and a continuation of the perversity that came with anti-clericalism. For all that *Robert le Diable* affirms a broadly Christian schema, it also dares to stage the spectacle of wicked nuns (one also thinks of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* [1836] and Halévy's *La Juive* [1835] as Romantic works that dare to present the Catholic church as a cruel and perverse institution). The powerful suggestiveness of the troupe of incoherently desiring women also finds an echo in the public perceptions of the dancers. There was a sense that the *corps de ballet* was itself an unruly sisterhood, and the unruliness was defined in part in terms of same-sex activity. Ballet gossip included tales of Pauline Montessu, who danced at the Opéra between 1820 and 1836. It was rumoured that, aside from her liaisons with numerous wealthy men, Montessu attended 'lesbian orgies' at the home of a dressmaker. Similarly, in his salacious account, *Les Petits Mystères de l'Opéra* (1843), Albéric Second wrote with heavy irony of the relationship between two Opéra dancers, Caroline Forster and Elina Roland:

> Look at the pretty picture that Mlle. Forster and Mlle. Roland make together. There they are, arm in arm, hand in hand, cherished companions looking at each other with looks of chaste and pure friendship . . . These ladies carry friendship so far as to live in the same street – the Rue Bourdaloue – in the same house, in the same apartment, and often, when it is very cold, in the same bed.[10]

One might wonder why Second is so specific in naming the women's place of residence as the Rue Bourdaloue. The street was quite close to the church of Notre Dame de Lorette, an area that was associated with prostitution (prostitutes were often referred to in Paris in this period as 'Lorettes'). Perhaps, then, there is in Second's account the suggestion of an illicit sexual appetite that moves between and across transgressions, from commercial sex to companionate lesbianism, and back again.

Second is an instance of a trivial or libertine relish of perversity that runs parallel to the more political Enlightenment and Romantic forms. A key figure who exemplifies such interrelationships – of anti-establishment critique, libertinism, perversity, and Romanticism – is the poet and critic Théophile Gautier. Gautier was one of the great balletomanes, and he initiated the creation of one of the finest and most enduring of Romantic ballets, *Giselle* (1841). Along with his intense and self-conscious Romanticism, Gautier cultivated a dandyish and libertine persona. He was drawn to everything that was 'young, new,

strangely colored, of an intoxicating and strong flavour'. Like many other young literary men of the period, he dealt in ironic and scoffing nuances. He sought to establish his difference from what he saw as the small-minded morality of the bourgeois. He deplored his age's 'rehabilitation of virtue', whereby 'every newspaper serial turns into a pulpit' and 'every journalist [turns] into a preacher'. Gautier railed against 'utilitarian critics' who wrote as though literature should be like a nourishing soup or a good pair of boots. In contrast, he wrote his own share of Romantic erotica, in his 'galanteries poétiques' and 'lettres ordurières'.[11] At the level of aesthetics, he expounded an art-for-art's-sake doctrine that would be adopted by later dandies such as Oscar Wilde and Jean Cocteau. Gautier tells us in the preface to his novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835):

> Nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor and weak nature. The most useful place in a house is the lavatory.

He declares himself to be 'among those to whom the superfluous is necessary'.[12]

In setting out to shock the rising classes, however, Gautier also managed to appeal to them. Like the makers of *Robert le Diable*, he knew the value of sensation. He is perhaps best remembered today for *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and this narrative gives us a clue to the motives he would bring to bear on *Giselle*. The hero of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the young poet d'Albert, is restless in the face of the tedious conformities of his society. When he walks down the street, he loves to 'jostl[e] the bourgeois'. But his restlessness is also markedly erotic. He longs to change sex, so that he can experience sexual intercourse as a woman. More than that, he wishes he could achieve the 'countless transformations' of the 'monstrous and bizarre gods of India'. He falls in love with a young cavalier with 'the darkest and most beautiful eyes'. There is reassurance from the start, though, that this cavalier is in fact a woman, the Mademoiselle de Maupin of the title. The supposed young man has 'something gentle and undulating about his gait and movements', and 'many women would envy him his hands and feet'. Gautier is not interested in the idea of homosexuality. He and his hero are obsessed with womanliness in male attire. This uncertain image serves as an opportunity for restating the differences between the sexes: 'Would God put such long fringes of brown silk on the wretched eyelids of a man? Would he dye so vivid and delicate a carmine our ugly,

thick-lipped mouth bristling with hairs?' The momentary deviancy becomes the occasion for the narrator to assert a divine and natural order, in which God makes women pretty and men 'bristling'.[13]

It was only later in the century that Gautier's interest in deviancy became obviously available to a more specifically homosexual reading. Much of his phrasing would be recycled by late nineteenth-century sexologists. Mademoiselle de Maupin reflects, for instance, that it 'often happens that the sex of the soul is not the same as that of the body', and that she has 'strong and virile thoughts'. The idea of the soul of a woman trapped in the body of a man would become a commonplace of later homosexual apologia, as would her thought that 'I belong to a third sex, a sex apart, which has as yet no name'.[14] Alongside the sexologists, decadent writers would be drawn to the homosexual potential of Gautier's fiction. Oscar Wilde found in Gautier a usable precursor. He mentions Gautier several times in the course of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and significant parts of that novel are unmistakably paraphrased from *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. Similarly, Aubrey Beardsley began a set of illustrations for a new edition of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, a project that was cut short by his death.[15]

The point of comparison with 'The Ballet of the Nuns', and the aspect that looks toward *Giselle*, is Mademoiselle de Maupin's behaviour with another woman. Her disguising herself as a man enables her to draw the attentions of other women, and she enters into a dalliance with d'Albert's former lover, Rosette. The experience, for the Mademoiselle, is 'deviant' and 'painful', but 'sweet'. Mademoiselle de Maupin has the same diffusive erotic interest as is to be found in other heteroscopic fantasies. Although she will, eventually, love a man, the 'excess of [her] affection has . . . overflowed into [her] friendship with young girls and young women'. The novel arouses the curiosity of the presumptively male reader with the possibility of the loss of the woman to deviancy, before the woman is obliged to recognise the *force majeure* of male–female relations.[16]

What, though, of Gautier's work on ballet? To some extent, it was his interest in unusual sexual possibilities that led him towards ballet. Or rather, in ballet he found another arena in which he could stage his reveries of deviancy and correction. He fell in love with the great Romantic ballerina, Fanny Elssler, in part because he saw an 'indecision' in the nature of her sexual allure. In his eyes, she had the same combination of strength and beauty as the 'hermaphrodite of antiquity', and, while she was a 'very charming woman', she would have been 'the most charming boy in the world'.[17] Gautier's creative contribution to *Giselle* (1841) was to take Heinrich Heine's German

folktale and present it as material for the ballet. Heine had written a folk story about a supernatural tribe of women, known as Wilis, who lure young men to their death. As we will see, Gautier added to Heine's tale something of his own sexual adventurism.

Choreographed by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot to music by Adolphe Adam, *Giselle*, like *Robert le Diable*, features an attractive but tormented young man in the figure of Albrecht. Albrecht is the Duke of Silesia, engaged to be married to the aristocratic Bathilde. But over the course of one summer, he poses as a commoner and amuses himself in a dalliance with a delicate, beautiful peasant-girl, Giselle. She exists to one side of the aristocracy in which Albrecht must find a mate, but she is also different from the other peasants. She is finer, more delicate, and more loving than anyone. These qualities are signalled by the fact that she has a 'weak heart', so weak in fact that the shock of Albrecht's falsehood will kill her. From the start, then, Giselle is a weird and foreshadowed heroine. She exceeds and falls short of the conventional social groups that make up her world. In her frailty and her fatedness, she embodies – even before her death – a decadent desire. In a melancholic reversal of Mademoiselle de Maupin, Giselle is clearly destined to move from normal love to the world of the Wilis. Life continues happily for a while, but disaster occurs when Albrecht's two different lives are brought together. A royal hunting party passes through Giselle's village, and Albrecht is hailed by the nobles. He responds to them, and tries to pass off Giselle as an importunate stranger. Giselle sees that he has deceived her, and that he will not acknowledge her if it will endanger his social position. She goes mad, and dies.

For the second half of the ballet, the scene changes from the daylight world of the village to nighttime, and to Giselle's grave in the woods. As the clouds part and the moon throws a dim, sad light into the glade, we see the proud, ghostly figure of Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis. Her Wilis are a tribe of girls who died before their love was consummated. Each night they rise from their graves, tortured by desire and seeking fulfilment. They linger in dark parts of the woods, waiting for young men whom they will dance to death. But Gautier's libretto offers slightly conflicting explanations of the Wilis. He explains that they love to dance because they died before their marriages could take place. In this account, dancing stands in as an obvious euphemism for the pleasures of the marriage bed. The women seek out in death what they missed out on in life. But Gautier also suggests that, as in Hugo's poem about a Spanish girl who dies after dancing until dawn, the Wilis are girls who have died as a result of an excessive love of dancing. The Wilis are also, then, the shades of young women who were destroyed

by their own nymphomaniacal devotion to pleasure.[18] Either way, Gautier gives us an image that is at once pitiful and frightening, and that turns on sexual ravenousness. Other aspects of this, his own ravenous fantasy, include an original intention that the Wilis would feature deceased maidens from a variety of races and nations, so that a young man's encounter with them becomes a sort of murderous sexual world tour (his collaborator, Vernoy de Saint-Georges, dissuaded him from this plan).[19]

There is a strong Maupinesque or *Religieuse* element in the relations between the Wilis. Myrtha occupies a similarly 'virile and strong' relation toward the other Wilis as the Mademoiselle to her female lover. And, like the Abbess in 'The Ballet of the Nuns', she commands her weaker sisters to dance and otherwise to perform her bidding. In contrast to the libretto and its mention of a love of dancing, there is nothing joyous in the choreography for the Wilis, which moves between pathos and sadism. In a sense, Myrtha is a version of the author, instigating a series of sexual adventures to satisfy her own voyeuristic needs. Further, in commanding the Wilis to dance men to death, not only does she create a sadistic erotic spectacle, but she removes her male competitors from the field. Myrtha seems also to embody a masculine fantasy of the older woman's desire for predominance over the incoherent or undecided young woman (the scenario of Madame *** with Suzanne in *La Religieuse*). Perhaps Myrtha provokes the desires of the male viewer by challenging his right to all the young women. As the libretto tells us, Myrtha's ritualistic dances seem designed to establish the forest glade as *her* 'petit empire'.

While the makers of the ballet seem to have had in mind their own and other men's tastes, one wonders how this scene might have seemed to women who were attracted to other women. The ease with which they might have identified with Myrtha and her tribe might have been determined to some extent by whether or not this deviant aspect finds correction in the course of the ballet. Is it contained and punished, or is it allowed to linger as an evocative possibility?

In fact, the ballet insists on the dominant woman as an ultimate evil. To continue with the story, after Giselle has died, Myrtha summons her from her grave to be welcomed into the sisterhood. Meanwhile, Albrecht has been drawn by remorse to visit Giselle's grave. He stumbles into the midst of the Wilis. They capture him and set out to kill him. But Giselle is possessed with a forgiving love, and she pleads for his release. Myrtha denies her request, and compels her to dance with Albrecht. Of course Giselle longs to dance with him, but she knows that it will mean his death. So she lures him with a sad,

pitying desire. She dances slowly with him, and there is the possibility that, at this delicate, loving pace, Albrecht may last until dawn, and cheat the Wilis of their prey. But the other Wilis manage to detach the couple, and they make Albrecht dance at dizzying speeds. Giselle intercedes repeatedly between the murderous Wilis and Albrecht, but she cannot keep them from him entirely. After a while he is exhausted by their attentions, and he falls to the ground. The Wilis move in for their final attack, but at that moment the dawn breaks. The Wilis must return to their graves, and Albrecht is saved. Giselle lingers near him as long as she can, but soon she too must go back to the underworld. She gestures that Albrecht should give his love to Bathilde, and she returns to her grave. Albrecht's squire and friend, Wilfrid, finds him and guides him out of the woods, and back to his own world. Albrecht does not regain Giselle, but we may assume that he marries Bathilde. Giselle, on the other hand, must remain in Myrtha's strange sorority. The sense is, then, that the wicked tribe is still out there, waiting to deprive, tantalise, and destroy the passionate young man.[20]

Giselle elaborates at greater length some of the themes and scenarios of 'The Ballet of the Nuns'. The sisterhood on this occasion is that of Wilis or fairies, but these fairies have the white, veiled mystique of the nuns. And there is again the spectacle of a queer eroticism that will end in death. The ballet that is thought to owe most to 'The Ballet of the Nuns', however, and that very probably had an influence on *Giselle*, is *La Sylphide* (1832). While not as extravagant as 'The Ballet of the Nuns' and *Giselle*, it has its queer resonances. The librettist of *La Sylphide* was Adolphe Nourrit, a tenor who had played Robert le Diable to Marie Taglioni's Abbess. Nourrit wrote the scenario for *La Sylphide* while rehearsing Meyerbeer's opera, and the assumption has been that his work on *La Sylphide* was influenced by *Robert le Diable*. But *La Sylphide* is a gentler vision in some respects, and it lacks the quasi-sapphic sensationalism of its precursor. It was important, among other reasons, because it was the first full-length Romantic ballet, and because the choreographer made the most of Taglioni's pointe-work. There had been a *Silfide* in Milan in 1828; then in 1832 Filippo Taglioni choreographed *La Sylphide* for his daughter Marie, to music by Jean-Madeleine Schneitzhoeffer. Such was the success of the ballet that numerous other versions emerged. The one that is most familiar today is Auguste Bournonville's version of 1836, choreographed to music by Løvenskjold.

The original source, on which the ballet was very loosely based, was French Romantic Charles Nodier's *Trilby, ou le Lutin d'Argaïl* (1822), in which a young woman's affections are lured away from her fisherman

husband by Trilby, a goblin. In the ballet, the sex roles are reversed. Set in the Highlands of Scotland, *La Sylphide* is about a handsome young peasant, James, who is visited on the eve of his wedding by the Queen of the Sylphides. He falls in love with the fairy and rejects his earthly fiancée, Effie. However, he finds that whenever he attempts to take possession of his new love, she evades his grasp and loses herself in the midst of a myriad of other Sylphides. An old witch, Madge, pretends to want to help James. She gives him a scarf, telling him that if he places it round his beloved's shoulders her wings will fall off and she will be his. Madge does not explain that the scarf will also kill the Sylphide. James puts the scarf around the Sylphide, and she dies. The other Sylphides return to bear their queen away, and James is left alone. In the distance, he sees a wedding procession: his former fiancée, Effie, has married someone else. James has abandoned a normal love for something strange and impossible, and the price he pays is to end up entirely isolated. The ballet is Romantic in its interest in the supernatural and the Ideal, but it is also a warning against the dangers of Romanticism. The alternative, supernatural realm proves either impalpable, as in the case of the Sylphide, or grotesque, as in the case of the witch.

La Sylphide exemplifies a sort of bachelor paranoia, in that it is obsessed with the fear of non-consummation. The young man is unable to affirm his manhood, and so falls prey to a queerly disgusting figure, in this case a witch. In this sense, the ballet is embryonically homophobic rather than homosexual. It is an instance of how heterosexual paranoia produces homosexuality – or, at least, monstrous femininity – as a feared and loathed other.[21] Queerness is the chaotic background that reestablishes the pleasing predictability of Effie's world of normal marital arrangements. James accedes to his desire for the unconventional, and as a result he fails to establish a consummated, adult identity. This leaves him in a kind of sexual no man's land of fairies and witches. In contrast to 'The Ballet of the Nuns' and *Giselle*, the queerness here resides not so much in the group (the Sylphides) as in the individual (the witch). Also, the Sylphide is not abused by the other members of her order. She is their queen, and not subject to humiliation at their hands. This ballet is queer in the sense that it is about an uncanny disturbance in an otherwise stable system. It *is* akin to the other *ballets blancs* in the sense that it focuses on an erotic crisis, a crisis that has been precipitated by the fact that normal loves have been found wanting.

It might seem strange to have defined the queerness of ballet in terms of perverse sisterhoods. The tendency is, I think, to see a connection

between ballet and male homosexuality on the grounds that ballets have fairies in them. There is an assumption that there is a kinship between homosexuality and the excessive and theatrical femininity of the fairy. However, there are immediate problems with such an argument. The equation of homosexuals with fairies did not occur until the late nineteenth century; indeed, it is often argued that there was no widely accepted idea of 'the homosexual' until the late nineteenth century. Clearly the founding Romantic fairy ballets, *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*, are explicitly concerned with women and with male–female relations. We might, though, want to think about how the fairy ballet makes an inadvertent invitation to those who fall outside its intended audience. How might the sexual dysphoria and impossible loves of Romantic ballet have served as a projection for other confused souls and their impossible loves? Were 'The Ballet of the Nuns', *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*, and other fairy ballets and legends adopted and re-imagined so as to give oblique expression to male or female same-sex impulses? In the rest of this chapter, I want to show that this was the case with men, at least; that there was a gradual convergence of fairies, ballet, and homosexuality over the course of the nineteenth century, and that this convergence became the subject of ironic play in the twentieth century.

In her *Dictionary of Fairies* (1976), Katharine Briggs notes that the word is thought to originate with the Three Fates of classical myth, the strange women who spun and then cut the thread of life. By the Middle Ages, the role of the fatae had become slightly more specific. In Italian medieval romances, they reappear as prophetic old women who visit any house in which there is a newborn baby, and they tell the baby's future. The term was Frenchified as *fai*, and *faierie* came to refer to the 'fatedness' or state of enchantment that is initiated with the prophecy. Over time the term has been generalised to include virtually any creature that has some aspect of the human, but that in fact belongs to a strange, supernatural race.

Most fairies are human in form, but they often have a grotesque oddity that they try to keep hidden. Some use their lovely faces to keep you from noticing that, when seen from the back, their heads are hollow. Others use their long hair to hide the fact that they have animals' feet. Others keep their hands in fast, perpetual motion, to prevent you from seeing that their fingers are joined together. Then there are those that call to you from the water, so you cannot see their long, fish-like tails. Fairies are able to provoke both admiration and horror. They use their 'glamour' to prevent you from discovering their underlying abnormality. The word 'glamour' is of Scottish origin, and it signifies the enchantment or mesmeric power that causes one to see

the fairies as they wish to be seen. But if they are careful only to present their normal aspect to the world at large, they also have their own secret places, where they may gather and be their true selves without fear of exposure. They will not willingly reveal their secrets – nor even their names – to humans, but they long to lead a more open existence. When they think no human is within hearing distance, they shout their names out at the top of their voices. In spite of such moments of self-celebratory revelry, and despite their secretive instincts, fairies are always drawn, irresistibly, to the beauty of the completely human. Like the Queen of the Sylphides lingering near a lowly Scottish farmer, or Wilis searching the woods for young men, they want to bond – as far as they are able – with the normal world. But such unions are doomed. Feared and excluded by ordinary people, fairies live in a sort of perpetual adolescence, trying to make a celebration of the fact that they will never have fully human opportunities and responsibilities.[22]

Fairies became especially important in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As noted earlier, the writers of the Romantic age believed that their own societies were becoming overly bourgeois, rational, and civilised. The Romantics were especially appalled by industrialisation and utilitarianism, and their response was in part to turn their gaze to marginal, pre-modern cultures. Frederick Jameson defines Romanticism as a turning aside from modernity, as 'a whole generation attempted to shelter itself, as an organism wards off shock, against the stupendous, total, and unprecedented transformation of the world into the henceforth barren and materialistic environment of middle-class capitalism'.[23] In flight from the new conformities, the Romantics were interested in places that seemed to have kept their essential wildness, and that had maintained their own strange legends. Writers recorded and added to a literature of fairies that enabled readers to revisit a colourful and mysterious old Europe. This included Nodier's tale of the Scottish Highlands, and Heine's story of the German Wilis, as well as the work of Andersen and the Grimms.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the fairy was endowed with contradictory values. The more violent and erotic aspects of legend were deleted in many nineteenth-century retellings. The fairy's dangerously disruptive tendencies were forgotten, and she was transformed into a figure of goodness. She became a winsome creature who was sadly doomed by the spread of a standardising, industrial society. Other strands of nineteenth-century culture, however, preserved something of the fairy's original, unsettling power. In the Victorian fairy painting of Dadd, Fitzgerald, Doyle, and others, fairies are still cruel, erotic creatures. Artists picked up on the idea that fairies have no soul, and

so will carry out their impulses without forethought or remorse. In Victorian drawings and paintings, fairies are often depicted beating or pulling the wings off insects. They also bare themselves without shame, and various parts of their bodies – legs, heads – are given an obvious phallic significance. Much as cherubs are to be found hovering over religious scenes in Renaissance painting, in Victorian art one often finds fairies crouching amidst the scenes of illicit or unnatural passion. This idea, which is to be found earlier – as in Fuseli's eighteenth-century painting – persists through to Beardsley's work in the 1890s. The fairies of these artists are more in the tradition of the spiteful Wilis.[24]

There have been many points in the fairy's history where the idea of the fairy might seem to correspond to modern stereotypes of homosexuality. Homosexuals have often been seen as dangerously and excessively sexual. The homosexual could be identified in the same way as the fairy. Much as she moves her hands quickly to hide the fact that her fingers are all joined together, the homosexual too may be over-expressive, as he tries to divert and to attract attention at the same time. Homosexuals have their special places; they are supposed to love to dance, and to be preoccupied with 'glamour'. They are thought to lament over and to revel in their difference. And so on.

The circumstantial and hearsay connections might seem numerous to us, but at what point in history did this equivalence emerge as part of the cultural imagination? The use of 'fairy' as a term for homosexual men is dated to the late nineteenth century. At that time, editors of the 'muck-raking' press of New York realised that sensational accounts of homosexual subcultures sold newspapers. So readers were told of men who wore make-up and items of women's clothing, and who were designated 'fairies'. New York's rough Bowery district was recognised as a particular resort for fairies, who were assumed to be male prostitutes servicing a non-homosexual clientele (in this period, a man might well engage in same-sex acts on certain terms and not consider himself homosexual or in any other way abnormal). Historian George Chauncey has shown that the New York fairies became a defining cultural myth and spectacle. The press, the police, and reformers continued to revile them, but this seems to have incited a desire in the wider public to see such strange beings for themselves. Dance-hall owners knew that they could add to their reputation by ensuring a presence of fairies, as waiters, prostitutes, or 'acts'. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many male visitors to New York felt that they hadn't seen the sights if they had not been to the most infamous of the fairy 'dives', such as the Armory Hall on Hester Street, or the Slide on

Bleecker Street. Even those who could not or would not visit such places could still enjoy the spectacle. The indignantly moralistic reports in Pulitzer's *World* and Hearst's *Journal* provided the very sights that were supposed to be too disgusting for ordinary people to contemplate.[25]

As for the fairies themselves, their motivations seem to have varied. Some men became fairies because it was the only obvious same-sex-oriented identity available to them. Others did so because it was 'a way of understanding how they, as men, could have the feelings their culture ascribed exclusively to women'. Some men did not identify as fairies because to do so contradicted their sense of their own masculinity; or because it seemed too dangerous; or because they had found other, less conspicuous ways of acting on their attraction to other men. The crucial point is that the fairy became the representative figure that defined the homosexual, regardless of a diverse and evolving reality. As Chauncey puts it, 'The very brilliance of the fairy left most men safely in the shadows'.[26]

If the association of fairies with homosexuality did not occur until the late nineteenth century, does it make sense to look for some kind of affiliation between fairies, homosexuals, and ballet in earlier periods? Historians have argued that, prior to the late nineteenth century, there was no clearly defined idea of a 'homosexual'. Sex between people of the same sex tended to be seen as an 'abomination', a disgusting aberration that contradicted the laws of God and nature. The homosexual or the lesbian was not understood in a consistent way as a special type of person. He or she had committed a disgusting sin, but he or she might not otherwise be different from other people. Although there are instances of homosexual groups and institutions with elaborate codes and values (the 'molly houses' of eighteenth-century England, for instance), same-sex practices and behaviours are generally understood to have been relatively diffuse, occasional, and inchoate. The development of more specific same-sex cultural forms is seen in part as a symptom of urbanisation. In a more concentrated population, acts could be seen to fall into patterns, and they could be construed not as 'aberrations' but as 'preferences'. When seen as part of a recurrent and cohesive behaviour, acts could also become the basis for a more broadly social network. They could become the basis of self- and group identification. Homosexuals and lesbians could see themselves as belonging to sororities and fraternities of their own.[27]

But, as was partly suggested by the discussion of *Giselle* and *La Sylphide*, the historical argument can be revised to the effect that, for much of the nineteenth century, there was a cultural reverberation

around the idea of the fairy, and the fairy's aura of otherness enabled writers and artists to begin to articulate a queer or deviant sensibility even before the advent of the homosexual. Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) is particularly interesting in this context. As a young man, he attended for a time the Royal Ballet school in Copenhagen; he appeared in some ballets, and he maintained contact with the ballet world throughout his life. He was a good friend of the great Danish choreographer August Bournonville, and many of Andersen's stories would be made into ballets. He never married, and, while his journals record intense erotic responses to both sexes, it is assumed that he had no sexual relationships. Judging from letters and from the autobiographical notes, he considered himself an unseemly misfit. The author of 'The Ugly Duckling', it would seem, longed for an imaginary realm in which he, too, would discover that he was a swan. Several scholars have wondered if 'The Ugly Duckling' and other stories represent an unconscious encoding or sublimation of homosexual feeling.[28] For instance, Andersen wrote 'The Little Mermaid' when a male friend to whom he was very attached decided to get married. The Mermaid can be seen as a version of Andersen himself, in that she is a betwixt-and-between figure who will inevitably lose the man she loves to a more suitable other. The Mermaid is also mute, and so in her we see a prototype of the 'love that dare not speak its name'.

Perhaps Andersen's story of 'The Ice-Maiden' is of most interest here, because that is the story that the ballet world would adapt numerous times as *Le Baiser de la fée* or *The Fairy's Kiss*. The protagonist of this narrative, Rudi, sets out on a journey with his mother. They must pass a mountain known as the Maiden, and it is on the mountain that Rudi loses his mother. He himself nearly freezes to death – in poetic terms, he has been kissed by the Ice-Maiden or Ice-Fairy. Having come so close to possessing Rudi, the spirit of the mountain, its Fairy, now believes him rightfully to be hers. She will return to claim him before he can ever marry a normal woman. As Rudi grows into an attractive and successful hunter, he stimulates desire in all the village girls and women, and the story generally is made to turn on his attractions and his sexual destiny (we might conclude that, for its author, it is a homoerotic story placed within a heterosexual frame). Rudi falls in love with a wealthy miller's daughter, Babette, and they become engaged. He then has an encounter on the mountain with a girl whose eyes are 'as clear as glass and fathomlessly deep'.[29] She gives him a wondrous wine that arouses him, but he senses something dangerous and uncanny about her. He escapes from her clutches, only to discover that he has lost his engagement ring. On the eve of his wedding, he

and Babette row out onto a lake. Rudi thinks he sees the lost ring in the water of the lake. He swims down for it, only to be grabbed and held by the Fairy. At last he is frozen by this icy desire, and is taken away to its cold world. This allows him, though, to experience a different kind of fulfilment, the paradoxically cold warmth that he had tasted for the first time when he drank the Fairy's wine.

Andersen's story is a prolonged masturbatory tease. The handsome young man moves ever closer to wedded bliss, without actually getting there. Although in the written version the scenery is always climaxing in molten sunsets, Rudi only achieves a sudden orgasmic 'feeling of power and happiness'[30] when he drinks the wine and kisses the Fairy. There is perhaps a covert sexual logic, then, to his effort to swim toward the ring at the end. He thinks he wants Babette, but ultimately he knows that his pleasure is with the Fairy. But in achieving that perverse fulfilment, he is also lost. Being kissed by the Fairy means that he is endlessly frozen into a state that falls short of normal manhood.

We might draw parallels between the 'frozen' hero and the author. Although Andersen was infatuated with some of his male friends, he seems never to have located a directly sexual role in such feeling. Unable to realise or act out his impulses, he lived in a state of celibacy. We might say that Andersen is an example of a pre-homosexual identity. That is to say, he had a tendency for which there was no obvious or fully evolved behaviour. Sexual identities may be innate or genetic, but they are also learned, and there was no viable model for Andersen to copy. As with other Victorians, he could fall back on classical culture for a vocabulary for his desires, but the classical world did not provide an example that pleased him. This is clear from an incident in which Andersen was shown a sketch that a sculptor had made for a statue. The sketch pictured the author reading one of his stories to children. Andersen resented being characterised as a writer for children, and he expressed his unhappiness with the sketch with the comment that it reminded him of 'old Socrates and young Alcibiades'. It seemed to him that he was represented with a 'tall boy who is lying right up against my crotch'. Andersen implies his distaste for the pederastic nature of 'Greek love', as suggested by Socrates and Alcibiades. It is both appropriate and pathetic that, in the final statue, Andersen is alone.[31]

Andersen was usually drawn to men who were more masculine than himself, though this did not prevent him at times from falling in love with teenagers. But the desires that he expressed in his fiction and his diaries remained semi-formed. He existed in a sexual limbo, in which he was primarily drawn to his own sex, but in a way that was vague and emotional. One of his closest male friends, Edvard Collin, saw this

very clearly. He refused to allow Andersen to refer to him with the familiar 'du', because it would have set up a relationship that would have made Collin himself uncomfortable. Collin explained: 'He dreamed of finding in me a "romantic friend"; but I would have been no good at that at all'. The phrase 'romantic friend' captures the unresolved nature of Andersen's feelings. Many men went through romantic friendships, and they were usually seen as the inevitable consequence of sex-segregated schooling. It was an instance of what, in the twentieth century, would be referred to as situational homosexuality. Most men would emerge from this phase to transfer their desires to women, while others would persist in their 'immature' preferences. But Andersen does not seem to fit comfortably into either category. He was a misfit indeed, and he remained as mute as his Mermaid, perhaps because he did not dare to speak, but also because he was not sure what he wanted to say. As he wrote to another friend of his unhappiness: 'Th[e] cause lies within me, in a sentiment for which I have no fitting name!'[32]

Andersen is an example of how the otherworldliness of the fairy had a queer suggestiveness even before the term became a byword for the homosexual. This reading is affirmed by the decision of later, more confirmedly homosexual writers to adopt the fairy story as a preferred form. Oscar Wilde was particularly adept at taking up the images and stories of previous eras and rendering their relatively diffuse queerness in a more specifically encoded, *fin de siècle* register. He began writing fairy stories in the 1880s, and he pushed the genre in a more specifically aestheticised and homoeroticised direction. One of his protagonists is pictured lying on 'the soft cushions of his embroidered couch . . . wild-eyed and open-mouthed, like a woodland Faun, or some young animal of the forest newly snared by the hunters'. In another story, a young fisherman is described tugging at ropes until, 'like blue enamel round a vase of bronze, the long veins rose up on his arms'.[33] Wilde also introduces same-sex desire into the fairy story by overlaying the narrative with references to classical culture. His 'Young King' gazes for hours, 'as one in a trance, at a Greek gem carved with the figure of Adonis'; the same character spends a whole night 'noting the effect of moonlight on a silver image of Endymion', and is also seen kissing a statue of 'the Bithynian slave of Hadrian' (the Bithynian slave was Antinous, famed for his beauty and loved by Hadrian). With these various allusions, Wilde offers us a brief excursion through the legends of male beauty, as seen through the eyes of his own equally beautiful hero. In aestheticising his characters and their locales with sensory detail, and in introducing an array of classical references, Wilde is broaching a subject

he dare not name. A frank statement of same-sex desire is suppressed, and in its stead there is a compensatory piling up of circumstantial indicators. But Wilde retreats from his own daring. He transforms his homoerotic tale of the 'Young King' into a Christian allegory. Classical legends are displaced, as the face of the 'Faun' is reconceived as that of 'an angel'.[34]

The literature of fairies suggests a relatively subliminal or inchoate queerness that becomes more precise and self-aware later in the century. Ballet seems to contradict this trajectory, in that some of the early fairy ballets represent quite a knowing and even cynical heteroscopic queerness. The best example of the queer sublime is *Swan Lake* (1877; see Chapter 3). For now, though, it is worth looking ahead to how modern fairy ballets have drawn out the kind of implications traced in this chapter. The examples of *La Sylphide* and *Giselle* suggest a queer potential in the Romantic fairy ballet. Both ballets offer an explicitly normal point of view, while their normality is defined in anxious relation to various types of queerness. Let's return at this point to Andersen's 'Ice-Maiden', and to its transformation into a ballet. In comparison to *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*, Andersen's story has more naïve, but also more insistent, queer tendencies. The hero's endlessly deferred heterosexual consummation begins to seem symptomatic of a wish for an altogether different kind of consummation. Rudi fails to establish a fully adult heterosexual identity in marriage, but he finds a consummation in the otherworldly embrace of the spirit of the mountain, the Fairy. Andersen does not present this alternative consummation as a happy ending. But, with the repeated approach to and deviation from an ordinary marriage, the story perpetuates the hero's availability as a plaything of the author's and the reader's fantasy. Rudi's sexual destiny is never settled, so much as permanently suspended in the chilling waters of the lake in which he drowns.

For all that Andersen had strong lifelong connections to ballet, he and his contemporaries did not turn 'The Ice-Maiden' into a ballet. If we want to find a balletic exploration of the story's queer resonances, we have to move forward in time. The story was written in 1835, the period of the Romantic ballet, but it was not actually made into *Le Baiser de la fée* until much later. The first western ballet version was choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska for Ballets Ida Rubinstein in 1928.[35] This modern ballet seems to have had a more knowing psychological rationale, and critics have been tempted to read it as a fable that intentionally draws out the queer shading of the original story. In such readings, Nijinska's legendary brother becomes the hero, Rudi, while the great impresario Diaghilev is the Fairy. Nijinsky was

primarily heterosexual, but Diaghilev took Nijinsky for his lover, and made him into an international star. Nijinsky tried to break free from the supposedly sinister power of Diaghilev by getting married, but after his marriage he rapidly descended into madness. By 1928 he had been living in a 'frozen' or catatonic state for over a decade. It may be right to see *Le Baiser de la fée* as a commentary on Nijinsky and his homosexualised imprisonment. Nijinska's more obvious motivation was that the wealthy Ida Rubinstein wished to play the fairy, and Stravinsky had created a libretto and a score. Rubinstein's choice of role was a good one, in that she was capable of a compellingly majestic, fiercely cool stage persona. She was also an emblematic figure for lesbian supporters of the arts. It is tempting to speculate that her presentation of herself as the male-killing Fairy would have provided an additional *frisson* for those with 'inside' information. Michael Moon, for one, comments that 'one can readily imagine at least some of the ways that the more or less open secret of lesbian sexuality she figured for some members of her audience (especially, we may assume, for lesbians themselves and for some gay admirers) contributed to the highly charged atmosphere of her public appearances'.[36]

The more clearly substantiated influence, though, is to be found in the composer's motivations. Stravinsky declared that he intended the ballet as a reflection on and tribute to Tchaikovsky. The score contains many sustained musical references to Tchaikovsky, and Stravinsky thought that the plot had a special value as an allegory of Tchaikovsky's life. Stravinsky explained that for him the Fairy is Tchaikovsky's muse, whose kiss gave him musical genius. Tchaikovsky was 'claimed' by his muse in that he was exhausted by his insistent need to compose. The Fairy or muse, then, prevented Tchaikovsky from living a normal, married life, but she also led him to triumph. Tchaikovsky was more obviously prevented from leading a married life by his homosexuality. There may be something disingenuous, then, in Stravinsky's account of his intentions. But even Stravinsky's declared way of reading the ballet in relation to the composer's life is itself rather queer. The libretto still turns on a deviation from a normal life, and it still features a hero who will find doom and fulfilment in the embrace of an uncanny 'other'.[37]

Andersen's story has proved a compelling one throughout the twentieth century. Other versions have been choreographed by Ashton (1935), Balanchine (1937), Macmillan (1960), Hynd (1968), and Neumeier (1972). Each choreographer was drawn to the story for different reasons, and one suspects that Balanchine at least was interested more by the Stravinsky score than by the story. However, Ashton's

biographer, Julie Kavanagh, situates Ashton's 1935 version within a queer context, in that for her Babette and the Ice-Maiden served to echo 'the duality in [Ashton's] own sexual identity'. Ashton was friendly with the sixteen-year-old Rose Paget, a dancer and the daughter of the Marquess of Anglesey. Soon Paget fell in love with Ashton. She, like the daughter of the wealthy miller in Andersen's story, could offer financial security and social standing. But Ashton refused to marry her because, at the time, he was spellbound by Michael Somes, a seventeen-year-old who had recently joined the company. The sense is that Ashton would always be prevented from achieving normal happiness by the recurrence of his more intense homosexual interests. In the case of Somes, it would prove a loving but partly destructive exchange, such as existed between Rudi and the Fairy. Somes was heterosexual, and the suggestion among some of his peers was that he encouraged Ashton's interest as a means of furthering his own career. The two men embarked on a relationship of sorts, but the imputation was that Somes, like the Ice-Maiden, acted not so much out of tenderness as out of a desire for control. It is, though, a little odd to cast Ashton as the powerless victim. Ashton was not above using his power in the company to gain sexual favours from dancers. Some complained that, after turning Ashton down, their careers seemed to stall. Ashton may be read into the character of Rudi; but, as Kavanagh suggests, he is also to be found in the two women: the submissive miller's daughter, and the destructively selfish Ice-Maiden.[38]

The modern examples of Stravinsky's, Nijinska's, and Ashton's work on *Le Baiser de la fée* suggest that later ballet-makers realised, more or less consciously, the specifically homosexual potential of the fairy ballet. None of the queer readings can be made to 'stick' in an incontrovertible, literal, and documented way. But each text reveals a prehistory, or acquires successive overlays, which result from or project queer propensities. A further example of this process is the most famous fairy ballet of all, *Sleeping Beauty*. The libretto for *Sleeping Beauty* was written by Marius Petipa and Ivan Vsevolojsky, who based their work on Charles Perrault's *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697). The libretto was set to music by Tchaikovsky and choreographed by Petipa. *Sleeping Beauty* was premièred at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1890. Since then it has been performed countless times in countless versions.[39] Most versions begin with the christening of Princess Aurora. Various good fairies bless her with their hopes for her future, but the mood changes when the ugly, evil fairy, Carabosse arrives. Although Carabosse is female, the part is often given to a man, which tends to heighten our sense of her monstrousness. She casts a spell to the effect

that Aurora will prick her finger with a spindle and die. This in itself symbolises an intentional disruption of sexual normality (the implied narrative is one of menstruation and intercourse, whereby Aurora will die at the moment that blood and pricks enter her life). The good Lilac Fairy uses her powers to lessen the spell cast by Carabosse. She decrees that Aurora will prick her finger, but that she will not die. She will sleep for a hundred years, at which point a prince will awaken her with a kiss, and they will live happily ever after.

Images of paralysis and non-consummation are again present, and there is again a marginal, queer figure that threatens the course of heterosexual love. The ballet has a happy ending, in that Carabosse will disappear, Prince Florimund will kiss Princess Aurora, and male–female love will be triumphantly resurrected. But this traditional romance can be given an ironic twist, not only with the casting of a man in the role of Carabosse, but with the doubling up of the roles of Carabosse and Prince Florimund. Robert Helpmann, the homosexual dancer and actor from Australia who was a star of English ballet in the 1930s and 1940s, doubled up the roles within the same production. He performed in the Sadler's Wells production of 1939 and 1946, and subsequently in the same company's legendary production at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1949. He took great pleasure in switching between Carabosse and the Prince. It was as though he identified with the disruptive fairy who complicates the happy banalities of the opening scenes. But in twinning the two roles, Helpmann also ensures that the bad fairy is not entirely written out. Carabosse, the monstrous she-male, remains strangely present, and all the more troublingly so because she lingers on in the form of the otherwise ideal Prince Florimund. Helpmann's subtly malicious version implied an underlying kinship between Carabosse and the hero (it is, of course, with the disappearance of the bad fairy that the hero appears, and the two are never seen at the same time). In introducing this ironic nuance to the otherwise happy ending, Helpmann makes *Sleeping Beauty* more akin to the fairy ballets in which the hero is a shadowed and ultimately alienated figure. Helpmann's biographer notes that this version of Florimund was also marked by a 'melancholy aestheticism'. In Helpmann's version and in others that twin the roles, we may well find ourselves asking: How well do we know this Prince? He is almost too ideal, and his name is suspiciously flowery. Is Aurora to be left to sleep once again?[40]

This type of queering-by-casting often occurs by happenstance, and the resulting nuances may only be apparent to 'insiders'. A touching example of this occurred when Nureyev played James in a National

Ballet of Canada production of *La Sylphide* in 1974. The part of Madge, the witch, was taken by the great Danish dancer Erik Bruhn, who emerged from an alcoholic retirement to play the part. Many years before, Bruhn had been a great exponent of the Romantic and classical roles, and Nureyev had admired him greatly. Bruhn had also been the great love of Nureyev's life. But Nureyev's fame rapidly outstripped Bruhn's, a fact that seemed to damage Bruhn's confidence. The relationship between the two also faltered, and though they remained close Nureyev went on to a succession of other affairs and encounters. To cast Bruhn as witch to Nureyev's hero is to suggest a pathetic commentary on their lives. Nureyev was still successful – a 'main character' – while Bruhn had become a decayed creature of the shadows. The production takes on an allegorical aspect that relates to the closet, and that suggests a resemblance to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Nureyev perpetuates his youth and his fame, but only by disguising the truth of his life, which is his connection to the marginalised, queer figure.

This chapter has traced a queer element in nineteenth-century ballet, in the sense that it has located a desire that was 'deviant' or 'excessive'. This desire, though, indicated a heteroscopic restlessness rather than a coherent and stable 'homosexual' or 'lesbian' type. Over the course of the century, however, and especially into the twentieth century, that relatively diffuse queerness was recirculated as a more conscious and identifiable formation. It is hard to document at length or in any great detail a deliberate association of ballet with same-sex desire in the nineteenth century, and given the stigma attached to same-sex desire this is hardly surprising. To some extent I have had to interpret shadows and silences. I turn now, though, to the one case where a fuller and more precise discussion is possible: that of Tchaikovsky and *Swan Lake* (1877).

3

SWANS

The scene is often in or near a park:

> [N]o spot favors debauchery more than [the Champs-Élysées. This is because of] the twisting paths in the shadows of the tall trees which a feeble ray of light barely penetrates[, and] the cafés installed amidst the clumps of trees along both sides of the avenue which remain open until at least half past midnight. (Paris, 1868)
>
> If one of them sits on a bench, he pats the backs of his hands; if you follow them, they put a white handkerchief thro' the skirts of their coat, and wave it to and fro; but if they are met by you, their thumbs are stuck in the arm-pits of their waistcoats, and they play their fingers upon their breasts. By means of these signals they retire to satisfy a passion too horrible for description, too detestable for language. (London, c. 1850)
>
> It is a large establishment, in one of the best quarters of the city, adjoining to the chief public park . . . On entrance, the first detail of striking suggestiveness, is the huge piscina full of tepid water. On special days of the week, such as Sundays or holidays, it is also full of a most mixed multitude of homosexuals, all naked (the ironical towel being made into an equation of nothing) and all immersed in the water up to their shoulders, – decorously enough. All are promenading together, in a sort of friendly *cotillon*; their hands kept under water, not for swim[m]ing, but for – mutual investigations, which are to be expected when one enters the pool. (Unspecified European city, 1908)[1]

What if we try to relate these scenes to episodes in and near a different park – the park of *Swan Lake*? In this other park (the park of the original 1877 *Swan Lake*, rather than the now more familiar 1895 version), a young prince, Siegfried, is bored and restless, even though he is celebrating his coming-of-age. When his increasingly drunken party comes to an end, he and his friends rush down to a lake to hunt some swans with their crossbows. In the darkness at the lakeshore, Siegfried suddenly glimpses a strange creature. She is a woman, but there is something fairy-like about her, and in her white dress and jewelled crown, she seems uncannily related to the flight of swans. She is startlingly white, and her diamonds glitter in the inky blue of midnight. Siegfried is astonished. He gazes at her, unsure whether to rape her or to shoot her with his crossbow. The swan-woman sees him and becomes very nervous. But when she speaks to him, it is in a rather flirtatious way, as she teasingly points out to him that she was one of the swans that he had wished to shoot. Siegfried lays aside his crossbow. She decides that she can trust him.

The new lovers pass slowly through the silent glades, and tell each other their stories. Siegfried learns that his beloved is called Odette, and that she is the daughter of a knight and a good fairy. After her fairy-mother's death, she fell under the power of her stepmother, who is a witch. She and her friends transform themselves into swans to escape the witch's attention. The witch will lose her power to injure Odette once Odette has married, but until then she must wear a crown that protects her from harm. Odette allows Siegfried to see the other swan-maidens. He is fascinated to witness their various ritualistic dances, and to gain an insight into their strange world. Siegfried declares that he has fallen hopelessly in love with Odette, and that he will marry her, if only she will turn up to be chosen at the palace ball the following night. Odette says that he will see many beautiful women at the ball, and forget all about her. She adds that she feels that the witch is setting up a test of his love, and that the outcome could be disastrous. He persuades her, though, to go ahead with his plan. With the dawn, Odette and her swan-maidens disappear, and Siegfried must wait until the evening to see her again.

When evening comes, the huge ballroom is filled with crowds and music. The dowager-princess humiliates Siegfried by presenting him with a succession of beautiful women, and demanding that he make his choice. He says that he will choose, but not yet. He waits anxiously, hoping that Odette will keep her promise and turn up to be chosen. As midnight strikes, a shabby old knight, Rothbart, enters and humbly asks to present his daughter to the court. The nobles are

a little embarrassed by these late and unfashionable arrivals, but the knight is allowed to proceed. He takes the cloak off his daughter, and she stands before them a stunningly pretty woman who resembles Odette. She begins to dance in a mesmerising, flashy way, and from her superhuman skill Siegfried can almost believe that his swan-queen has indeed arrived. He dances with her, and matches her amazing steps with his own youthful athleticism. The whole court can see the powerful attraction between this exuberant pair. Siegfried tells his mother that he wishes to marry the fascinating stranger. She accepts his choice. But no sooner is the marriage agreed upon than the ballroom darkens, and there is a crash of thunder. The knight and his daughter burst into uncontrolled and cruel laughter. The knight, Rothbart, removes his humble disguise, and shows himself in the form of a demon. The mesmerising woman is Rothbart's daughter, Odile, and in pledging himself to her, Siegfried has betrayed Odette.

Siegfried's fascination with these glittering, bird-like creatures and their dances is so new and so arousing that he has failed to discriminate between them. But he is appalled to realise that he has broken his promise to Odette, and that he can no longer save her with marriage. He rushes from the ballroom and down to the lake. He wants to find her and tell her that he still loves her as much as ever. Odette's friends tell her to flee from Siegfried, as he has failed to pass the test. She still loves him, though, and she wishes to see him once more. The lovers find each other, and Siegfried begs for forgiveness. She explains that it is not in her power to forgive him, and that they are seeing each other for the last time. Siegfried continues to plead with her, but finally she tries to run from him. He grabs her and tells her she cannot leave him. He takes the crown off her head and throws it into the lake. Odette exclaims, 'What have you done? You have killed yourself and me'. A storm gathers on the lake, and she falls into his arms. Through the sound of thunder, we can hear her deathsong. The waves of the lake beat higher and higher against Siegfried, as he continues to hold the body of his dead lover. Soon both he and she disappear beneath the surface of the water. Then, slowly, the storm dies down, and the moon pierces through the gloom. Out on the now becalmed lake, there appears a band of swans.[2]

When reduced to a narrative outline, *Swan Lake* (1877) may seem woodenly melodramatic. The reader may still shudder, though, to have this Romantic story of love between a man and a woman placed side by side with scenes of cruising-grounds and bathhouses. What basis is there for doing so, beyond the similarity of marginal tribes with strange codes and rites? What good can it serve, anyway, to reduce the totality of the ballet – with all its refinements of emotion, image, and music –

to the scenario of, to use a phrase, 'anonymous sex between men'? But the disapproving accounts of the behaviour of the men are misleading and reductive in their turn. They are often drawn from police reports and trial notes, and they come with large amounts of moralistic posturing. What if we try to move through and beyond the condemnatory rhetoric to particular lives, and especially to the life of Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), the main force in the creation of *Swan Lake*? The ballet will still be a story of doomed love between a man and a woman. But perhaps the different scenes, of lakeshore and cruising-ground, will seem to speak of and to each other with a mutual curiosity. With this in mind, I now offer some sense of the formation of homosexual behaviours in Tchaikovsky's lifetime, and of Tchaikovsky's particular experiences. The chapter then returns to the ballet, tracing out its larger cultural history, and seeking correspondences between the work and its contexts.

The descriptions of the parks and other locales with which I began might be drawn from the historical records of any major European city from the eighteenth century onward. A more codified and visible homosexuality – a *pattern* of homosexual behaviour – seems to be a metropolitan phenomenon, regardless of localised legal and sociocultural factors. And yet there is some variation between, for instance, a more modern, bourgeois city such as nineteenth-century Paris, and an imperial city such as Moscow or St. Petersburg. For example, there does not appear to have been a homosexual subculture as such in Russia before the nineteenth century. But, as historian Dan Healey recounts, casual sexual relations between men have been a feature of Russian folklore since at least the Middle Ages. Jokes and bawdy stories were often told about drunken encounters between men of the lower orders. These encounters were named 'sins', but they were sins that were often laughed about and even celebrated.

Adam Olearius, a diplomat from Holstein, visited Moscow between 1633 and 1643, and commented on this rough-and-ready sociosexual culture:

> Such antics provide matters for conversation at their carouses. People caught in such obscene acts are not severely punished. Tavern musicians often sing of such loathsome things too, in the open streets, while some show them to young people in puppet shows.[3]

The sense is that any Russian man of the time might, after too much drink, try to gain satisfaction with another man. The act is seen as a

result of circumstance – of drink, strong desire, and a passing opportunity – rather than the wish of a particular type of person. The upper classes, however, were dissuaded from this opportunistic, plebeian sex by the Westernisation that occurred during the rule of Peter the Great (1672–1725). As Olearius's disapproving account suggests, Westernisation meant stricter and more explicit codes concerning sexual conduct. As Healey notes, there was an attempt to 'impose "civilized" norms by condemning sodomy in élite circles'.[4] If same-sex behaviour was seen as a betrayal of ruling-class values, nobles might still act on their desires, and preserve their authority, by having sex with lower-class men. These encounters might be kept hidden. Also, to have sex with peasants was in a sense to confirm one's power: it was a reassertion of the idea that the lower classes were an expendable resource for the aristocracy. The ruling-class philanderer may have viewed the lower classes unsentimentally, as available for exploitation, but some seem to have looked at their 'primitive' underlings with a degree of wistfulness. Peasants and domestic servants could seem to occupy a lost realm of unselfconscious pleasure, and the noble could renew his acquaintance with this realm via brief, unencumbering liaisons. From the serfs' perspective, there was a tradition of tolerating 'gentlemanly mischief', not least because such mischief was usually a way of making money.

While drunken encounters between men of the same class doubtless persisted, the growing literature of homosexuality is dominated by accounts of commercialised transactions between men of different classes. Xavier Mayne noted in 1908 that the Russian armies were 'full of prostitution', and he cites poverty as the main reason.[5] Similarly, Healey quotes the nineteenth-century journal of Medved'ev, a Moscow merchant. Medved'ev was married, and sought sex with women and with male friends, but he also recorded in his journal:

> For some time now my lust leads me to pick a younger cab-driver, who I make fun of along the way; with a little nonsense you can enjoy mutual masturbation. You can almost always succeed with a 50-kopek coin, or 30 kopeks, but there are also those who agree to it for pleasure.[6]

Neither Medved'ev nor the various cab-drivers, soldiers, waiters, and bathhouse attendants saw their activity as defining them as 'homosexual'.

On occasion, though, and increasingly over the mid- to late nineteenth century, the upper-class man came to be recognised – and came

to recognise himself – as having consistent and particular desires that set him apart. He acted out of choice, and he had the leisure to conceptualise his preferences. He often seemed to have preferred the lower-class man because it was uncomplicated, and because it had fewer implications for his social authority. Although he jeopardised his authority in 'sinning', he held the overwhelming balance of power in the relation between himself and his partners.

Lower-class men may have acted out of same-sex desires, or they may have acted against their inclinations for money. Or again, they may not have had the elaborate and moralised sexual preconceptions of their Westernised 'betters'. This last possibility, though, may be a historiographical prejudice that arises from the scarcity of lower-class accounts. While Medved'ev was literate, and chose to keep a journal, the lower-class accounts tend to have been acquired by duress, as part of a police interrogation or a court case.

There is some evidence of diverse motivations on the part of lower-class men. In 1866, a St. Petersburg bathhouse attendant listed the range of activities desired of him by his clients, without any expression of preference or distaste:

> [the client] lies with me like with a woman, or orders me to do with him as with a woman, only in the anus, or else [he is] leaning forward and lying on his chest, and I [get] on top of him, all of which I did. Besides all this, other visitors to the baths demanded that we bring them a woman from a public house; they would first make me do the deed (copulate) with her, while they watched, then they would use the woman in front of me.

His affectless account seems to confirm an impersonal or happenstance attitude to different types of sexual activity, although it may also indicate fear, despondency, or some other state of mind. On the other hand, another lower-class young man speaks in 1912 of having sex with 'his own people'.[7]

Regardless of the class of the participants, there does seem to have been a shift with urbanisation, especially in the mid- to late nineteenth century. The intensification of opportunities also led to heightened visibility, and a more broadly cultural self-awareness. In the concentrated urban environments of St. Petersburg and Moscow, homosexuality was able to institutionalise itself around particular types of establishment and locale, even if the 'types' to be found there were diverse. There were many instances of intense and romantic

relationships between men of the same class, although again the evidence relates to middle- and upper-class life. There is often a more or less submerged homosexual aspect to some of the artistic côteries of Moscow and St. Petersburg – côteries to which Tchaikovsky had access. If sexual relations often confirmed – even depended upon – class differences, the evolution of social-sexual institutions did allow new alliances to emerge. Xavier Mayne's swimming-pool '*cotillon*' brought together an 'amazing *mélange*', including '[b]oys and men, youths and elders, tradesmen's clerks and archdukes, actors and musicians, officers of the army and common soldiers'. However, there is not much to suggest that this 'amazing *mélange*' ever developed into a more generally meaningful social or political coalition.

The formation and survival of homosexual subcultures in Russia and elsewhere might seem to indicate official toleration. But the reclusive, 'backwater' spaces for such *cotillons* reminds us that this was a necessarily secret world. Men were publicly tried for homosexual acts, and merely to acquire a shadowed reputation could prove injurious to a man's social and professional standing. With rare exceptions, this was a fearful culture, and, as already noted, a lot of the knowledge of nineteenth-century Russian homosexuality is derived from police reports and sodomy trials. And yet the forces of oppression were applied unevenly. It had been hard to monitor sexual behaviour when it consisted in the main of random drunken incidents. With the formation of a homosexual subculture, policing became a more feasible proposition. Surveillance of bathhouses and restaurants sometimes led to court cases, but there seems not to have been a consistent and systematic attempt to eliminate all these institutions.

Some of the most notorious scandals demonstrate the dangers of being discovered to be homosexual, but they also suggest the extent of tolerance. Further, they confirm the sense that a man's class status was not to be separated from his sexual practice. In 1889, over two hundred men were found to have been involved in a social and sexual côterie that brought upper-class men together with guards and with actors from the Alexandrinsky Theatre. The existence of such a côterie suggests quite a developed underground organisation of homosexuality within the upper class. Although this incident was referred to as a scandal, it had relatively minor consequences for the nobles who were involved. Numerous guards and actors were dismissed from Imperial service, but it seems clear that the Tsar was not minded to persecute the more privileged participants. (Nicholas II's uneven complaisancy may have been related to the same-sex preferences of his brother, Grand Duke Sergey Aleksandrovich.) More generally, homosexuality was a

sufficient presence at the highest levels of society that exposing and punishing it would have been both difficult and embarrassing. When upper-class homosexuals were actively persecuted, it was often because there was an additional motive. One of Tchaikovsky's close friends, Prince Vladimir Meshchersky, was notorious for his philandering among the government employees over whom he had authority. The reactionary Meshchersky only encountered serious difficulty, though, when his political unpopularity reached unprecedented heights.[8] There was no official sanction for homosexuality or for homosexual trade. But for the most part this subculture was permitted to exist, not least because it was hardly visible to polite society. Also, to persecute homosexual activity was to grant the lower class the power of blackmail over the upper class. It must have seemed easier, most of the time, for the authorities to assume that these were unpreventable and victimless crimes.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a new literature of sexology to help the literate man to identify and conceptualise himself. Across Europe, the homosexual emerged as a certain type of person who could be recognised by certain telltale characteristics. Xavier Mayne, whose book was a compendium of personal knowledge and sexological studies, offered his readers a quiz by which they could assess their 'Uranian' or 'similisexual' tendencies, and those of their acquaintances. This included thinking about how people look at others ('the Uranian eye, especially in the higher type, is almost always singularly luminous . . . and its penetrating gaze can be disturbingly direct'). At times Mayne's questions seem obviously to imply the *fin de siècle* stereotype of the aesthete, with his emotional and excessive investment in the arts ('Are you strongly affected by music . . . [d]oes music ever seem to you to have a really "mysterious" message to *you* – nervously, spiritually, or otherwise?'). Other questions might seem odd to modern readers, and would seem to relate to contemporary physiological notions ('Can you readily separate the great toe from its fellows by its *own* force?').[9] Mayne and others presented models against which to measure the self. In the face of sexological methods of detection, the informed homosexual had a fuller and more precise array of traits to guard against and suppress. It was the heterosexual who, in his very normality, became invisible, and the homosexual had to aspire to that same invisibility.

The other feature of sexological studies is that they indicate the emergence of a Europe-wide homosexual awareness. For all the differences in the behaviour and values of London and those of St. Petersburg or Paris, there was a perception of identity across national boundaries.

Mayne was so persuaded of the transnational similarities that his 'Bath-Resort' is offered as a more or less generic scene, to be found in most major capitals. We might see the transnational aspect as inevitable, in that most European capitals were undergoing the same demographic and economic shifts at approximately the same time. But this would also seem to have been the result of a deliberate assertion of a queer identity across national boundaries. Havelock Ellis records an account of a New York brothel in which one of the prostitutes goes by the name of 'Dorian Gray'. Faced with no accepted public, national culture of homosexuality, people ended up drawing on the same international repertoire of references. The legends of Greece, of the Arabian Nights, and, after 1895, of Oscar Wilde, became the founding elements of a universalised queer culture. There was also a fair amount of contact between very distant queer institutions, in that middle- and upper-class travellers – Tchaikovsky included – sought out other queer places and people on their tours or their business trips. The publications of the sexologists and pornographers also fostered an internationally shared sense of the possibilities of homosexual life; Mayne's *Intersexes*, though it is offered as a history of a 'Problem in Social Life', reads very much as a guidebook.[10]

How can we locate Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky with regard to this subculture and its increasingly elaborate set of classed and psychological determinations? By birth Tchaikovsky occupied what biographer Poznansky characterises as 'the lower ranks of the hereditary gentry'. Although he went through a relatively impoverished period in the 1860s, Tchaikovsky led a more or less affluent life. As a boy, he was remarkable for his closeness to his mother, and for his 'excitability'. His character can easily be read off against sexological criteria. He was prone to 'a morbidly high-strung state verging on hysteria', and was especially sensitive to music. On one occasion he was supposedly so overwrought by some music that had been played in the house that he cried to his governess, 'Oh, the music! Save me from it'. Pointing to his head, he is supposed to have said, 'It's there, in there. It won't let me rest'.[11] At the age of nine, he first saw *Giselle*, and thereafter he had a great love of ballet. He loved to impersonate ballerinas and, as his brother Modest remembered, 'would give full-scale performances'. As a boy, he could get away with such effeminate fooling around ('everyone applauded . . . and his peers in fact took part in them with pleasure'). As an adult, he would restrict these performances to gatherings of his most trusted friends.[12]

His parents decided on a career in government for him, and at the age of ten he was sent to board at the School of Jurisprudence in St.

Petersburg. As Tchaikovsky's brother, Modest, later recounted, when the time came for Tchaikovsky to be separated from his mother, he clutched at anything to prevent it, and had to be wrenched away by force. His immense feelings of loss on this occasion would be compounded four years later when his mother died of cholera. His sense of bereavement would last throughout his life, a fact that critics frequently use to explain the nature of his music. Poznansky is typical in suggesting that 'the shattering experience of his mother's death was one of the sources of the deep existential melancholy that was to become one of the constituents of Tchaikovsky's psychological makeup and was often to find poignant expression in his music'.[13] There is also perhaps the suggestion that Tchaikovsky fits a psychological stereotype of homosexual development, with an overattachment to the mother that is reinforced by her tragic loss. But Tchaikovsky clearly had a melancholy disposition before his mother's death, and indeed before their initial separation. He fits another, more generalised stereotype of homosexuality in that, in comparison with most other boys, he had always stood out as strangely sensitive and artistic. Small wonder, perhaps, that he should fall in love with *Giselle*, a ballet that features a frail and doomed heroine.

Tchaikovsky's banishment to the School of Jurisprudence had its advantages. He had greater access to the cultural activities of St. Petersburg, and formed friendships that would last throughout his life. He became especially close to other artistic boys, and especially to Aleksey Apukhtin, who would become a well-known lyric poet. But the régime of the school was brutal. Like many other same-sex institutions of an educational, religious, or military nature, it was a place in which sexual expression – from the consensual to the violent – was commonplace. It is hard to know precisely what Tchaikovsky's particular experiences were, though we do know that he had intense infatuations with classmates, and was renowned for his looks and his charm (he was thought to be 'girlishly pretty').[14]

How did Tchaikovsky perceive his sexual nature in adulthood? There were various scandals in the course of his life that would have reminded him that he was outside the law, and subject to punishment and shame. Modest recorded an occasion on which a particular restaurant – the Chautemps – became rather too notorious, and in a process that seems to have been casual or semi-official, its habitués were 'defamed throughout the city'. Tchaikovsky was a frequent visitor to the Chautemps, and Modest argues that the incident terrified his brother, and confirmed in him a secretive and fearful nature. Certainly Tchaikovsky remained sufficiently private that very few of his

contemporaries ever knew of his homosexuality. His insistence on his privacy meant that he became a romantic enigma. As one person remembered, his 'private life was always surrounded by a kind of haze and mysterious mist', though towards the end of his life his homosexuality was probably assumed by many.[15]

There were different examples of homosexual life that might have informed how Tchaikovsky thought of his own life. Some of his friends – such as Apukhtin – established long-term relationships with men of their own class, and led social lives in which their same-sex identification was either open or very poorly disguised. Others established a kind of concubinage with the serfs on their country estates. Tchaikovsky soon learned about the various sexual opportunities available to a gentleman, and he availed himself of them. The form of his desires would never become entirely settled. He commented on how appalling he found the 'cynical debauchery' of some friends. He visited their estates and enjoyed for a time the dramas that unfolded between masters and servants. He also relished and learned from the gossip of the homosexual 'aunties' who helped to promote queer institutions and conventions in the cities. But 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. Perhaps in a continuation of his childhood melancholy, or because of the oppressed nature of homosexual life, its class stratifications, or the growing psychological sense that the homosexual was a defective type – or perhaps out of a combination of several or all of these factors – he viewed his own personal life with a sense of fatedness, in which his dreams of happiness would always prove to be impossible.[16]

As if to ensure the failure that he felt he could not avoid, Tchaikovsky often conceived his more profound romantic feelings for men with whom a serious relationship was not possible. He fell in love with pupils and cousins who usually had heterosexual interests, and who were much younger than him. His most enduring relationship was conducted at a much lower, less idealised pitch, and was with his servant, Alyosha Sofronov. Sofronov entered into service with Tchaikovsky when he was in his mid-teens, and his master in his mid-thirties. By 1877, when Sofronov was in his late teens, the relationship had become sexual. Poznansky points out the many roles that Sofronov came to play for Tchaikovksy, including companion, housekeeper, nurse, friend, and, in some respects, son. It seems unlikely that the relationship remained particularly sexual in the 1880s, but the two remained interdependent. Sofronov married in 1888, and after the

death of his first wife in 1890 he remarried in 1891. He became well off during his service with Tchaikovsky, and was further rewarded with a legacy at his master's death. Clearly Tchaikovsky loved Sofronov and depended on him in a variety of ways. But he always had some measure of control over the other man that had nothing to do with their respective personalities or characters. The personal interaction always pushed against the issue of authority. As he wrote of Sofronov to his brother, Anatoly, in 1879: 'It is a surprising thing how nice he can be when you keep him in the position of a lackey . . . and how he immediately becomes spoiled when . . . you live with him not as a servant but as a comrade'. In the same letter he admits that, after a while, Sofronov bores him.[17] The relationship was important, and was even a kind of a marriage. But it had its limitations, and our understanding of it is doubtless distorted by the fact that we only have the master's version of events.

Tchaikovsky is sometimes assumed to conform to a recognisable stereotype of the late nineteenth-century middle-class man whose romantic and sexual lives are more or less separate. He 'loved' handsome, well-bred cousins and pupils, but had sex with his servant and, subsequently, with other lower-class men. I think this is misleading, in that, as he became older, he entered into his sexual liaisons with a fervour that was erotic, but that was also tender and romantic. He became attached for a year or so to a cabman named Vanya, and he recorded the intensity and the range of his feelings. He wrote to Modest of having 'fallen rather heavily into Cupid's net'. In his diary he mentioned a long walk in the woods with Vanya, and he noted that he was in love. He also wrote, 'Vanyusha. Hands'. This may indicate a particular form of sexual pleasure, but Tchaikovsky had a more general and fetishistic obsession with hands, and his other intense romances were also described with enigmatic references to 'Hands'. Over time, Vanya's tendency to drunkenness put Tchaikovsky off, not least because it involved 'endless visits to pubs'.[18] Although he continued to see Vanya occasionally, Tchaikovsky's emotional engagement diminished to an insignificant level. He recorded similar but more passing relationships, such as with a waiter named Andrey, and a bathhouse attendant named Timofey, but the criterion seems to have been gratification rather than love.

Even where his affections were not particularly engaged, though, Tchaikovsky was often alive to the pathos of his and his partners' lives. Indeed, his desire seems to have been intensified by the social distance between himself and his partners. In his relations with lower-class men, he was thrilled by the temporary power-reversals that they implied, as

he, an upper-class man, became enslaved by his desire. He wrote to his brother, Modest, of Evstafy, a seventeen-year-old servant on his brother-in-law's estate at Kamenka: 'As regards my source of delight . . . *I would feel happy to clean {his boots} all my life long* . . . and I am generally ready to lower myself anyhow provided that I could kiss, even *if only rarely his hands and feet*'. Tchaikovsky imagines himself performing services that he never had to perform, for someone who had to perform them every day. He dreams of total romantic surrender, but in his abasement to lower-class men he constructs an erotic myth in which his prime motive of self-gratification is never hard to discern. There is an excitability in his pity for them. The theatricality and the masochism are confirmed, in a letter, by another fetishistic reference to hands. Writing to Modest, he mentions a young man somewhat above the servant class but significantly below himself. It was a young actor who, in one role, had to slap another actor. Tchaikovsky comments to Modest, 'What I wouldn't give to have that same hand give me a hundred slaps in the face!'[19]

If one wished to make a hero of Tchaikovsky – to see him as a precursor of liberation – it would be difficult. His attitude to his sexual disposition shifted from one period of his life to another, and even from one day to another. Often, in confidential letters to his brother Modest, he did not name his 'problem', but simply referred to it as '*this*'. In other letters, especially in those written before his disastrous marriage, he revealed a sense of remorse: 'My predilections are my greatest, my most insurmountable obstacle to happiness . . . I have sunk so deeply in the mire of my tastes and habits'. On one occasion he simply bemoaned 'mia prokliataia bugromaniia' ('my damned buggeromania').[20]

Towards the end of his life, he failed to form any lasting sexual partnerships, but began to hunt ever more keenly on the cruising grounds of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Paris, and Berlin. From his early years, he gave up hour after hour to walking the Nevsky Prospect, a traditional place for passing homosexual contacts. Aside from the obvious sexual motive, he seems to have been fascinated by the 'traffic' or 'scene' of such places. He made brief, vivid notes in his journals of people he saw. He was too careful to put details in letters, but on numerous occasions he wrote to Modest of how he wanted to tell him of the experiences he had had 'sauntering about alone'. Even after so many years of living in St. Petersburg, this side of the city's life could still cause him to exclaim, again in a letter to Modest, that it was 'indeed a curious city'. Above all, he seems never to have given up on the possibility of a sudden discovery of the wondrous. He dedicated hour upon hour, late at night, in various major cities across Europe, to the

possibility of a meeting that would provide the fulfilment he had not found in his everyday world. At times there is a suggestion of world-weary humour, but there is also, in his notes of glimpses of men, the sense that this was the most romantic – the most desperately wishful – aspect of his personal life.[21]

How might we relate Tchaikovsky's work – and especially his work on *Swan Lake* – to his biographical and sociocultural context? Assertions of a connection between the life and the work have been controversial. His admirers have resisted the association with homosexuality in part because it has been used to diminish the composer's reputation. In his own day, Tchaikovsky was in danger of being stereotyped as a 'decadent' composer. While this did not equate to a 'homosexual' composer, the two terms would have served to confirm each other, and Tchaikovsky seems to have come perilously close to exposure on occasion. Critics of his era, some of whom knew of his personal life, seemed to draw on the emergent image of the effeminate homosexual in their reviews. They wrote of his music's 'passive', 'sentimental', and 'flawed' personality. One Parisian critic, who may or may not have heard the rumours, described Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony as a 'dissolute and wild fantasia'.[22] In more recent times the argument has been made that, due to his homosexuality, he had a 'feminine' and 'emotional' nature, and that these implicitly bad qualities show through in his work.[23]

It is trite and prejudicial to define a melody or piece of orchestration as inherently homosexual on the grounds that it seems 'emotional' and 'flawed'. However, Tchaikovsky himself indicated a connection in broader terms between his life and his music. He confided to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck, that he had never been truly happy in his romantic life, and that the clue for this was to be found in his music. One cannot be sure what he meant by this, and he seems deliberately to be vague, but he seems also to echo the disposition of some of his critics in locating a 'flawed' personality in his music. At other points, he expressed more plainly the fear that he could not be a 'strong' composer unless he led a conventional heterosexual life. This tentative link between the type of music and the type of life received ironic confirmation when finally he did get married. At that moment, he feared that, far from making him a 'strong' composer, this action against his nature would cause his musical talent to 'die for ever'. Whether 'strong' or otherwise, his ability to create was, for him, related to his freedom from – or alienation from – heterosexuality and its conventions.

Philip Brett has argued that music 'is particularly accommodating to those who have difficulty in expressing feelings in day-to-day life,

because the emotion is unspecified and unattached'.[24] The argument might be that nineteenth-century homosexuals, who were obliged to hide their feelings, would have been particularly drawn to 'unspecified and unattached' creative forms. Tchaikovsky did not exactly have difficulty expressing his feelings, although he was clearly aware of the need at times to repress or to disguise them. He saw his romantic tendencies as 'damned buggeromania', but also, it would seem, as an important source of his art. Perhaps his energy as a composer was derived in part from the fact that he could not resolve these tensions.

There are, though, more particular arguments to be made in relation to ballet and to *Swan Lake*. As noted, Tchaikovsky fell in love with ballet as a boy, on seeing the great Romantic ballet, *Giselle*. This love contained an element of transgendered identification, and his childhood enthusiasm for impersonating ballerinas continued into adult life. (He once improvised a *pas de deux* with the other homosexual composer of famous swan music, Camille Saint-Säens; this performance was for the amusement of Nikolay Rubinstein, who accompanied them on the piano.) Tchaikovsky had strong opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of particular ballerinas, and on his ability to emulate them. This was the subject of mildly spiteful play between himself and his brother, Modest. Modest was another homosexual who enjoyed impersonating ballerinas, and while Tchaikovsky likened his own 'fluidity and classicism' to the Italian prima Amalia Ferraris, he compared Modest to the untalented Russian dancer, Savrenskaya.[25]

In Tchaikovsky, his brother, and Saint-Säens – all middle- and upper-class homosexuals – we glimpse a self-consciously 'camp' affiliation with ballet, in the sense that it is both ironic and sincere. Tchaikovsky did his impersonations in part to scandalise and amuse men such as Rubinstein, whom he trusted. He made a deep identification with the ballerina, but in acting this out he also acknowledged his 'real world' distance from her. Then again, if he made himself ridiculous, it was in a way that revealed genuine expertise. We cannot know in any great detail how Tchaikovsky may have fitted the model of the homosexual who realises his homosexuality as a birth into performance, and who perceives ballet as an appropriately self-conscious elaboration of gender as performance (see Chapters 1 and 2). Nor is it clear that he located in *Giselle* the kind of queer resonances that, I argued, might be found there. Yet, in his love of *Giselle*, and in his occasional life as Amalia Ferraris, there are grounds for thinking that the pathos and self-invention of ballet did foster queerness for Tchaikovsky – that ballet gave him a vocabulary of selfhood that went beyond that of '*this*' or of 'damned buggeromania'.

Why, then, swans? It used to be assumed that Tchaikovsky had had little influence on the content and form of the story of *Swan Lake*. The libretto was supposed to have been the joint effort of a theatre manager, Vladimir Begichev, and the dancer, Vladimir Geltser. These men seem to have been circumstantially involved in the ballet's production, but there is no convincing evidence to credit them with the libretto, and no one is credited in the original programme notes. Musicologist Roland John Wiley has traced the longer history of the ballet in his study *Tchaikovsky's Ballets* (1985), and he presents evidence that the idea of the ballet existed in Tchaikovsky's imagination long before he began working with others on the project. A niece of the composer remembers Tchaikovsky creating a 'Lake of Swans' ballet as part of a home theatrical to amuse the children of the family. This was a one-act version in which the children took various roles, and in which Tchaikovsky himself took the role of the prince. It is hard to date this 'family' version with precision, but it was probably made in the late 1860s or early 1870s, and certainly well before the commissioned work of 1875–1876. The libretto of the professional, Moscow version of 1877 may well have been Tchaikovsky's original idea – the 'family' version – as elaborated by others. It is overly long and confused, as though an idea has been 'improved upon' by too many hands. The ballet only came to be recognised as a coherent classic with Modest Tchaikovsky's revised and clarified St. Petersburg version of 1895.[26]

If we accept that *Swan Lake* represents Tchaikovsky's own particular choice of images and ideas, why (again) swans? Perhaps the swan is peculiarly appropriate to queerness and to ballet. With its long neck, the swan is often depicted with phallic connotations (as in the many paintings of Leda and the swan). The swan's extraordinary shape relates to ballet's obsession with 'line', the creation of a shape that is clear and balanced. 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, and in this it is akin to the great nineteenth-century ballerina Marie Taglioni. Her arms were thought to be so long as to be 'deformed', but she used this potentially ugly feature to create an unusual and weirdly fascinating beauty.[27] The notion of redeeming an otherwise disgusting appearance serves as an embodied version of coming to terms with the 'ugliness' of homosexuality. Andersen's story of 'The Ugly Duckling' (1835) is, of course, the appropriate parable here, in that the duckling's strangeness is only a sign that he is out of place. He will eventually be surrounded by 'big swans', who will 'stroke . . . him with their bills'.[28]

Swans have more generally been used to signify loss and melancholy. They have been associated with a wondrous fatality, as with the

'swansong' that the bird is traditionally assumed to sing as it moves towards death. The swansong also has connotations of a loving and heroic fidelity, as with Shakespeare's Emilia, who decides, 'I will play the swan/And die in music' (*Othello* Act V, scene ii, ll. 245–246). Tchaikovsky appears to pick up on both the fatalistic and the redemptive connotations of the swan. He gives us a melancholy story of an impossible love, but there is redemption at the end, as Siegfried remains in the waves with the dead Odette.

There is a folklore of swan-maidens, who use a 'swan shift', a magical cloak that enables them to switch at will between maiden and swan. The Russian scholar Yury Slonimsky cites Johann Musäus's *Der Geraußte Schleier* as a specific source for *Swan Lake*. This story features swans with crowns, who can be glimpsed in their true maidenly form at dawn, and who resist the loves of men. But, as Wiley and others have pointed out, aspects of *Swan Lake* are to be found in the legends of several countries. Wiley chooses to stress the Wagnerian influence. Although Tchaikovsky had mixed feelings about Wagner's work, the use of the swan symbol in *Lohengrin* (1850) is significant, as is the fact that in the opera humans are turned by sorcery into swans.[29] The legend of Lohengrin, or the Knight of the Swan, can be traced back to Icelandic folklore. In Wagner's version, Lohengrin saves Princess Elsa from a forced marriage, and agrees to marry her himself if she will not ask him his race. She cannot resist the temptation to ask the question, however, and so Lohengrin retreats in a swan-boat to his castle. With this figure of the mysterious hero who retreats to his own secluded locale, one notices not Wagner's queer intent – for he had none – but the queer resonances that such mythologies may have had for Tchaikovsky.

There is also, though, a 'lostness' of 'Old Europe' in Wagnerian opera. He presents us with an early and feudalistic world of god-kings who are as out of place in a modern, increasingly bourgeois Europe as those other twilight creatures, the homosexuals. The possible link between Wagnerian nostalgia and homosexual estrangement had already manifested itself in the life of Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845–1886). 'Mad King Ludwig' was Wagner's most fanatical and generous patron. As a young man, Ludwig seemed the Romantic ideal of a prince. He had been renowned throughout Europe for his good looks, wealth, and refinement. He was adored by people who barely knew him, including Tchaikovsky's friend and patron, Nadezhda von Meck. He had a fascination with heraldic and cabbalistic symbols, and was especially obsessed with the sign of the swan. His ancestral inheritance included the *Hohenschwangau* ('High Country of the Swan'), and the

bird's talismanic significance was affirmed by the fact that his hero, Wagner, had created a Swan-Knight in Lohengrin. Ludwig soon damaged his promising early reputation in spectacular fashion. In 1867, in an episode that seems to anticipate the incident in *Swan Lake* in which Siegfried is reluctant to choose a wife, Ludwig refused to marry the woman to whom he was betrothed. This decision was attributed by some to the mental instability that had marked his family, but it was also of a piece with the rumours about his enthusiasm for handsome courtiers and for young valets, grooms, and foresters. Ludwig became increasingly eccentric, and spent vast sums on the building of grandiose castles. He was declared insane and effectively dethroned in 1886. Although these last events were veiled to some extent by officialdom, the key document that seems to have forced Ludwig to abdicate was a journal in which he entered into pledges with an equerry and a valet to 'abstain from kisses'. When he drowned under mysterious circumstances shortly after his abdication, Tchaikovsky seems to have assumed – as did many others – that he had been murdered. He wrote in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck, 'What a tragic end, and what an outrage this whole story is!'[30]

Swans, then, had a series of cultural connotations, some of which resonate with homosexual life in general, and some with Tchaikovsky's life in particular. And yet, if we try to read for a close match between the composer and the ballet, we run into problems. We could perhaps read *Swan Lake* as a kind of drama *à clef* in which the theme is blackmail. The shadowy, demonic Rothbart brings a ruling-class figure into his power by arousing and requiting an unorthodox passion. Or we might see a correspondence between Tchaikovsky and Odette. He, too, was haunted by malevolent powers, and, like her, he needed to be elusive. There was a 'swan-ness' to Tchaikovsky's homosexuality, in that his cruising was a hopeful part of his life, but also the symptom of an ongoing failure. He and Odette both needed to be rescued from their impossible condition. Then again, Tchaikovsky's secret life, and especially his fervent abasement to lower-class men, might prompt the thought that *Swan Lake* itself is a sadomasochistic fantasy, in that it turns on extremes of protectiveness and cruelty, fidelity and betrayal. But one can place Tchaikovsky in an unflattering, 'demonic' light by casting as swan a person he himself would never have associated with the role: his wife, Antonina Milyukova. During the mid-1870s, Tchaikovsky so longed to be normal that he decided to marry. He thought it best to choose a woman whom he thought to be stupidly devoted to him. He did not tell Antonina Milyukova of his past life. No sooner was he married than he felt an overwhelming revulsion

for her, and she was banished from his home and his life. He paid for her upkeep, but thereafter her life was marked by bouts of insanity and hospitalisation. There are indications that Antonina Milyukova was unstable before the marriage, but there can also be no doubt that Tchaikovsky's treatment of her was selfish, manipulative, and harsh.

Tchaikovsky's life reveals numerous possible versions of the relations between Odette, Siegfried, and Rothbart, both before and after his work on the ballet. The problem is that there is a profusion of shifting biographical possibilities (some of the most persuasive of which come *after* the ballet). It still makes sense to read *Swan Lake* as a projection of the artist's experience, but in a much more generalised way. In the ballet and in his life, escape and imprisonment become oddly interchangeable. Odette is forced to become a swan in order to evade the witch, but she and her friends enjoy flying through the air, 'almost to heaven itself'.[31] Similarly, Tchaikovsky felt blighted by the same-sex desire through which he also found fulfilment. He deplored his homosexuality as a seemingly inescapable condition, but he also wrote of the joy of some of his experiences. Further, while we may see the drifting band of swans as analogous to the marginal figures of the cruising-grounds, we should perhaps grant more importance to the physique of the individual swan. The critic Marcel Schneider has argued that the swan bespeaks contradictory impulses. He proposes that its whiteness and grace evoke 'the purity, virginity, and smiling mystery of young girls', but that the swan is also an aggressive animal whose columnar neck emblematises the male sex.[32] Schneider does not relate his argument to Tchaikovsky's class status or to his self-dramatisation in letters and diaries, but, as already suggested, there is a match there too. Tchaikovsky presented himself as the naïve, delicate figure who worshipped the burgeoning manhood of servants and coachmen, even though he was a man of the world who had the power to choose and to dispose of those same men. He might plead with them, but, like Siegfried with Odette when she does not respond to his pleas, he might also pluck off their crowns. The powerful ambivalence of the swan indicates Tchaikovsky's attraction to virility and his fear of it, a contradiction that he was able to negotiate by choosing men who seemed to have authority but who, in fact, were his 'inferiors'.

Finally, we return to the idea that *Swan Lake* confirms the virtual impossibility, in Tchaikovsky's era, of accommodating homosexuality within wider society. There was no real possibility of, as it were, bringing the creatures of the lakeside into the ballroom. Tchaikovsky shared the profoundly conservative outlook of most people of his class,

and so he characterises his desires as an unsought complication, as a melancholy fatedness. But he also represents them as the deepest kind of excitement. For both reasons, when the swan appears, the Prince follows it.

4

QUEER MODERNITY

A handsome man-about-town lingered by the Tchaikovsky apartment in 1893, as the composer neared death. A minor aristocrat with a passion for music, Serge Diaghilev (1872–1929) was distantly related to Tchaikovsky, and had had a 'cult' for 'Uncle Petia' since childhood. As an adult, he had managed to engineer several brief meetings with his hero in the concert halls and theatres of St. Petersburg. When, finally, Diaghilev heard that Tchaikovsky was dead, he rushed round once again to the apartment. There he found Rimsky-Korsakov and the tenor, Nikolay Figner, and began to help them with funeral arrangements. On seeing the body, Diaghilev found that Tchaikovsky was little changed in death, and still seemed as young as ever. Diaghilev then ran to find flowers and, years later, he remembered with pride that throughout that first day his wreath had been the only one at the composer's lying-in. On that same first day in further homage, he worked on a composition of his own, a violin sonata. He wrote in a letter that if he were to name the sonata, 'it would be something like "Death of Tchaikovsky and Death Always"'.[1]

By the time he worked on his memoirs, Diaghilev was the famous creator of the Ballets Russes. In recounting his youthful enthusiasms, he presents a reverent self who has surrendered completely to the mystique surrounding Tchaikovsky, and who shares something of Tchaikovsky's Romantic melancholy. He affiliates himself with the great man and his struggle, and goes on to write of how he tried to foster an understanding of Tchaikovsky's work in Western Europe.[2] At no point in his written account does Diaghilev grant that he may have seen beyond the glorified figure to something more vulnerable and, even, laughable. In conversation, however, Diaghilev is reported to have punctured the Romantic mystique, and in a way that set a distance between Tchaikovsky's personality and his own. Once, when he was trying to charm the young composer Vladimir Dukelsky, he mused, 'Poor Piotyr Ilytch Tchaikovsky was always on the verge of

suicide, so afraid was he that people might discover that he was a pederast'.[3] The fearful character that Diaghilev ascribes to Tchaikovsky contrasts hugely with Diaghilev's own. As one of the composers to work for Diaghilev, Nicolas Nabokov, put it:

> Diaghilev was an assertive homosexual; and the extraordinary thing about Diaghilev was that he was perhaps the first grand homosexual who asserted himself and who was accepted as such by society.[4]

If, when people looked at Tchaikovsky, they saw a mystery that fitted with their sense of a great man, did they really, when they looked at Diaghilev, see 'a homosexual'? If so, what might that have meant to them? And how might this more assertive identity have affected the productions and the reception of the Ballets Russes?

Nabokov's comment may need some qualification, but one thing that emerges very strongly from the historical material is that people were fascinated by Diaghilev. He too had the guise and the reputation of a great man, but he had none of Tchaikovsky's timidity. There are countless descriptions of Diaghilev in diaries and autobiographies, and the sense emerges that his extraordinary achievements were somehow related to his remarkable and impressive personality. He had a bravura air, and when he appeared at fashionable resorts he was accompanied by whispers of 'Look! Look! There he is!' His arrival was a theatrical event in itself: a 'very pale face' would be seen 'charging through a whole flutter of aides-de-camp'. There are numerous comments on his 'magnetism'. The accounts, by people who knew him well or barely at all, give us vivid evocations of what the man looked like and how he conducted himself. As a young man, it was noted that he was 'too good-looking'. As he became older, more famous, and more corpulent, he was variously described as looking like a 'pale fat baby', a 'sea-lion', a 'very nice monkey', a 'shady adventurer', a 'bear wrapped in Russian gloom', and an 'ageing magician' with 'an air of oriental opulence'. His streak of white hair amidst the black caused him to be nicknamed 'Chinchilla', while it made him seem 'absolutely fatalistic' to ballerina Tamara Karsavina. Another dancer, Lydia Sokolova, remembered – as did many others – Diaghilev's 'enormous head'. The composer Dukelsky could not make up his mind, although all his ideas were of a kind: 'I thought instantly of a decadent Roman emperor – possibly Genghis Khan or even a barbarous Scythian – and lastly, what he really was: a Russian *grand seigneur* of Alexander III vintage'.[5] Others tried to preserve the literal 'feel' of him. One balletomane told, half a century

after the event, of being caressed on the arm by Diaghilev's 'plump and warm hand'. A dancer remembered that shaking Diaghilev's hand was 'like shaking hands with a pillow'. We even have a characterisation of him as a lover. It was, apparently, 'like going to bed with a nice fat old lady'.[6]

The fact that Diaghilev appeared so frequently in public with his male dancers was also a cause for much comment. Dancers in this period tended to be relatively uneducated, and from the lower classes. They were not obviously suitable company for an aristocratic connoisseur. But Diaghilev was observed on promenades, in galleries, cafés, and restaurants with the young men whom he had made famous. He imposed a uniform, fashionable look on these stars in their everyday lives, so that Vaslav Nijinsky and Léonide Massine were dressed in summer, as Diaghilev was himself, in white ducks, blazer, and straw boater. Later favourites Anton Dolin and Serge Lifar were kitted out in plus fours. Diaghilev made an 'odd couple' with each of these men in turn, and this too was the subject of comment. If Diaghilev seemed a gentleman in the old style, Nijinsky seemed by comparison to be 'a shipping clerk or a plumber's apprentice', a 'jockey', or a 'slight stable-lad'. Cecil Beaton recalled of encounters in Venice at a later period: 'Always at Diaghilev's side was the neat little marionette figure of Lifar – very chic, but slightly "wrong."' Lifar was dressed as impeccably as Diaghilev, but he still 'continued to look like a street urchin'. Dukelsky recalled that Lifar 'wore a perpetually ecstatic expression and talked mostly in excited monosyllables, like a young savage savoring the fruits of European civilization for the first time'. Kochno, the assistant, seemed 'handsomer than the dancers on the stage' as he 'smil[ed] at no one in particular'.[7]

The fact that there are so many avid accounts of Diaghilev is a testament to the extent to which he reinvigorated the arts in the early twentieth century; but it is also testament to the fact that he seemed to manifest a relationship between the arts and a certain type of personality. We may still wish to stop short of Nabokov. When people looked at Diaghilev, were they aware of seeing an 'assertive homosexual'? Diaghilev disapproved of effeminate behaviour in men, and while he appeared in public with his lovers, they were not identified as such, and all acted in a 'discreet' way. Recognition of homosexuality may have been part of some people's fascination with Diaghilev, but others will have been fascinated because they did not quite know what they were looking at. Diaghilev was not characterised in print as a homosexual. It was suggested on occasion that he had an exotic and domineering manner – that he was a 'Svengali' in whom one

detected a slightly sinister personal magic. He was characterised in a novel of the early 1930s as 'the wickedest man in Europe', a phrase that, in its gossipy heatedness, indicates something unspeakable, but perhaps not, finally, very dangerous.[8] But when most people looked at him, they saw an aristocrat with a grand Russian manner, a man who seemed to define and to control the sources of glamour and prestige. While he made little or no attempt to disguise his sexual tastes, the nature of his life was veiled by an aura of privilege.

The argument has been made that English society, at least, knew well of Diaghilev's homosexuality, and tolerated it as a way of making amends for the treatment of Wilde a decade or so previously. However, while some English bohemians were attracted to the homoerotic mystique of Diaghilev and the work of the Ballets Russes, the English upper class seems to have been rather reluctant to tolerate homosexuality, even in so charming a man as Diaghilev. There was, according to Diaghilev's friend Misia Sert, a 'wave of fine Puritan approval' in London at the news of Nijinsky's marriage. One English society hostess commented on Diaghilev's new relationship with Massine that it had caused ballet to be branded 'more than ever' as a 'den of vice'.[9] These issues – of 'toleration' and markers of sexualised identity – may be of interest for their own sake or in broader historical argument. But how do they relate more specifically to the nature of Diaghilev's work, and to the cultural phenomenon of the Ballets Russes? Nabokov is again helpful here, in that he noted that the company's productions were usually based on the assertion of a scandal. His point was not that the ballets were always about homosexuality, but that the scandalous element derived from a contradiction within Diaghilev himself, from the tension between his openness and his discretion. If Diaghilev expressed some derision for Tchaikovsky's fearfulness, and if he 'staged' his own life both on the promenades and in the theatres, Nabokov suggests that some animus remained from the fact that Diaghilev's nature was still not, finally, declared and accepted. According to Nabokov, the desire to shock was part 'showmanship', but it was also a 'real' and 'profound' aspect of the whole venture.[10] This chapter takes account of the confrontational spirit of the Ballets Russes productions, but in its more obviously homoerotic guises. Diaghilev used ballet to revive and extend a queer iconography. He reworked old ideas and images of same-sex desire, and he created new ones. He also drew particular audiences to ballet, and these audiences seemed equally willing to risk confrontation. The Ballets Russes seemed, onstage and as a social entity, to manifest to some spectators a new, queer way of being.[11]

The first Ballets Russes season, in 1909 in Paris, went a long way toward restoring the social and artistic prestige of theatrical dance. Ballet had been mired for some time in a 'decadent' phase in the West. The Russian dancers, and especially the men, had greater technical powers than were to be found in the old ballet strongholds of France and Italy. But, even in Imperial Russia, the creativity within ballet had been stifled by conservative working practices and by favouritism. In the Imperial theatres, different parts of the backdrop and set were painted by different painters – one by a specialist in trees, another in seascapes, and so on – and there was little attempt to create a more cohesive and nuanced style. The female dancers in the Imperial theatres wore jewellery that had been given to them by the men in the audience, even when jewels did not suit the character they were representing. In terms of choreography, for all that the Imperial Ballet tended to present exotic spectacles, the quality of the movement was always more or less that of the established classical vocabulary. In making Fokine his choreographer, Diaghilev sponsored a more varied and naturalistic kind of movement. He also stunned the West with new designs by Alexandre Benois and Léon Bakst, and he was able to exhibit unusual levels of musicianship and musical taste. The Ballets Russes presented works that were aesthetically complementary, in the sense that all aspects of the production were intended to match or to offset each other. The emphasis on stylish and imaginative productions would be continued with Western artists, as Diaghilev searched out new talent in music, the visual arts, and choreography. At various times, he worked with Picasso, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Miró, Ravel, Matisse, Prokofiev, and Satie. He discovered and encouraged the major choreographic talents of the twentieth century in Fokine, Nijinsky, Massine, Nijinska, and Balanchine.

Diaghilev was not simply a great producer of ballets; with his commissions and collaborations in music and design, he was an impresario of the modern and of Modernism. His appetite for the new and the difficult, however, was counterbalanced by a love of historical texts and images. He produced *Giselle* again when that ballet was falling out of fashion, and he tried to sell Tchaikovsky and the best of Imperial ballet to the West in two productions of *Swan Lake* (1911 and 1923) and in a splendid version of *The Sleeping Beauty* (1921). This chapter provides a discussion of Diaghilev's dealings with old sources and new talents, focusing particularly on roles, images, and productions that bear most strongly and directly on ballet's queer history. The commentary is oriented around a series of photographs. This use of selected images is especially appropriate given Diaghilev's own use of photo-

graphs and other artwork to define and promote his stars, his company, and their work.

The first image is a photograph by Bert, of Nijinsky in *Schéhérazade* (1910) (see Figure 4.1). He is dressed in loose, silken harem trousers and a jewelled bodice. He wears earrings, and he swaggers towards the camera, exposing his throat and the inside of his wrists and forearms. He smiles, open-mouthed and welcoming. While tremendously animated, he seems only too ready to succumb to the viewer's gaze. It is a curious mix of elements, in that the body is clearly male, but the pose – with its curving lines – is feminine. Nijinsky's role was that of the Golden Slave. The company had had a great success with an Oriental ballet, *Cléopâtre*, in the preceding season. According to the poet Anna de Noailles, that ballet had seemed to release a 'sort of psychosis, a mass delirium' in the Paris audience.[12] *Schéhérazade* (1910) would prove the company's most enduringly successful ballet, and they would continue performing it around the world long after it had lost its initial gloss (it still appears in revivals of Ballets Russes repertory by the Kirov and the Ballet Nationale de l'Opéra de Paris).

Before considering some of the details of *Schéhérazade*, we might ask what, more generally, the Orient signified in the European imagination. Legends of the harem, of the *Arabian Nights* and of the *Kamasutra*, had established the Orient as seductive and even depraved. It was seen as a place of strange and unusual punishments, and of equally strange and violent passions. Episodes in *Arabian Nights* tell of male–male love in a relatively casual or non-judgmental way, and so the Orient acquired a particular cachet for homosexuals. It could be added to the emergent homosexual tradition, alongside tales of Greek heroes. Northern Europeans began to see warmer climes as the locale of widespread homosexual practice. They were inspired to travel to the East to experience the sodomitic practices that were to be found there. Of course, the same practices were to be found in London, Paris, and Berlin, but the Orient, as Edward Said and others have shown, acquired a sexualised mystique in Western minds. There is the sense that Europeans, made uncomfortable by their own irrational and 'non-Christian' passions, projected them onto these foreign others; or that fellow Europeans might tolerate a discourse on same-sex relations if it were presented as 'foreign'. Writer and traveller Sir Richard Burton (1821–1890) produced a notorious example of the theme in the 'Terminal Essay' to his translation of *Arabian Nights* in 1885. He argued that there was a 'Sotadic Zone' that covered most of the Mediterranean and the Orient, and in which homosexual behaviour was widely practised (his own phrase is that 'the Vice is popular and endemic').

Figure 4.1 Auguste Bert: Vaslav Nijinsky in *Schéhérazade* (1910).

For Western readers and audiences, the Orient did not necessarily represent 'homosexuality' in a specific and clearly defined way; but it did suggest a relatively unregulated sexual realm, in which excessive and perverse activities could flourish.[13]

Schéhérazade was set to music by Rimsky-Korsakov, and choreographed by Fokine; the luridly coloured sets and costumes were designed by Bakst. The story is one of the more notorious from the *Arabian Nights*. While the Sultan is out hunting, his favourite concubine, Zobeide, persuades the chief eunuch to release the male African slaves into the harem. The women of the court then have an orgy with the slaves, but this is interrupted by the return of the Sultan. He is furious, and he and his men slaughter both concubines and slaves. The central figure of the domineering, sexually adventurous woman Zobeide was played by the strikingly tall Russian heiress Ida Rubinstein. As the massacre was carried out around her, the cool, haughty Rubinstein remained still. She did not express anger at the Sultan, or grief at the slaying of her favourite slave. As Zobeide, she impersonated a queenly pride, and, in the face of the Sultan's violence, she appeared to wrest power back from him: before he could decide to kill or to spare her, she took a dagger and stabbed herself to death.

There was nothing overtly lesbian about the slaughter scene of *Schéhérazade*, nor about Rubinstein's persona. But the performance seemed to evince a potent and strange sensuality. The previous season, Rubinstein had been introduced to Paris audiences as Cleopatra, who allowed men to spend one night with her so long as they took poison in the morning. In *Schéhérazade*, again, sensuality was bound up with extremes of power, with sudden interchanges between dominance and subjection. And, once again, pleasure was seen in relation to death. Pleasure was theatricalised as an expression of despair, as a kind of suicide. At the same time, there was an assertion of a belief in pleasure in spite of the consequences. Art historian Bram Dijkstra has argued that such roles as Cleopatra and Zobeide, twinned with Rubinstein's 'fetishized emaciation', were part of a larger *fin de siècle* pattern of perversion in the arts. He suggests that the male audience might view such performances 'in either a sadistic or masochistic fashion', depending on whether Rubinstein's theatrical personae are seen as 'subjects in control of their own destinies' or as 'ultrapassive objects of aggressive desire'. Literary historian Michael Moon, on the other hand, argues that Rubinstein performed a will to exhaust male–female binaries, and that this made her a 'powerful emblem' for 'lesbian admirers'. There is the possibility that, if Rubinstein could not enact lesbianism, she could seem to lead towards it as the only viable next step.[14]

If Rubinstein seemed to embody a challenge to male dominance and to polite ideas of womanliness, the queer potential of *Schéhérazade* was compounded by the role and performance of her counterpart, Nijinsky. As the Golden Slave, he was the favourite who would make love to Zobeide. Eyewitness accounts note, above all, the feverish energy that Nijinsky brought to the scene of interracial orgy:

> The dark youth flickers here and there among the mazy crowd of slaves, hungry for the faithless wife of the sultan . . . He finds her soon, and his lecherous hands play over and over her body with a purpose too subtle, it seems, to take and hold her once and for all.[15]

This is an extreme erotic universe, a 'too subtle' place of delay and prolonged arousal, far from the procreative decencies of the Christian marriage-bed. Among other eyewitnesses, Harold Acton recalled 'death in long-drawn spasms to piercing violins', while Carl Van Vechten remembered Nijinsky's Golden Slave as a 'strange, curious, head-wagging, simian creature, scarce human', who 'wriggled through the play, leaving a long streak of lust and terror in his wake'.[16] It was, ostensibly, a heterosexual role, and it was shocking to contemporary audiences because it was an overt representation of sexual hunger, and of cross-racial desire. And yet, there was also a disturbing queerness. Fokine commented that there was a 'lack of masculinity' in Nijinsky that made him particularly suited for roles such as that of the Golden Slave, and not for other, more emphatically manly roles.[17] As the Golden Slave, Nijinsky was not homosexual as such, but he performed a general libidinal excessiveness that would seem able to take many forms. He was an incarnation of pleasurable compliance, of the Orient in all its imagined omnisexual glory.[18]

In presenting Orientalist ballets, Diaghilev was mining the same sources as had homosexual writers of the mid- to late nineteenth century. We might see *Schéhérazade* as in keeping with the Orientalist aspects of Beardsley's drawings and Wilde's fairy stories. Diaghilev had sought out Beardsley on a trip to Western Europe in 1897, and he had taken Wilde – by this time an infamous man – out to dinner the following spring. He tried to acquire, via Wilde, Beardsley's unpublished drawings for *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. Diaghilev then introduced a version of *fin de siècle* aestheticism to Russia with the journal he founded in 1899, *Mir iskusstva*, or *World of Art*. Buckle speculates that it was the example of the notorious English art and literature journal, *The Yellow Book*, that led Diaghilev to found *Mir iskusstva*. Certainly the 'art for

art's sake' aspect of the journal caused its editors and contributors to be labelled 'Decadents' in Russia.[19]

The next image also has a distinctly *fin de siècle* aspect (see Figure 4.2). It is again of Nijinsky, as photographed by Roosen in *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911). The librettist for the ballet, Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, took his idea from Gautier's poem of 1837, and more generally *Le Spectre de la rose* gives a *fin de siècle* twist to French Romanticism. The poem is spoken by the ghost of a rose to the young woman who has worn him to the ball. It is a typically voyeuristic Gautier fantasy, as the male rose is absorbed in contemplation of the sleeping girl. The rose reflects that his death was brought about so that the girl might wear him on her breast. But the ghost is happy. Many another, the rose thinks, would have given his life to have had such a tomb.[20]

The photograph shows Nijinsky as the rose, wearing Bakst's costume of pink-red petals. By this time, Nijinsky's body had acquired its obvious, adult strength. This gives the image an interesting tension. There is a kind of phallic pathos here, in that the body is short, hard, and straight, but the maleness is 'decorated' by the swirling prettiness of the *port de bras*. This tension was equally present in the choreography. Fokine had given Nijinsky a series of leaps which made full use of the dancer's immense power. But the power was produced with a light, flitting aspect, in that Fokine choreographed for the dancer a stunning series of beaten steps. As in the photograph, Fokine also created arm movements that were delicate, rounded, and sinuous. The hands and fingers fall as though to suggest a tracery of stalks and foliage, except that when the 'ghost' danced they also made fluent, swirling patterns. Fokine commented that the arms 'live, speak, sing, and do not "execute positions"'. In this role also, the choreographer drew attention to the importance of what he perceived to be Nijinsky's lack of masculinity. Fokine pointed out that the rose is 'in no circumstances a "cavalier"' or a typical 'ballerina's partner'.[21]

Nijinsky's personification of the rose gained a wider artistic currency. It was the subject of photographs by Bert and de Meyer, as well as by Roosen. Many artists also produced drawings and paintings of Nijinsky in this role. His delicately poised but supremely athletic rose became a defining image. However, the artists tended to exaggerate the effeminate aspect. Cocteau, Iribe, Barbier, Tigre, and Mayo produced line drawings that plumped out the thighs and diminished the shoulders. In the ballet, Nijinsky did not sway his torso or hips, but the artists distorted his image into a Beardsleyesque caricature. The drawings homoeroticise the body after the manner of the late nineteenth-century stereotype of the homosexual, and they were included in albums

Figure 4.2 L. Roosen: Vaslav Nijinsky in *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911).

seemingly aimed at a readership that admired or identified with the image.[22] The drawings present homosexuality in the form of the late nineteenth-century physiological phenomenon: they portray a deep womanliness emerging from within a residually male body. The photographs reveal a more subtle and modern image, in that they have a resolutely manly prettiness. There is no suggestion that this spirit or ghost of the rose is a physiological oddity or a mistake. Rather, he presents himself with a smile, in the knowledge that he is a wonderful specimen.

With Nijinsky, his first and greatest star, Diaghilev seemed to delve into a queer archive that had been in place since the mid- to late nineteenth century. This is also apparent in the ballets with classical themes and characters, and especially with *Narcisse* (1911). Nijinsky also achieved acclaim and notoriety with less ambiguous roles (most notably as the Faun in *L'Après-midi d'un faune* [1912]), and a more comprehensive treatment of his career would consider his importance in terms of the creation of a Modernist style of dance. The more immediately relevant point here is that the Ballets Russes propagated a variety of traditional queer images, from the Oriental, to the flower fairy, to the youth in a classical tunic. Within a few short years, Diaghilev had transformed the ballet from a spectacle that focused on the female body to one that focused on the man. Furthermore, the key figure, or the body in question, was not a limp form, but a muscular man with an astonishing, explosive energy. Given the different dramatic personalities in each of the roles, there was also an implicit liberation from the idea of the homosexual as a singular sexological type. Through Nijinsky, Diaghilev offered a range of personae and behavioural possibilities. Even though he drew on *fin de siècle* resources, this was an escape from Wildean shame, and from physiological destiny, into a joyous process of free association.

A final example of this excursion through the queer archive is something of a return to Orientalism. *La Légende de Joseph* (1914) was a version of the biblical story in which the wife of an Egyptian guard attempts to seduce the youthful shepherd, Joseph; when she fails, she denounces Joseph in revenge. This work was to star and to be choreographed by Nijinsky, but then came Nijinsky's marriage and his rupture with Diaghilev. Not surprisingly, Ida Rubinstein was to star as the vengeful wife, but she too left the company before the ballet was staged. Diaghilev had already commissioned a score from Richard Strauss. Strauss's participation was, in itself, a great coup, and the assumption was that his reputation alone would secure the success of the ballet. Diaghilev went back to Russia to find a replacement for

Nijinsky. He discovered the eighteen-year-old Leonid Miassin, whom he would transform into his new star and lover, Léonide Massine. He also lured Fokine back to replace Nijinsky as choreographer.

Diaghilev's deployment of Massine shows how the impresario liked to decide upon and project a specific image. He took Massine to a photographer's studio in Russia, before Massine was set to work on the ballet back in Paris. The image produced in Russia (see Figure 4.3) is from the fashionable studio of Boissonas and Eggler. Massine wears a white cap that is intended to suggest Joseph the shepherd. But, in these and in subsequent photographs, Massine appears not to be so much Russian, or biblical, but Italian or Greek. The image had a remarkable resemblance to the homoerotic photographs of Neapolitan and Sicilian youths taken by Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden at the turn of the century. Von Gloeden's photographs were expensive and not widely available, but they passed between wealthy homosexuals, and reinforced the 'Sotadic' reputation of the Mediterranean.[23]

With Massine as a Gloedenesque shepherd, Diaghilev seemed to have again taken a queer icon and given it a new and more conspicuous life. This masculine eroticism seemed to many to be a marked feature of the ballet itself. When *La Légende de Joseph* premièred in Paris in May 1914, Massine's costume stimulated amusement among the reviewers. In his memoirs, Massine described the costume as 'a soft white lambskin tunic roughly cut along the edge'. He notes that Bakst and Diaghilev thought 'it would provide a good contrast to the elaborate gold and red of the other characters'. He himself reflected, somewhat pathetically, that he 'felt that it was a bit skimpy'. Other photographs of Massine as Joseph show him in a ragged garment that ended at the level of his genitals, and that had holes around the midriff and chest. The costume gave the character an appearance of vulnerability, and if it was supposed to inspire moral pity for Joseph, it also seemed to invite the audience to consume the new star's body. To one contemporary, Massine looked to have been 'undressed – in skins of ermine'. Soon the ballet was being referred to in Paris as 'Les Jambes de Joseph'.[24]

The ballet offers an interesting commentary on desire and decadence. In the Book of Genesis, Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt. The wife of an Egyptian captain of the guards desires Joseph and attempts to seduce him. He resists, and she, out of shame and anger, denounces him to her husband, Potiphar, for having attempted to rape her. In the Bible, Joseph is imprisoned, but he is released when he interprets Pharaoh's dream for him. The ballet contained numerous and significant elaborations. It was set in the sumptuous Veronese styles of

Figure 4.3 Boissonas and Eggler: Léonide Massine in a pre-production photograph for *La Légende de Joseph* (1914).

sixteenth-century Venice. This was clearly meant to emphasise the moral contrast between the virtuous Joseph and corrupt, sensual Egypt; but it also requited the desire, on the part of the Ballets Russes and their audiences, for grandeur. Potiphar and his wife feature as wealthy, world-weary figures who seem to have exhausted every desire. In Cyril Beaumont's account, Potiphar is 'bored to the last degree', and 'it is certain that for him there remains no pleasure untasted, no sensation unrealised'.[25] The ballet finds Potiphar and his wife in a court of twisted golden columns, as an Oriental slave-dealer tries to tempt them with his wares. He presents them with dancing girls, but these do not interest. The slave-dealer then calls forth scantily clad gladiators, who box and wrestle with each other. When this too fails to arouse the wife, the slave-dealer calls forth a hammock, which is unwrapped to reveal Joseph. He and some other shepherds dance, and the wife becomes interested. Joseph is purchased. After her attempted seduction and the accusation of rape, a cauldron and heated irons are brought to torture Joseph. But he is saved by an apotheosis in which a male archangel appears and leads Joseph away. Potiphar's wife then strangles herself with a rope of pearls.

The scenario offers a curious analogy to the state of the Ballets Russes, in that it features an innocent who finds himself in notoriously depraved company. The various *fin de siècle* ironies were not lost on Charles Ricketts, an artist and a friend of Wilde, who admired the Ballets Russes greatly and who wrote an extensive account of this ballet. He thought that the whole affair would have been 'intolerable and fatuous' if 'the Russians had not been inspired interpreters of the thing'. At the appearance of the angel, he writes that 'the music becomes vulgar beyond belief', and he comments that the angel leads Joseph off at the end 'to the Savoy Hotel – I believe'.[26] The joke about the Savoy is a rather particular one, and it fits in with Ricketts's perception of what he called the ballet's 'many "un'olesome" tendencies'. The Savoy was Diaghilev's own favourite locale in London, and it had had queer associations since Wilde's time (Beardsley had chosen the hotel's name for an 1896 successor to *The Yellow Book*). And yet, the homoerotics of the piece, while obvious to some, were lost on others. The reviewer for the *Lady* was impressed by the ostensible morality of the ballet, in that it showed 'luxury weighing too heavily on the spiritual part of man'. Her objection was to the heterosexual license that the makers had allowed themselves. She regretted that, when Potiphar's wife 'endeavour[ed] to subjugate the guileless Joseph . . . neither librettists nor composer nor choreographer ha[d] avoided vulgarity'.[27]

Diaghilev's biographer Richard Buckle argues that *La Légende de Joseph* marks the end of an era for the Ballets Russes. It was still a product of the *Belle Époque*, designed to appeal to a Parisian love of excess and perversity. It seemed to ignore or retreat from the experimental choreography of Nijinsky in *Faune*, and it did not anticipate Massine's own future as a choreographer. Massine would bring great success to the Ballets Russes, especially with the ethnicised Modernism of *Les Femmes de bonne humeur* (1917) and *Le Tricorne* (1919), and with the reinvigorated character-dancing of *La Boutique fantasque* (1919). A study of the Ballets Russes, and especially of its later period, that focuses exclusively on its homosexual aspect, is destined to be a limited treatment. Perhaps the finest and most enduring work from this period is Nijinska's *Les Noces* (1923), which had little or nothing to add to the progress of queer modernity. Of the best choreographers that Diaghilev used after the Great War – Nijinska, Massine, Balanchine – none was homosexual. To persevere with the more specifically queer Ballets Russes productions and images, however, there is a shift after *La Légende de Joseph* to a more Modernistic queer iconography. One element of this centred on the upper-class chic of the 1920s. Leaving behind the melodramatic transgressions of the *fin de siècle*, the fashionable display of the 1920s tended toward a self-consciously empty-headed prettiness. This was a half-satirical hedonism; it involved not so much a 'perverse' sexual appetite as a 'sophisticated' one. The new generation of French composers was important here. Working in the aftermath of the War, the composers of 'Les Six', for all their differences, seemed more or less to share a desire to expose the exhaustion of 'great culture'. They seemed to suggest that sincerity was a moral and aesthetic sham. In its place, they often offered a musical playfulness that delighted in ironic pastiche.

A telling image for this cultural moment is that of Vera Nemtchinova as the 'Garçonne' in *Les Biches* (1924) (see Figure 4.4). Nemtchinova wears a short blue velvet tunic and white tights, and there is a suggestion of *travestie* and of androgyny in her look. The composer Poulenc came up with the idea for *Les Biches* (possibly with some help from Cocteau), and he created a jazz-inflected score for it. Nijinska provided the choreography. 'Les Biches' translates as 'the hinds', and, while its most obvious colloquial meaning would be 'the girls', there is also a suggestion of 'the prostitutes', and perhaps of underworld homoeroticism (the *Petit Robert* gives 'demi-mondaine' as one of the senses of the word, while *une biche* was, by mid-century, at least, a byword among criminals and prisoners for a virginal boy[28]). The one-act ballet shows the comings and goings at a stylish house party. There

Figure 4.4 Unsigned photograph: Vera Nemtchinova in *Les Biches* (1924).

is a 'Hostess' with a long cigarette-holder; three handsome male athletes; the 'Garçonne' or boy-girl; and a couple of young women who, despite the presence of the athletes, seem only to be interested in each other. Nijinska provided some wonderful dance-movements that brought out the vacuity of these bright young things, and the result is carefully balanced between satire and farce. *Les Biches* seems calculated to appeal to the well-heeled Diaghilev audience, in that it shows apparently privileged and beautiful people having fun. But, while this may seem little more than a light social comedy of vainglorious men and silly women, other more sinister interpretations have been suggested. Is the Hostess really a wealthy woman with guests, or is she the madam of a brothel? Are the exits, entrances, and encounters nothing more than the social interactions of the young and fashionable, or are the athletes in fact clients who are faced with an array of sexual types from which to choose? Over twenty years after its première, Poulenc explained what seems to go on in the ballet and why, at the level of plot, it remained somewhat vague:

> This is the theme: twelve women are attracted to three men; but only one man responds, his choice falling on a young person of equivocal appearance . . . *Les Biches* has no real plot, for the good reason that if it had it might have caused a scandal.[29]

Monica Mason, a dancer who was coached by Nijinska in a revival of the ballet, explains the ballet as a dual text. It offers amusing fun, but with the hint of a desperate and perverse underlying reality. What the text is will depend on the experience that one brings to it: '[I]f you are innocent, you see nothing. If you are not, you see everything!' One reviewer, at least, thought he saw everything; his review was headed 'Ballet of the Degenerates'.[30]

While the image of Nemtchinova seems the most obviously queer feature of the ballet, it can come as no surprise that Diaghilev was particularly fond of the dance of the three athletes. He wrote to Kochno of how it was performed 'with bravura – weightily, like three cannon'.[31] This display of male beauty was presented in short, fashionable outfits designed by Marie Laurencin, and it was a new variant of the homoerotic. These men who, in Cyril Beaumont's words, 'seemed to find their own company sufficient', were not made classically safe with a loincloth, but appeared in contemporary Paris couturier packaging.[32] Their athletic display leaves the young women unmoved. There is none of the sensationalism of the Oriental dramas in this piece. Rather, we

are presented with a fragile, inconsequential world, in which the connections are either 'wrong' or do not work out. Dance theorist Ramsay Burt suggests that the failure of the athletes' performance may be a symptom of Nijinska's own Modernist detachment. I think Burt's reading is persuasive, in that the choreography strives for formalist effects more than for narrative continuity; it is conspicuously Modernist in that it presents us with stark, angular blocks of colour. I wonder, though, if Nijinska and her collaborators were not only being Modern in the high cultural sense at this point, but also exploring the deliberate coolness of the modern social style. Cecil Beaton thought Nijinska had captured the 'nervous charm' that was 'unique to its time and place', a 'slightly tarnished world' of 'brittle sophistication'. In an interesting review for the *Evening Standard*, Edith Shackleton wrote that Nijinska had 'marvelously caught the attitudes of the moment, with its bald frankness between the sexes, its poverty-stricken lack of trimmings, and its self-conscious physical prowess'. She also thought that Poulenc, with his 'thin, childish and ugly' music, had caught 'the restless, unhappy spirit of the present day'.[33] For all that the ballet seemed to have the potential to shock or to depress, it was staged at high speed, so that the more scandalous combinations come to seem inadvertent and funny. Writing to Diaghilev of the preparation of this ballet, Poulenc described the moment when a sofa is turned around to reveal two girls lying 'head to tail'. The incident put him in mind of Barbette, the renowned transvestite acrobat. Poulenc ends: 'At rehearsals I laugh until I cry'.[34]

Diaghilev's interests moved from the contemporary social scene to Futurist imaginings, but his homoerotic impulse was carried forward. The most remarkable image to be created on his last star, Serge Lifar, was probably that of his role in *La Chatte* (1927) (see Figure 4.5). Choreographed by Balanchine to music by Sauguet, Kochno's libretto was based on Aesop's fable, in which a young man falls in love with a cat.[35] The young man asks Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, to turn the cat into a woman. She does so, and the man is content. However, Aphrodite decides to test the woman's love. On their wedding night, a mouse appears in the bedroom. The woman fails the test, in that she abandons her lover to chase the mouse, and the goddess changes her back into a cat in punishment. The lover is heartbroken to lose the woman, and he dies.

The ballet was chiefly remarkable for its set and costumes. They had been designed in the Constructivist style by Naum Gabo and Anton Pevsner. The effect was striking in its Futuristic minimalism. The men wore tunics of very short shorts and triangular tops, and strange, airy

Figure 4.5 G. L. Manuel: Serge Lifar and Olga Spessiva in *La Chatte* (1927).

shapes on their heads. The whole effect was all the more original because the designers had made use of new materials: a plastic called celon for the scenery, and mica for the headdresses and tunics. The dancer Lydia Sokolova thought that the 'shining transparent armour worn by the dancers gave [the ballet] a heroic, interplanetary quality, as if the little tragedy . . . was taking place in a society of god-like pioneers of a newly subjugated star'.[36] *La Chatte* was very successful. Kochno put this down to the 'luminous presence and poetic interpretation' of Spessiva as the cat, to Lifar's 'vigorous' partnering, to the novelty of the décor, and to the melodic score. Reviewers commented on the way in which Lifar's glacial or distant stage presence blended with the production as a whole. And yet, a clearly homoerotic connotation was also apparent to them. The *Observer* noted that the ballet was 'definitely *fin de siècle*'. The reviewer then had some fun with the erotics of the piece, suggesting that it cast up thoughts of public-school deities. In the male *corps*, he saw 'seven youths, students of no mean academy – the Fifth Form at St Dominic's suggests itself'. These youths' studies 'are diversified by an exotic romance between the Head Boy and the school cat, whom Aphrodite, in answer to his prayers, has changed into a Young Girl'.[37] Cyril Beaumont took a more acerbic view. As he later remembered it, the ballet was 'chiefly remarkable for its settings and costumes and for its exploitation of the beauty of manhood'. In his opinion, the choreography seemed to have 'little connection with the theme', and 'served mainly as an excuse', whereby 'a number of lightly-clad, bronzed young men, led by Lifar, then in the flower of his youth, executed a series of movements reminiscent of a gymnastic display'.[38]

In spite of the success of this new look, Diaghilev moved on. No sooner had *La Chatte* and another Constructivist ballet, *Le Pas d'acier* (1927), been staged than he decided that Constructivism was already dated. It is alleged that, as his health declined in the late 1920s, Diaghilev took less and less interest in the work of the company. He died in 1929. Even in his last months, however, he was looking forward to trying out new ideas. These seem to have included orchestral improvisation, and scenery that moved and so became part of the performance. At his last meeting with Karsavina, he explained to her that the music would not have melody, but would be a series of tonal shifts, 'like the transmutation from one precious stone [to another], ruby into diamond, diamond into sapphire'. At the very end of his life, he thought he was about to 'inaugurate a new art form'.[39]

* * *

Should we see Diaghilev as the inventor of queer modernity? In dance historian Lynn Garafola's view, there was a shift with Lifar and Dolin to a homoerotic persona that was newly bold. In her assessment of the changing iconography of the Ballets Russes, she writes of Dolin that his 'gaze is unabashedly direct, not a question or an appeal, but a statement and a challenge'.[40] Some of Diaghilev's contemporaries, though, saw him as merely exploiting inherited ideas – queer or otherwise – in a sort of unscrupulous, consumerist frenzy. For Constant Lambert, the Ballets Russes 'belonged essentially to the nineties', and their admirers, while 'priding themselves on their modishness, were actually *fin de siècle* characters born out of their time'. Even when Diaghilev moved into altogether twentieth-century modes and styles, Lambert detected an underlying continuity:

> The sailor replaced the sex appeal of the oriental slave; factories, dungarees and talc provided the glamour once sought for in fairy palaces and fatuous costumes; but the essential element of attraction remained the same. The knowing and Firbankian *Les Biches* was only a natural successor to the lavish and Wildean *Schéhérazade*.[41]

Lambert's point seems to be that the ultimate truth of the Ballets Russes was homosexuality, and that homosexual expression belonged only to the 1890s. As a homosexual, Diaghilev could not – in Lambert's view – also be Modern. Lambert also implies a contrast between a truly manly and authentic creative act, and homosexual imitation. He damns Diaghilev for his 'scrapbook methods', 'scrapbook taste', 'scrapbook ballets', and 'scrapbook mentality'. And yet, the pastiche or 'scrapbook' technique was also a recurrent feature of Modern art, and in fact Lambert was as much against the great Moderns who had outstripped him as he was against Diaghilev. In his reactionary fervour, Lambert ended up bringing Diaghilev and the Moderns together again, within one decadent tradition:

> Selection and superimposition or, if the word be preferred, montage is the key note of such widely differing manifestations as Eliot's poetry, Diaghilev's ballet, Stravinsky's concertos, Ernst's pictures and Eisenstein's films.[42]

Lambert was not alone in his willingness to try to take out Modern and queer tendencies in one swing. There was widespread criticism of the Ballets Russes in the press. This was sometimes related to

homoeroticism, but the greatest scandals were caused by the autoerotic gesture of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, and by the seeming barbarism of *Le Sacre du printemps*. As the reviews already quoted would indicate, the homoerotic element was usually sufficiently oblique that it could escape notice. It required a certain prior knowledge or sensibility on the part of the viewer (as Chapter 5 will show, the situation was slightly different in the United States).

Previous chapters have indicated that homosexual experience was always conditioned by class factors. This was also the case with the Ballets Russes. The company was identified with the upper classes. From Diaghilev's grand manner, to his manipulation of aristocratic patronage, to the ticket prices, the Ballets Russes was oriented toward those with money to spend. Also, in taking up a succession of lower-class men, Diaghilev seems to perpetuate the 'gentlemanly games' of an earlier era. The Surrealists Louis Aragon and André Breton complained that the purpose of the Ballets Russes had 'always been to domesticate, for the benefit of the international aristocracy, the dreams and revolts of our present day physical and intellectual famine'.[43] Did anyone know or care beyond the 'international aristocracy'? The Ballets Russes attracted an élite homosexual audience, but it included talented men from the middle and upper middle classes: Proust, Hahn, and Cocteau in Paris, and the Bloomsbury set in London. There is some possibility of an impact in the lower middle and even working class in that, when the company was in straitened circumstances, Diaghilev was reduced to accepting engagements in music halls. The intellectual and upper-class supporters of the Ballets Russes tended to assume that the lower-class audience would find Diaghilev's 'high art' ridiculous or bewildering. Charles Ricketts wondered: 'Will the masses turn Bolshevist or suffer in silence this intrusion of art in their national Shrine?' Harold Acton, who saw the Ballets Russes in a 'grotesque music-hall' shortly after the Great War, likened the ballet to 'a perfect lotus springing from a swamp'.[44] Unfortunately there is very little material that indicates a working-class response, and nothing on a working-class queer response. The aristocratic or 'White Russian' aspect of the Ballets Russes may have seemed to exclude the working classes. The aura of privilege might have made the company seem to belong to a rarefied world that was far above everyday life and perhaps also 'above the law'. But one might suppose that these same aspects would have been every bit as attractive to a working-class viewer as to those from other classes. A worldly, jocular response was assumed from the working class in a play of 1927. The play featured a scene in which a newspaper seller and an Underground Railway worker encounter a

'very exquisite young man'. The railwayman comments sardonically to his friend, '[T]hat's wot the Russian Ballet's done for England'.[45]

For all the speculation as to what the lower classes could possibly make of the Ballets Russes, one thing is clear: the company was sufficiently popular with the music-hall audiences to merit lengthy, repeated, and highly paid engagements. And, while it may have operated at a fairly exclusive, 'establishment' level for much of its history, the company also fostered an additional audience that was large enough to draw comment. A London reviewer of *Les Biches* complained in 1925 about the 'young men in roll-top jumpers who stroll about at the back of the circle'.[46] When Philip Page reviewed Pavlova's performance at Covent Garden for the *Evening Standard* in 1927, he compared her audience favourably with that to be found at the Prince's Theatre, where the Ballets Russes season had begun: 'One does not see at Covent Garden the ecstatic youth with flowing hair who expresses his appreciation of Serge Lifar with a mass of sibilants'. Similarly, Hubert Farjeon, writing for *Vogue* in 1928, lamented that during the Ballets Russes season the corridors of the theatre were 'crowded with sweet seasonable young men on whose highly presentable souls the soft down of aesthetic pubescence is just beginning to appear'. Farjeon makes an obvious reference to 1890s markers of queer identity, adding that these 'beautiful burgeoning boys' might almost be said to 'wear the Ballets Russes like a carnation in their button-holes'. With the mention of the *boutonnière*, the sense is that Diaghilev had taken up where Wilde had been obliged to leave off. But Farjeon also noted a significant change:

> The velvet-voiced youth of twenty who has taken possession of the Russian Ballet is more formidable than his aesthetic predecessor of thirty or forty years ago. He is not so drooping, not so languishing, he does not court the pallor of former days. On the contrary, he is surprisingly pink in the cheek, surprisingly fit, surprisingly unready to go down like a ninepin.

Although there is humour in Farjeon's comments, he seems doubly affronted: by the presence of homosexuals, and by the fact that they do not conform to the *fin de siècle* figure whom he could, if he wished, assault without fear of opposition. There is the sense of a gradual emergence of queer culture from weakness and shame to something stronger, more assertive, and more resilient.[47]

In the decades following Diaghilev's death, the legends of the Ballets Russes served as touchstones that revealed the presence of queerness. One need not admit one's own sexual preferences, nor inquire into another person's, when one could more cautiously discover a mutual enthusiasm for and knowledge of Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes. The Ballets Russes could also serve as an incipiently queer rejection of the norms of masculine behaviour. Growing up in the Ballets Russes era, and inspired by the company's legend, the English aesthete Harold Acton and his friend at Eton would 'leap into riotous dances', which they found preferable by far to football as 'an outlet for [their] animal spirits'. Composer Ned Rorem recalled of his adolescence in the late 1930s that, while playing football at school, he and a friend would discuss 'Nijinsky or Mae West until the enemy ball came our way'. He also recollected, with blushes, his boyhood recreation of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. There seems to be an echo of the Ballets Russes' scandalous *Cléopâtre* in the comment of an unnamed American interviewee for a sexological study of 1948. The anonymous informant recalled that when, during a country boyhood, he and a friend would go into the barn to 'kiss, embrace, and love', they 'used to call it "Cleopatra"'. Growing up in the 1940s and 1950s, Edmund White would dance to classical music, 'fluttering [his] great swan wings while mincing forward on tiptoe', or he would leap 'forward, bare-chested and crowned with [his] mother's turban, a lunatic grin on [his] lips, the Favorite Slave'. Michael Moon recounts an anecdote of a later episode of boys having a 'Scheherazade party'.[48] And so on. Equally, to write essays on Nijinsky or to collect company memorabilia – as practised by Carl Van Vechten, Edwin Denby, and Lincoln Kirstein – was to engage in an obliquely queer discourse.

The status of the Ballets Russes affirms the fact that queer culture still had to exist in an alternative order that did not constitute the 'knowledge' and 'facts' that might be used as 'evidence'. There was a consequent investment in 'legends' rather than in 'history'. But this shadowiness and indirection seemed to enable an ever-more-resilient subculture. Perhaps also it fostered self-acceptance at the level of the individual. In promoting homoerotic art, the Ballets Russes did not confront a person with an immediate and dangerous fact about his or her nature, so much as lead the imagination into realms of pleasurable possibility.

Perhaps also the very entity of the Ballets Russes served as an idea of an alternative social unit. The strange machinations of the troupe of performers can seem an alternative family, as was suggested by a ballet such as *Les Forains* (1945), or by the film *The Red Shoes* (1948). It is also

Figure 4.6 Unsigned photograph: [l. to r.] Serge Lifar, Enrico Cecchetti, Serge Diaghilev, Giuseppina Cecchetti, Lord Berners and Boris Kochno on the Lido at Venice in 1926.

perhaps suggested by a final Ballets Russes image, a photograph of Diaghilev on the beach of the Venice Lido in 1926 (see Figure 4.6). He is pictured with the elderly ballet-master Enrico Cecchetti; Cechetti's wife, Giuseppina; Lifar; Lord Berners; and Kochno. It could almost be a 'family portrait', in that it shows three different generations, with the middle-aged Diaghilev at the centre. His arm rests protectively on Signora Cecchetti's shoulder. The youngest, Lifar, hangs affectionately onto Cecchetti's arm, while Kochno, the troubled adolescent, stares off into the distance. Perhaps this image goes some way to explaining why the Ballets Russes was such a compelling entity, why the press reported their doings so eagerly, and why young artists were so keen to be taken on. When people glimpsed Diaghilev and his entourage, they saw that a 'scandal' might also be – or might eventually be – nothing more than a curious and attractive variant of the normal.

5

NEW YORK AND THE 'CLOSED SHOP'

One day in the middle of the twentieth century, the composer Marc Blitzstein observed to fellow composer Ned Rorem that 'sooner or later all queers meet each other'.[1] Looking at the côteries of Tchaikovsky's St. Petersburg, or at the Paris of the Ballets Russes era, it can seem as though all the homosexual men in the arts, at least, were known to each other, or knew of each other through friends. This book traces out a transhistorical version of 'all queers meet each other', in that it looks at patterns of meeting or affiliation from one generation to the next, from Tchaikovsky to Diaghilev, from Diaghilev to, in this chapter, Lincoln Kirstein (1907–1996). But it is probably as well to acknowledge that the notion that 'all queers meet each other' is a delusion. Perhaps most male homosexuals within certain privileged social and intellectual cadres meet each other. It might be tempting to romanticise such meetings as constituting a tight-knit, mutually supportive 'brotherhood'. But 'all queers' inevitably turns out to be a loose and incomplete agglomeration, and one that contains animosities as well as friendships. To outsiders in early to mid-twentieth-century America, though, homosexuals could seem to form a unified, exclusive, and dangerous new group. Thomas Hart Benton, the well-known regionalist painter, presented the idea in lurid terms in his autobiography, *An Artist in America* (1938):

> If young gentlemen, or old ones either, wish to wear women's undergarments and cultivate extraordinary manners it is all right with me. But it is not all right when, by ingratiation or subtle connivance, precious fairies get into positions of power and judge, buy, and exhibit American pictures on the base of nervous whim and under the sway of those overdelicate refinements of tastes characteristic of their kind.[2]

The 'artistic homosexual' was now, it would seem, a widespread and influential figure. According to Benton, the typical American museum was now 'run by a pretty boy with delicate wrists and a swing in his gait'. In vilifying the homosexual, Benton and others were responding in part to other, larger pressures. Through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, there had often been a sense in the United States that the arts were more for women than for men. If the 'chief business of the American people is business', then the artistic man could appear suspicious. He had turned aside from the normal duties and proofs of manhood.[3] By the early twentieth century, this suspiciousness was increasingly seen in relation to sexual deviancy. The artistic queer became a newly prominent type. He seems even to have displaced the dive-bar fairy of the 1890s as the defining image of homosexuality.

The dubious reputation of the man in the arts was made worse by a kind of cultural treason. Men and women who found themselves to be at odds with mainstream American life and *its* art had turned to Europe, and to the experimental, Modernist avant-garde. Anti-Modernists such as Benton tended to make a strategic display of their American manliness, and they were quick to express disgust for the Eurocentric deviancy of others. In writing, music, painting, and dance, there were repeated efforts to define a genuine, manly, American tendency in the arts, as opposed to the 'degeneracies' of European Modernism. While we may think of the European Modernists as preponderantly male heterosexuals who were often determinedly macho, from the 1920s through to the 1940s the nationalistic propaganda in the United States suggested otherwise. One promoter of American regionalist painting, and a friend of Benton's, implied that only homosexuals could be interested in the 'emasculated tradition of the French modernists'. Similarly, Frank Lloyd Wright wondered 'if this movement which we call modern art and painting has been greatly, or is greatly in debt to homosexualism?'.[4]

The more general suggestion was that all the arts were vulnerable to colonisation by homosexuals. In the museums, galleries, theatres, and concert halls, at least, homosexuals seemed to have acquired a new confidence and assertiveness. They were ready, it was thought, to usurp cultural power and turn it to their own ends. As music historian Nadine Hubbs shows in her recent discussion of 'America's sound', music as much as painting was subject to fears of conspiracy, of a homosexual 'state within a state'.[5] And even more than was the case with painting and concert music, this was the assumption with dance and the theatre arts. The evidence would suggest that many homosexuals and lesbians were drawn to the arts, and to the theatre arts in particular,

because these were seen to be tolerant milieux. Chauncey writes that there was a sense on Broadway that '[h]omosexuality, along with other unconventional sexual behavior, was regarded in an unusually open-minded way by people who were themselves often stigmatized because of the unconventional lives they led as theater workers'. One such person commented in 1922 that the theatre district was a good place to be because 'they wasn't too hinkty about who rented a room, and they was kinda bohemian and minded their own business'.[6] Perhaps, also, in a culture in which expressiveness was identified with femininity, it was easy to assume that one's homosexual leanings and one's artistic interests were virtually the same thing. Whatever the diverse motives, after mid-century the perception had been established that, in the words of *Time* magazine, 'in the theater, dance and music world, deviates are so widespread that they sometimes seem to be running a closed shop'.[7] This and other commentaries represented the notional homosexual 'closed shop' as a threat. It indicated a subtly aggressive takeover. But the 'closed shop' might also be understood as a defensive mechanism. It could be a way of creating a friendly, productive environment for what would otherwise have been disallowed.

This chapter traces one strand in the development of ballet in New York from the 1930s through to the 1950s, looking particularly at the early career of Lincoln Kirstein. But I read Kirstein's artistic decisions within the context of homophobic watchfulness. Those with an interest in ballet had to try to pass off their motivations as being in keeping with the national character. The queer aspect had to be cast in more or less disguised or subliminal forms. Through Kirstein, we can explore the idea of the 'closed shop' in positive terms, as a series of moments at which queer allegiances and queer sociability led to the production of queer images and ideals. This is not, though, to enter into a sort of homo-communitarian fantasy, and nor is it to confirm the conspiracy theories regarding homosexual exclusivity. Kirstein was open to the creative contributions of many people. His lengthiest working associations were often with heterosexuals, and he also questioned the whiteness of ballet with his promotion of African-American and Latin-American dancers. The queer allegiances were shifting and partial, and they existed alongside other, equally significant allegiances.

What was the position of ballet in early twentieth-century America, and how might that position shed light on Kirstein's motivations and strategies? Certainly ballet was construed in relation to the corruption of Europe and the bold innocence of America. The greatest American modern dance pioneer, Isadora Duncan, represented ballet as the artificial product of degenerate societies. She contrasted this with her

own dance, which, she maintained, was unconstrained and natural. The terminology introduces a slight confusion here, in that Duncan's modern dance was intended to recapture the natural heroism of pre-modern societies. For Duncan, being 'modern' meant asserting a connection with the ancient Greeks. Socialist writer Mike Gold admired Duncan's point of view. He argued that dance had been sacred in earlier cultures, but that in ballet it had become no more than a 'sex perversion' that typified courtly life. According to Gold, Duncan had 'destroyed' ballet and 'restored The Dance'.[8]

But this recovery of the so-called natural was carried out under troubling terms. While Duncan introduced a relatively free form of dance, she was careful to distinguish this from jazz. She referred to the fluid and improvisatory moves of jazz-dancing as 'ape-like convulsions'. Further, she thought it 'monstrous that anyone should believe that the jazz rhythm expresses America'. Her implication was that the 'nature' of jazz-dancing was in keeping with the sexual temperament of the inferior Black race. While Black nature was inherently base and emotional, white American nature was inherently idealistic and intelligent (the white body reflected the 'spirit's vision'). Other American dance pioneers had similarly racialised ideas as to what the natural, national body looked like. Ruth St. Denis limited the proportion of Jewish dancers in her company so as to preserve what, for her and doubtless for many of her contemporaries, was a more 'American' look.[9]

Ballet occupied an awkward position in the United States. There had been frenzied excitement over the American tours of the great ballerinas in the nineteenth century. Fanny Elssler enjoyed tremendous success in 1840, and there had also been at least one notable American ballerina in Augusta Maywood (1825–1876). But Maywood spent most of her career in Europe, and ballet was generally understood to be an exotic product. The foreignness of ballet was reaffirmed in the twentieth century with the success of Anna Pavlova, Mikhail Mordkin, Vaslav Nijinsky, and the Ballets Russes. Ballet could sell itself in the popular theatres as an exciting glimpse into strange cultures. It was *risqué*, in that it was a 'leg show', but it was also seen as high art, and attendance at the ballet was a means of laying claim to social prestige. For nationalist and left-wing critics of Europe and 'over-civilisation', though, it was an obvious and useful target. Only relatively marginal figures such as Gold condemned it as the 'ostentatious waste' of discredited régimes, but there was more widespread disquiet over the racial and sexual implications of certain works. Ballet remained popular, and was certainly a great deal more successful with the public

than fledgling modern dance, which subsisted on bookings from small theatres and colleges. But if some ballet producers traded in 'classy' and exotic glamour, others thought it would be necessary to declass and Americanise ballet if it were to have a deeper and more lasting appeal.

If ballet had seemed 'degenerate' to nineteenth-century Americans, this was due to the display of the dancing girl, and the assumptions that might be made about her character. There was a change in the twentieth century, and especially with the tour of the Ballets Russes in 1916. While the tour renewed ballet's popularity, it also established a more specific association with deviancy. This was not simply a question of homosexuality. When Diaghilev was summoned to appear before a judge in New York to respond to complaints about the 'alleged objectionable features' of some of the ballets, one of the most objectionable features would appear to have been the interracial orgy of *Schéhérazade*. As the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported, Diaghilev 'bleached Le Nègre a trifle' for succeeding performances. Even the revised version was too much for one viewer, who, on seeing Nijinsky as the Golden Slave, had to suppress 'an impulse to jump onto the stage and thrash him'. Equally, the notorious autoerotic gesture of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, in which the faun appears to ejaculate into the nymph's scarf, was removed. Instead, Massine as the faun 'placed the drapery gently on the rocks and sat gazing into its silken folds'. The press descriptions of these various incidents contain an element of good-humoured American self-mockery, as the cosmopolitan and endlessly polite Diaghilev is confronted by a series of blustering, indignant functionaries. In Kansas City a Police Captain was reported as having told 'Dogleaf' that '[t]his is a strictly moral town and we won't stand for any of that highbrow immorality. Put on your show, but keep it toned down'.[10]

With the arrival of Nijinsky, there was a new and specific element of complaint. Although Nijinsky was widely acknowledged to be an exceptional dancer, several reviewers commented on what they perceived to be his lack of manliness, and especially in his *Schéhérazade* role of the Golden Slave. The *New York Herald* stated, 'That Mr Nijinsky is effeminate at times is obvious'. The critic from the *New York Times* complained that Nijinsky's 'super-refinement of gesture and posture amounted to effeminacy'. This critic felt that the 'costume of the dancer, fashioned about the shoulders exactly like a woman's décolleté, with shoulder-and-arm straps, even helped to emphasize this, as did certain technical details of the dancing, such as dancing on the toes, which is not ordinarily indulged in by male dancers'. Others found in Nijinsky a 'most unprepossessing effeminacy', or that he was 'offensively effeminate', while the *Evening Post* made the more subtle

comment that there was a 'masculinity of strength and rhythm' that counteracted 'the other impression'. Aside from *Schéhérazade*, Nijinsky was most troubling in *Narcisse*, which provoked some giggles, and in *Les Sylphides*, in which, the *Musical Courier* claimed, the dancer's 'persistence in stroking his curls gave a touch of feminism to his performance . . . which was not relished by many of the audience'.[11] To a significant proportion of the American audience, ballet seemed with Nijinsky to have acquired a queer shading. This sense would be evoked again in 1933. Romola Nijinsky's biography of her husband (ghost-written by a young American balletomane) confirmed the physical relationship between the dancer and Diaghilev. As with Benton and the insinuations about European painters, male American modern dancers would try to capitalise on the queering of ballet. In contrast to Nijinsky, they claimed to offer a 'virile dance' which moved away from 'the purple tints that usually hover around male dancing'. Far from the European effeminacy of Nijinsky, the American modern dancer was the 'Frontiersman of an Art-Form for Athletes'.[12]

The peculiar reputation of Russian ballet drew some men to it, though it also required them, at times, to disguise their interest. The balletomane who had ghost-written the Nijinsky biography – and who would subsequently be central to the development of American ballet – was Lincoln Kirstein. Kirstein had been born in Rochester, New York, in 1907, into a well-to-do Jewish family. His father made a substantial fortune from his involvement with Filene's department stores, and he sent his son to expensive prep schools, and then to Harvard. Kirstein had developed an interest in ballet in boyhood, and when he was nine he was aggrieved that his mother would not take him to see the Ballets Russes. He later assumed that she did not wish him to see the scene in *Schéhérazade* in which the blacked-up Nijinsky made amorous advances to the white Zobeide. Kirstein's interest would be indulged at the age of thirteen, however, by a cousin. The cousin, an older, unmarried man, had spent time in Europe, where he had made the acquaintance of some of the members of Diaghilev's circle. He took the young Kirstein to see Pavlova's performances in Boston, which they attended five nights running. The experience confirmed in Kirstein what he called, after Cocteau, the 'red-and-gold disease'. This term betokened a morbid obsession with the over-coloured and artificial world of the opera house.[13] In the 1920s, and with the generous financial support of his father, Kirstein was able to go to Europe and see the Diaghilev seasons for himself. It was during this period, in an effort to get close to the sacred legend of Nijinsky, that he befriended Romola Nijinsky.

Reading through Kirstein's various autobiographical reminiscences, he seems as a young man to have been ambivalent about his own interests and motives. Alongside his 'red-and-gold' morbidity, he was intensely serious about the 'difficult' arts of Modernism. He helped to found the Harvard Society for the Contemporary Arts, and was also a founder of one of the more influential of the little magazines, *Hound & Horn* (1927–1934).[14] As editor of *Hound & Horn*, he corresponded with and published work by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein. While in London, Kirstein mixed with the Bloomsbury set, with whom his elder sister was on friendly terms. In Bloomsbury, Kirstein found others whose queerness and intellectualism had led them to the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev's company, especially in its Modernist phases, had revived the artistic credibility of ballet. And yet, as the phrase 'red-and-gold disease' indicates, Kirstein was almost ashamed of his love of the theatre. He seems also to have been doubtful of his intellectual powers. He gave up the editorship of *Hound & Horn* to 'men with a more genuine interest in abstract ideas than I would ever possess',[15] and cast about for a role that might suit him better. He liked painting, but his friends told him he was too rich ever to have the drive and the genius required to be an artist. He had taken ballet lessons from Mikhail Fokine, but he knew he would not make a dancer. Then, while on a trip to Venice in 1929, he accidentally wandered into the midst of the gathering for Diaghilev's funeral. This moment teased him with a sense of destiny. He began to wonder if he might not start an American ballet. The idea took a much stronger hold when he realised that Diaghilev's last great choreographer, George Balanchine, was similarly casting about for *his* next step. Kirstein spoke to Balanchine about going to America, and discovered that the choreographer was willing to give it a try. Kirstein then embarked upon a series of personal and professional manoeuvres that would, eventually, produce the New York City Ballet.

Although it would be hard to separate Kirstein's queer motives entirely from his balletic or aesthetic motives, his actions were explicitly oriented toward the ballet itself rather than to any desire to create a queer, creative côterie. While Balanchine's Diaghilevian associations were attractive, the choice of the heterosexual Balanchine is further proof of Kirstein's Modernist leanings. But Kirstein's other choices and strategies suggest that queerness was a background condition that enabled everything else. In his urgent desire to secure Balanchine for America, Kirstein turned to the museum curator, Chick Austin. On 16 July 1933, Kirstein wrote to Austin: 'This will be the most important letter I will ever write to you as you will see. My pen burns

in my hand as I write'. He went on to tell Austin of the fabulous opportunity that was there for the taking.

Who was Austin, that Kirstein should turn to him at this point? Chick Austin had been a 'sissy' as a boy, with a strong interest in the theatre. From an affluent background, he, like Kirstein, had attended expensive prep schools and had gone to Harvard. He had also spent time in Europe where, as he later recalled, the Ballets Russes had provided him with 'the most intense emotional experience of [his] life'. As an adult, Austin took ballet classes, and he later took part in an amateur production (Alwin Nikolais recalled that it was 'absolutely dreadful').[16] At the time at which Kirstein was trying to bring Balanchine to America, Austin had a dazzling reputation as the innovative young director of one of America's wealthiest museums, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. He, like Kirstein, would doubtless have seemed one of the suspicious young men who were gaining positions of power in the arts. Austin was primarily homosexual, but again, like Kirstein and like many others of his class and generation, he married, and maintained a personal life that was, on the surface at least, relatively conventional. Austin was useful to Kirstein because the Atheneum had a theatre, and Kirstein knew that Austin, if anyone, had the skill, the position, and the desire to import Balanchine and found an American ballet. The two men had never been particularly friendly. Kirstein, in his earnestness, had been mistrustful of Austin's flamboyance. But they were both members of the artistic salons of Manhattan and Boston, and Kirstein knew that Austin shared his passion for ballet and for the Diaghilev legend. As he wrote in the letter of 16 July: 'Please, Please, Chick if you have any love for anything we do both adore – rack your brains and try to make this all come true'.[17] Austin responded exactly as Kirstein had hoped. He swept everything off his desk and told his assistant, '*This* is the only thing that's of any importance! We've *got* to get them! We've *got* to get them!'[18] Putting all his fabled powers of persuasion to work, Austin was instrumental in securing the institutional and financial backing that brought Balanchine to America. Unfortunately for him, Balanchine saw that Hartford was too small and told Kirstein that they must return to New York. Though with feelings of guilt towards Austin, Kirstein could not but agree with Balanchine. Austin was immensely disappointed to lose the Diaghilevian prize that he had put so much effort into securing. But he continued to support ballet and modern dance, and by way of compensation he was able, a few weeks after Kirstein and Balanchine's betrayal, to acquire for the Atheneum the splendid Lifar Collection of Ballets Russes costumes and designs.

The short but intense working relationship between Kirstein and Austin was founded on elements that would inform many of Kirstein's dealings. Given their prior knowledge of each other through relatively queer college and arts circles, Kirstein and Austin never had to explain to each other their suspect passion for ballet and, specifically, for the Ballets Russes. In their letters, they did not have to suppress dangerously expressive comments about what they both 'loved' and 'adored'. Their allegiance was not exactly founded on homosexuality, but that was perhaps an unspoken precondition upon which they were able to work so effectively together. The class factor was doubtless an element of equal significance. The men were from similar social and educational backgrounds, and both had a belief in artistic excellence and originality that required them to be indifferent to – even scornful of – popular taste. Like the princely Diaghilev on whom both men modelled themselves, they assumed an upper-class assurance that gave them the courage to pursue their own 'superior' interests. As Austin wrote of Diaghilev, it was important to provide 'splendor devoid of vulgarity and taste kept inviolate from commercial degradation'.[19]

Once Kirstein had Balanchine in New York, they established the School of American Ballet, which Balanchine saw as crucial to the making of a good company. Kirstein realised that it was equally crucial to make a case for an *American* ballet. Although Kirstein had been inspired by the Ballets Russes, he knew that Balanchine's Diaghilevian and Modernist associations could prove damaging. For all the scandal that trailed in the wake of Nijinsky, the post-Diaghilev Ballets Russes company was very popular in the United States. But what was acceptable in a 'Russian' company might seem troubling or pretentious in home-grown dancers. Kirstein had to criticise the splendid, international Ballets Russes because it was the main opposition, and he understood that his success might depend in part on the manipulation of nationalistic prejudice. Partly as a propagandistic necessity, partly motivated by his own progressive enthusiasms, Kirstein set out to discredit the Ballets Russes. In *Blast at Ballet* (1937), he argued that the ballets that had been radical and stunning at the moment of their first production were now tired and dull. The classics of the Ballets Russes repertoire – *Petrouchka*, *Prince Igor*, *Les Sylphides*, *Schéhérazade* – were being 'whipped like a staggering cart-horse over the ballet-trails of the world'. Of *Schéhérazade* he joked that often 'Zobeide's slave appears to be dying his death of ennui'.[20] Kirstein also lamented that the later Ballets Russes works – *Le Tricorne*, *Les Noces*, *Parade*, *Le Fils prodigue* – were no longer performed, even though these ballets engaged more fully with modern art and the modern world. In Massine, Kirstein

attacked the choreographer of *Le Tricorne* and *Parade*, and the leading Diaghilev relict. Massine was the major competition for anyone looking to establish him- or herself at the forefront of ballet. Kirstein mocked Massine's experiments in symphonic ballet, and praised Balanchine's altogether more subtle achievements.

Kirstein's problem, though, was that symphonic ballet was not popular, regardless of who made it, and Balanchine was more generally not a success with the American public. Kirstein admitted as much, writing that Balanchine was often seen as a 'choreographer's choreographer'. He dignified this as the preference of serious, artistic people; Balanchine earned his stature by 'avoid[ing] crass pageantry, showy stage pictures of living models, pictorial build-ups, and parades in which there was no *dancing* as such'.[21] Kirstein presents Balanchine as the furthest remove from the dated and tawdry spectacle of early Diaghilev. Balanchine is offered as the pure modern, who is sensitive not in the embarrassingly lush sense of expressing emotion, but in his formal explorations of the music. There is no narrative pathos, no tragic prince with a confused love, nothing indeed of the 'red-and-gold disease' of which Kirstein had learned to be ashamed. In Balanchine, Kirstein had found someone who might serve to counter the dubious sexual reputation of ballet. Balanchine was often criticised for producing a soulless and 'mathematical' dance, but this at least meant that he had none of the morbid and grandiose tendencies that were deemed to be un-American. Balanchine was happy to do away with glorious and complicated stage-sets. His choreography was often performed in practice clothes against a plain backdrop. He began to cultivate a tall, starkly athletic type of ballerina, who was thought to be in the spirit of modern America. Balanchine formulated the stripped-down phrase 'Ballet is Woman', a perfect response to earlier accusations that ballet was effeminate.

The New York City Ballet would eventually crystallise around Balanchinian neoclassicism, which would not be seen as sexually suspect, and both the company and the choreographer would come to have towering reputations. The slow triumph of neoclassicism would mean the end of other, more obviously queer possibilities. Yet, in the early years, Balanchine's progressive and Modernist tendencies were, in themselves, seen as dangerously 'international' and 'decadent'. One influential early reviewer recommended in 1933 that Balanchine be dismissed in favour of an American.[22] During the 1930s and 1940s, Kirstein tried to integrate Balanchine with more populist and avowedly American ideas. He produced a series of self-consciously American ballets, but the irony here is that this Americanist move is

what enabled Kirstein really to draw upon the queer resources of Manhattan. Doubtless he did not select his collaborators on the basis of their sexuality, and yet the people he could use – who had interest in and an understanding of ballet – were often homosexual men with whom he was already on friendly terms. An incomplete list of the variously bisexual and homosexual men to be connected to Kirstein's work around mid-century – many of them suspiciously 'international' – would include the composers Aaron Copland, Paul Bowles, Virgil Thomson, Marc Blitzstein, and Samuel Barber; the artists and designers Pavel Tchelitchev, Paul Cadmus, Jared French, Eugene Berman, Cecil Beaton, and Christian Bérard; the choreographers Jerome Robbins, Eugene Loring, Antony Tudor, and Frederick Ashton; and the literati who provided ideas, wrote essays and reviews, or were simply enthusiasts, such as Carl Van Vechten, Edwin Denby, W. H. Auden, Frank O'Hara, Charles Henri Ford, John Ashbery, Parker Tyler, Glenway Wescott, and Monroe Wheeler. For these men, as much as for Kirstein himself, queerness was not necessarily understood as a prime and defining force, and the queer component of this creative environment was only allowed to manifest itself under particular constraints.

Kirstein started up a series of companies, forerunners to New York City Ballet, in American Ballet (1935), Ballet Caravan (1936), and Ballet Society (1946). With these companies, he set out to create a type of ballet that would conform to familiar and acceptable ideas of what it was to be American. Of Ballet Caravan, Kirstein claimed:

> Ours is a style bred . . . from basket-ball courts, track and swimming meets and junior-proms. Our style springs from the personal atmosphere of recognizable American types as exemplified by the behavior of movie-stars like Ginger Rogers, Carole Lombard, or the late Jean Harlow. It is frank, open, fresh and friendly.

Kirstein emphasised qualities that were at once alluring and drawn from everyday life. For his male dancers he claimed a 'clean, manly brilliance' that made them seem a 'contemporary Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett'.[23] There was no shadowed interiority, no irony or mystery, in the personalities that Kirstein offered. Although Balanchine could turn his hand to anything, his complex and cerebral dances did not fit this patriotic model particularly well. For Balanchine, ballet was not meant to boost a national self-image; he believed that 'choreographic movement [was] an end in itself, and its only purpose [was] to create

the impression of intensity and beauty'.[24] The repertory of Kirstein's early companies was an awkward mix of modern formalism and populist Americana. American Ballet staged the Balanchine masterpieces *Serenade* (1935) and *Apollon Musagète* (1937), alongside his less enduring comedy of American college life, *Alma Mater* (1937). It was only when the company fell into difficulties, and Balanchine went to Hollywood for a while, that Kirstein was really able to explore a more vernacular and nationalistic dance-theatre.

Perhaps Kirstein's intentions were forced with the temporary departure of Balanchine and the formation of a touring company in Ballet Caravan. In seeking to appeal to provincial audiences, Kirstein opted for a harder, more nationalistic 'sell'. This element was often announced in the titles. With Ballet Caravan he produced *Pocahontas* (1936), with choreography by Lew Christenson to music by Elliott Carter, Jr.; *Yankee Clipper* (1937), with choreography by Eugene Loring to music by Paul Bowles; *Filling Station* (1938), with choreography again provided by Christenson, to music by Virgil Thomson; and *Billy the Kid* (1938), with Loring again as choreographer, and Aaron Copland as composer. Kirstein had an important say in the choice of topics, and he wrote the 'book' for all four ballets. His excursions away from an internationalised neoclassicism and into Americana also permitted a new, queer aspect to emerge. These productions were by no means a return to a *fin de siècle*, 'red-and-gold' expression. Rather, the queerness was manifested through the guises of conventional masculinity. Featuring sailors, cowboys, and mechanics, the defining characters of these ballets were traditionally manly. And yet sailors, cowboys, and mechanics were also the emergent heroes of a queer American pantheon.

Filling Station presents a wishful portrait of a typical American male. Kirstein chose to make a mechanic the hero of this piece. In the libretto he wrote, '[E]veryone who has ridden in an automobile recognizes the typical, self-reliant, resourceful and courteous Filling Station Mechanic as his friend'. The part was choreographed and danced by Lew Christenson. Kirstein was enchanted by Christenson's clear, blond beauty. With his open, handsome looks, the dancer was well-suited to the part of Mac the Mechanic. Mac is an interesting blend of qualities. He corresponds to the myth of the pioneering American male, in that he is 'self-reliant' and 'resourceful'. Yet he is not a dominant figure, but rather endlessly ready to be of service to others. He is almost domestic in the way he 'keeps his washroom spick and span'. Mac ensures that the 'chromium on his gas pumps gleams', and that his road maps are 'neatly stacked to be given away on request'. Although in a faultlessly

masculine context, this man is giving and caring. He is a happy character, but almost puzzling in his simplicity. He has no love-interest; he is always available, but never to be possessed. He has a couple of truck-driver friends, Ray and Roy, who stop by from time to time.

The black-and-white film of *Filling Station* reveals that the choreography and Christenson's nature as a dancer are very much of a piece with the libretto. Christenson was very tall for ballet, and he had worked a lot in vaudeville in his early career. His dancing is not rigidly classical, but has a pleasingly loose-gaited aspect. The idiom also mixes the classical with vaudeville, in that there are correct pirouettes and *tours en l'air*, but with a more vernacular *port de bras*. The arms are often held low, out front and with hands down in a tap-routine style, and there is little of the elegant evasiveness of *épaulement*. Christenson's self-choreographed solo incorporates cartwheels; he is careful to avoid the fancy look of *batterie*, and relies rather too much on the *double tour* as the defining trick.[25]

Mac's benign aura and his 'spick and span' environment are disrupted in the course of the day by a selection of other American types. A State Trooper stops by, followed by a couple and their children who 'burden [Mac] down with demonstrations of domestic bliss'. Mac is also visited by a wealthy young couple who are out on a bender, and a gangster. The drama ends when Mac has summoned the Trooper to deal with the gangster. The station empties, and Mac, 'finding himself alone again', is left 'waiting for whatever will turn up next'.[26]

Mac is a vacuous and inconsequential hero, who is always pleasantly available to the other characters and to the audience. There is no subtext within the ballet itself that makes him decisively queer, but there is a prehistory that implicates him in a queer iconography, and this in turn brings us back to public controversies over homosexuality and the arts. Kirstein thought that the style of the ballet should be quite realistic, but with elements of the comic strip and the vaudeville of Christenson's background. He chose Paul Cadmus (1904–1999) to design the sets and costumes. Kirstein met Cadmus in 1937. The two became close friends, and Kirstein married the artist's sister, Fidelma Cadmus, in 1941. Kirstein commissioned the décor and sets for *Filling Station* before his friendship with Cadmus had developed, and he was making a choice that had specific connotations.

Kirstein claimed to know of Cadmus from the scandal that surrounded Cadmus's painting of 1933, *Shore Leave*, in which muscular young sailors cavort with young women. Kirstein perhaps misremembered this point, in that it was Cadmus's painting of the following

year, *The Fleet's In!*, that caused a genuine and lengthy scandal. *Shore Leave* depicts a daylight world of the young and the boisterous, though the more careful viewer may notice that, in the background, one sailor is chatting with an effeminate young man. *The Fleet's In!* was more obviously shocking. It portrays a bacchanalian evening encounter between sailors and women who may be prostitutes, but who seem at the least to be 'loose'. One aspect of *The Fleet's In!* was so perturbing that, while it probably added to the controversy, it was not mentioned specifically in the arguments over the painting in the press. As in *Shore Leave*, but this time more to the fore of the scene, one sailor ignores the women, and responds knowingly to the overtures of a young man. In both paintings, the young man wears a red tie, which was a contemporary sign of homosexuality.[27]

The Fleet's In! was very quickly suppressed. It had been commissioned by the Civil Works Administration for the Navy, but the Navy had it removed from display. The debate on the front pages of the newspapers was over whether, as one Admiral put it, the painting 'originated in the sordid, depraved imagination of someone who has no conception of actual conditions in our service', or whether it represented sailors as they actually were. A *Daily News* editorial opposed the official view, asking, 'Should Sailors Be Sissies?'. The editorial argued that the 'shore-leave activities so vividly pictured by Mr. Cadmus go with the fighting man's trade'. The *Daily News* either missed, or did not object to, the understanding gaze exchanged between sailor and fairy. The newspaper asked its readers if it was appropriate to expect the Navy to be a 'glorified Boy Scout camp on the sea', or if it should be 'an organization made up of fighting men accustomed to doing any and all of the things that fighting men traditionally do'.[28]

Cadmus's painting does not idealise the sailors. As he commented, he had not made them or their associates 'particularly attractive'. His sailors do not have handsome faces. They look coarse, and their buttocks and thighs bulge with a rude energy. In his account of the scandal over *The Fleet's In!*, art historian Jonathan Weinberg notes that sailors 'had the reputation for being both sexually active and somehow morally untouched by their promiscuity'. But Cadmus 'gave too many details of the sailor's promiscuity for the myth of innocence to hold'.[29] Kirstein wrote that he had been drawn to Cadmus's work by the 'exactness and vitality in his Hogarthian scenes of metropolitan and suburban life'.[30] The Hogarthian aspect is strong in *The Fleet's In!* It is easy to imagine that these sailors would smell of drink and cigarettes, and that they would be loud and obstreperous. But the

realistic detail of *The Fleet's In!* and *Shore Leave*, along with the almost humorously accentuated curves of the bodies, has the effect of inviting the viewer to judge the sailors in social rather than moral terms. The paintings seem not to ask us to condemn the sailors' actions as wrong, but to ask if we ourselves would want the trouble of being involved with them. There is, to use Kirstein's word, a 'suburban' concern with niceness, and a recognition that these sailors may still be attractive even though they are not nice.[31]

In asking Cadmus to make designs for *Filling Station*, Kirstein knew that he was hiring someone famous for a 'sordid' work. More specifically, Cadmus had produced a notorious variant on a recognisable and popular archetype of American manhood. Cadmus's sailors are still large, well-muscled, and conventionally manly, but they are happy to interact with supposedly antisocial types: homosexuals and fast women. Cadmus's involvement with *Filling Station* may have encouraged the knowing viewer to insinuate similar connotations with Mac. Here is another young man without a conventional love interest, but with a variety of callers or 'traffic'. There is no unveiling of Mac, however. He remains the plucky, innocent hero throughout the ballet. Any desire that the viewer – male or female – experiences in relation to Mac is the responsibility of the viewer alone, but perhaps Cadmus is mischievous in this respect. He pushes the attractive and available qualities of this apparently undesiring character to an extreme. His costume for Mac, in Kirstein's memory, was 'a handsome white uniform of translucent nylon piped in red with a red-and-white cap and tie' (see Figure 5.1).[32] None of the other characters has a similarly translucent costume, nor is there any reason to believe that the mechanics of the period wore see-through uniforms. The effect is that of presenting Mac in a tantalising gift-wrap, through which we can discern his nipples and the outline of his white underpants. Mac remains as clean and pure as ever, but Cadmus's insinuating design leads the viewer ever closer to a 'sordid' response.[33]

The impact of Cadmus's work was such that it was also a factor in the biggest ballet success of mid-century New York, Jerome Robbins's *Fancy Free* (1944). As Kirstein admitted, other Americans – such as Catherine Littlefield, Ruth Page, and Agnes de Mille – were trying to create a ballet repertory on American subjects. Jerome Robbins would soon be working with Kirstein at New York City Ballet, but in 1944 he was struggling within the Russianised confines of Ballet Theatre. A friend suggested to Robbins that he base a contemporary American ballet on *The Fleet's In!* Robbins went to see the painting, and was intrigued but fearful. His friend remembered that Robbins

Figure 5.1 George Platt Lynes: Lew Christenson in *Filling Station* (1938).

had thought the painting 'too risqué', but Robbins went ahead all the same. He had good reason to steer clear of queer topics. Even though he was very secretive about his homosexuality, rumours were already circulating about him in New York, with one journalist referring to him in private as 'that fag'.[34] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Robbins sought to distance himself from the homosexual inferences that might be drawn from the source of *Fancy Free*. He went further and publicly rejected *The Fleet's In!* as a truthful representation of the Navy. In an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, he said that he had gone to see the painting, and although it had given him the idea for the ballet he 'inwardly rejected' Cadmus's representation of sailors and their associates. 'I wanted to show that the boys in our service are healthy, vital boys', he told the *Monitor*, adding that 'there is nothing sordid or morbid about them'. Robbins's biographer accepts that '[s]elf-protection may have called for a certain amount of public posturing to bolster his heterosexual image for the mainstream audience', but that Robbins's rejection of the painting also reflected 'his ongoing turmoil [and] conflicted inclinations'. It was easiest, and most commercial, to eliminate the queer prehistory of *Fancy Free* and 'tell the story of three happy-go-lucky sailors chasing girls'.[35]

Robbins insists in *Fancy Free* on the same heroic innocence as did Kirstein in *Filling Station*. For all that his sailors ignore moral propriety, they are also uncalculating, and mean no harm. They are clearly motivated by sexual desire. As Robbins put it in the libretto, while their flirtations are 'carried on in nice terms', there is 'a sure feeling of lust underneath'. There is 'a real affection for each other', but their goals are 'women, drink, [and] any kind of fun they can stir up'.[36] Each of the three sailors represents a slightly different type. One is defined by the fact that he is the 'most bawdy, rowdy, boisterous of the three'. He represents the 'extrovert vulgarity of sailors, the impudence, the loudness'. Another is 'more naive, lovable', with 'warmth, humor, and almost wistfulness'. The third is notable for a 'Spanish or Latin' quality, which Robbins defines as 'intensity'. He has 'an attractive flashiness and smoldering quality', and his movements suggest 'a strong passion and violence'.[37] The ballet was relentlessly heterosexual in its narrative logic, and it strove to suppress the 'sordid or morbid' aspects of its source. But at the same time, and as Robbins's book makes clear, it was a paean to different types of masculine allure, from the crude, to the sweet, to the darkly, dangerously romantic. Further, there are three sailors and two women in *Fancy Free*. In keeping with *Shore Leave* and *The Fleet's In!*, there is always one sailor 'left over'. In the ballet, the spare sailor does not strike up an acquaintance with a young man in a

red tie. The three men fight over the two women, but the women desert them while they are fighting. The ballet closes with the sailors chasing after a new girl, affirming once again their urgent and essential heterosexuality.

As so often, and necessarily, in the ballet of the period, the same-sex shadings that are to be found in the background of *Fancy Free* were repressed, sublimated, or simply redesignated as heterosexual. The queerness can only survive as a way of looking, or, in Robbins's terms, as a 'morbid' imputation that might be made against 'healthy, vital boys'. The same-sex reading is always in the wrong in this way: a matter of suspicion and insinuation where everything is otherwise pleasant and straightforward. The ballet depicts a heterosexual world, and viewers, heterosexual or otherwise, may enjoy it without any sense of irony or misgiving. At the same time, though, queerness was so ubiquitous in the circumstances of the ballet's making that the small, heterosexual figures that we see on the stage seem to cast huge, queer shadows. Leaving aside the ballet's derivation from *The Fleet's In!*, it was also legendary for the affairs that it depended upon or inspired. The composer Leonard Bernstein, the choreographer Robbins (who also took the part of one of the sailors), and the two other dancers who played sailors, were all bisexual or homosexual, and were all thought to be involved with each other at some point. Robbins was believed by friends to have been in love with one of the other dancers, Johnnie Kriza, and his intense feelings were thought to have informed the choreography for Kriza's solo. When asked in later years about the personal contexts of the ballet, Bernstein gave a rather less romantic view:

> Oh, God! Not *that* conversation! Practically everyone I know – or used to know – liked to tell me how one thing we have in common is the cast of *Fancy Free*.[38]

There was, as it were, a queer density to the proceedings that was not allowed to figure in any explicit way, but which confirmed that there were disingenuous and 'closed' (or, rather, suppressed but resilient) forces at work.

With Balanchine's return from Hollywood, Kirstein's interest in Americana ballets declined. This is not to say that there were not still ballets with typically American subjects. Balanchine's own *Western Symphony* (1954) and *Stars and Stripes* (1958) indicate the continued willingness to explore specifically American themes and idioms, but these were jocular efforts. The defining feature of the New York City

Ballet was neoclassical formalism, with its stress on the movement itself rather than on extraneous ideas or images. Kirstein later explained this shift by saying that he realised that 'we were not Americans in general, but specifically New Yorkers'. Based in the modern city *par excellence*, this seemed to mean a dancerly sophistication that was stripped of all but token historical reference.[39] The return of Balanchine killed off interest in some quarters. Gore Vidal commented: 'My days as a balletomane – and lover of dancers – ended when Balanchine appeared on the scene and swept American ballet off the stage'. Vidal admitted the 'mathematical charm' of Balanchine's work, but he wanted a more localised repertory, in which an actress-dancer such as Nora Kaye would 'illuminate our generation, to the music of Copland or Bernstein'.[40]

A full treatment of queerness and New York ballet would look at many other figures and productions. As my inclusion of Ballet Theatre's *Fancy Free* reveals, the account ought not to hinge entirely upon Lincoln Kirstein. Kirstein was important, however, and all the more so because of his energy for making connections between ballet and other forms. We could look in more detail at other artists and composers that Kirstein got to work for him, but I want to focus at this point on how Kirstein sought to promote a balletic iconography beyond the ballet performance itself. One important venture in this regard was his founding of the magazine *Dance Index* in 1942. This journal, which lasted until 1948, published essays by noteworthy balletomanes, alongside numerous illustrations. Launched within two months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the magazine, with its 'Homage à Isadora' and its antiquarian studies of Romantic ballet, must have seemed out of keeping with the spirit of the time. In their first editorial, Kirstein and his associates confessed their doubts about the timing of the new venture, but they wrote that 'there were a number of men in service who expressed a lively interest, and this, if nothing else, convinced us to persevere'.[41] In several subsequent issues, the editors print letters from servicemen urging them to keep going. Looking at the contents of the various issues of *Dance Index*, it is easy to see why the editors may have had more general fears as to the acceptability of their product. Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Anna Pavlova may have seemed dubious subjects of interest for American men, but these relatively safe topics were queered by other elements, such as a homoerotic Van Vechten bookplate and a whole issue devoted to rare and spectacular photographs of Nijinsky.

The founding of *Dance Index* suggests that, for Kirstein, ballet was not only interesting in and for itself, but also as a vehicle for côterie

expression. Although Kirstein never stated this plainly, and may never even have formulated the idea in his own mind, there is a sense in his various activities that ballet enabled him to foster queer productivity. Through ballet he could manifest a sensibility that, in more direct form, would have been found unacceptable. This idea of côterie production and reception is also present in his work with the photographer George Platt Lynes (1907–1955). He had been at school with Lynes, and the two had many friends in common. Lynes had spent time in Paris and the south of France, and had met and befriended many Diaghilev associates: Picasso, Cocteau, Stravinsky, Misia Sert. Back in the United States, he moved from general portrait photography to fashion work for magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. Kirstein needed photographs of his companies for promotional purposes, and he commissioned Lynes to take them.

Alongside the conventional images of repertoire, Kirstein enabled Lynes to develop his interest in photographing the male nude. Kirstein took good-looking male dancers along to Lynes's studio and, while many of the photos are clothed and illustrative of actual productions, the intention was always in part to move into a kind of balletic homoerotica. Even the relatively straightforward image of Mac in *Filling Station* is lit so as to make the most of Cadmus's mischievous costume design. Lynes produced a variety of images of male nudes, from Surrealistic and psychological scenes, to starkly unsentimental moments of dressing and undressing. While some of Lynes's other nudes offer a quite deliberate affront to politeness, in working with dancers and with choreographed poses he seems to explore a middle ground where stylisation and classical or narrative references provide a kind of dressing for the otherwise shocking image.[42] Of the Lynes photographs reproduced here, we move from the very dancerly image of Christenson in an identifiable role as Mac, to the static and perhaps confrontational image of Eglevsky (see Figure 5.2). The portrait of Eglevsky occupies an intermediate territory between the acceptable repertory photo and the obscene nude. The white tights signify Eglevsky as a dancer, but it is hard to see that he offers the viewer anything beyond his sheer physical presence. Like the nudes 'dressed' in classical references, ballet here serves an aestheticising and universalising function. The exposure of and attraction to the body is justified because we are being invited to consider a type or a heroic instance. This sense is enhanced by the folds of cloth which form a landscape beneath Eglevsky (he seems to bestride a horizon).[43]

Lynes's photographs seem to encode in their own style and form the mix of boldness and secrecy that characterised the queer-balletic

Figure 5.2 George Platt Lynes: Portrait of André Eglevsky (1943).

sensibility. Lynes did not go out into the everyday world for his photographs. He was not interested in the 'social document' work of contemporaries such as Walker Evans. He stayed indoors and used his studio to create a stripped-down and stylised 'world elsewhere'. He had clearly been influenced by the Hollywood publicity shot, and although he experimented with natural light later in his career, his typical method – as in the Eglevsky portrait – was to use powerful lamps to produce extremes of light and shade. He did not try to produce a semblance of natural light, but placed lamps in several positions, to produce emphatic shapes and angles. This use of light removed surface detail in favour of silhouette, mass, and contour. In stressing composition in terms of *chiaroscuro*, Lynes achieved a look that was, in Weinberg's words, 'sculptural' and 'eternal and classic', rather than realistic.[44] This glossy, cinematic style was doubtless very attractive in terms of enabling Kirstein to promote his companies. If ballet was in danger of being seen as traditional and European, Lynes could give it a contemporary glamour. The style is also interesting in that, given the compositional quality of Lynes's near-nudes and nudes, it is hard to see them as 'filthy' or even as primarily erotic. Homosexuality does not feature as a buried and shameful interaction, but as a brightly lit and somewhat meditative encounter. And yet this is a world that could only exist in the private realm of Lynes's studio, or as images that Lynes and Kirstein passed to their friends. For all that Lynes's work was a bold exploration of forbidden ideas, it had to take place in the closed space of the studio. Lynes's dancerly nudes, and even his near-nude dancers, were, by the standards of the day, obscene, and could not be published in the United States. (Some of Lynes's nudes were published in his lifetime in the German magazine, *Der Kreis*.) But through Kirstein's and Lynes's connections with Manhattan's wealthy homosexuals, the photographs were circulated to a limited audience.

To what extent did Kirstein's and other people's efforts register beyond the studio, the salon, and the cocktail circuit? Kirstein's early companies toured extensively, and played modest theatres for modest prices. One wonders what provincial men might have made of *Filling Station* or *Billy the Kid*. Even the New York City Ballet was, especially before its move to the Lincoln Center, a relatively welcoming institution. Yet ballet was for the most part seen as an exclusive entertainment.[45] Such evidence as there is of men who defined their sexuality in relation to ballet comes from men who were members of a fairly privileged minority. In fact, some homosexuals sought to define their sexuality in aspirational terms, and ballet was a useful point of reference. As one man recollected of the 1940s:

> Homosexuality was an upscale thing to be . . . There were a number of places where wealthy, youngish men had duplex apartments in Park Avenue, and pretty much any day if you dropped by at five o'clock there would be people there for cocktails and, more often than not, somebody would say, 'Well, I have tickets to the ballet and we can drop in on Tony's later'.[46]

Such men seldom wished for an obviously 'out' life – the reminiscences often praise the 'discretion' of earlier eras – but they hoped for a more fully social and public interaction with men whom they identified as their own kind. Such men felt safer in decorous surroundings, whether the ballet-theatre or the Oak Room at the Plaza. If being homosexual was a threat to one's social authority, this feeling might have been assuaged by conducting one's homosexual life in prestigious locales. There is also the sense that homosexual dressiness could pass as upper-class behaviour. Whether for dance-makers or for audiences, ballet served this need to inhabit the particular or 'upscale' space. It seemed to establish an exclusive environment, in which homosexual men might feel as at home as anyone else. And yet, as the attacks on the 'closed shop' indicate, even this 'discreet' colonisation was risky, and a long way short of either liberation or acceptance.

* * *

This chapter has focused for the most part on the early and mid-twentieth century, and on negotiations of ballet, homosexuality, and Americanness. I suggested that the gradual emergence of Balanchinian neoclassicism meant the foreclosing of other, more obviously queer possibilities. Balanchine choreographed remarkable work for women, and he produced an unprecedently strong company of women dancers who were able to perform this work. But as a coda to the chapter, I want to resist the false narrowing down of queerness that my argument might otherwise imply. With the rise of New York City Ballet in the 1950s and 1960s, it may be that there was a diminution in the production of an obviously homoerotic iconography. While I do not see such iconographies as negligible, I do not want to reduce queer aesthetics to the production of beautiful images of men. Why should the Balanchine style be assumed to exclude – or to play less to – homosexuals or to an otherwise queer audience? It seems worthwhile to go beyond the equation of 'mathematical' with 'anti-queer', and to look a little further at Balanchine, and at the responses to his work.

Balanchine was prolific over the course of a long career, and his output was tremendously varied. We tend to see the modern 'leotard ballets' as Balanchine at his most characteristic. In works such as *The Four Temperaments* (1946), *Agon* (1957), and *Stravinsky Violin Concerto* (1972), audiences were presented with stark, plotless exercises in movement, set to more or less 'difficult' modern music. Dance historians Reynolds and McCormick characterise the Balanchine style as having 'clean attack, speed, energy, technical virtuosity, and, for all its acrobatic risk-taking, a firm anchor in the classical tradition'.[47] To see a Balanchine ballet is to enjoy the thought that one is seeing *more* dancing, and dancing for its own sake. The *corps de ballet* is often given tricky 'ballerina steps', and the principals are given steps which involve surprising combinations of shape and rhythm. Balanchine was endlessly inventive, and the 'leotard ballets' contain some of the dislocated and 'body-popping' movements that are, to this day, seen as 'postmodern' and 'experimental'. Even where Balanchine explores a more traditional 'grand' ballet vocabulary, in such work as *Ballet Imperial* (1941) or the 'Diamonds' section of *Jewels* (1967), there is a playful or daring speediness, so that the classic style seems a form for further experimentation rather than a complete and closed experience. With their renewed speed and intricacy, and with their dangerous ventures into off-balance and off-beat movement, Balanchine's neo-classical works have, in critic Edwin Denby's words, an 'angelic irony'. We are presented with 'novel' steps, but also with 'poignant images of style', and the effect is that 'past and present seem to happen at the same time'. There is an interesting intellectual torque in Balanchine's work, with the sense that 'like a classic' can be more interesting than 'classic'.[48]

Perhaps a price must be paid for speed and athleticism. As Reynolds and McCormick write, if the dancers 'moved bigger and faster and with sharper accents', this was 'sometimes to the detriment of delicacy and fine shading'. There were not the 'beautifully rounded arms' nor the 'subtleties of *épaulement*' that were to be found in Europe.[49] Denby, Balanchine's most articulate admirer, loved the 'easy, large, open, bounding' nature of New York City Ballet, but he too could find fault. He observed an unfortunate tendency towards a 'sameness of attack'.[50] This sameness, produced out of the company's very dynamism, is also perhaps implicit in Tanaquil LeClerq's description of her role in *The Four Temperaments*:

> It should look maximum, 100 percent everything: move 100 percent, turn 100 percent, stop dead . . . kick, wham, fast,

> hard, big . . . you can't interpret because you'll be late, you won't be with the music.[51]

LeClerq's comments capture an aspect of Balanchine at his best and most distinctive – extension, concentration, speed, strength. But her comments correspond quite closely with the typical criticism of Balanchine – the lack of 'interpretation', the 'mindless' speed and difficulty. R. P. Blackmur wrote in 1958 of a 'terrifying vision of efficiency beyond conceivable impulse', of 'hysteric exactness' and 'echoless technique', of faces and legs that were not 'inhabited', an art where the subject had been 'left out'. What we were left with, according to Blackmur, was a 'ballet of the pinheads'.[52]

Balanchine's changes in balletic style also bring us back to the body and to sexuality. Balanchine famously changed the look of the ballerina. Previously the tendency had been for the petite and sprightly, or for the compact and explosive. Balanchine favoured a tall, lean, long-legged appearance. The key shift was in the 1950s, with the transition from Balanchine's 'found' early ballerinas in New York – Melissa Hayden, Maria Tallchief – to LeClerq, the prototype of a succession of extremely thin, long, and fast ballerinas. Suki Schorer, who joined the company in 1959, wrote of the array of types of ballerina – and of womanhood – to be found at New York City Ballet. She developed as a dancer by emulating these various personae:

> I tried emphasizing an expansive, beautiful *port de bras* and open, lifted chest like Jillana's, or a delicate but definitely nuanced attack and phrasing like Violette Verdy's, or the tall and elegant, long, slightly cool and remote presence of Diana Adams, or the vulnerable, inward, doll-like presence of Allegra Kent, or the light-up-the-stage incandescence of Melissa Hayden, or the dazzling speed and technique of Pat Wilde. It never occurred to me to emulate the powerful, dominating presence of Maria Tallchief.[53]

Schorer's comments remind us, perhaps, that Balanchine did not narrow the style of the ballerina as much or as rapidly as has been suggested. And yet, with LeClerq, and most notably with Suzanne Farrell, he did set a new, modern style for the dancer – tall, and so thin as to be almost breastless. Farrell soon learned that 'part of dedication meant always being on a diet, or at least saying that one was'.[54] Some of Balanchine's alleged comments on weight have become legendary: 'Don't eat less, Gelsey – eat nothing!'

Earlier dancers seemed to find a self or a personality in the work that Balanchine choreographed on them. Even in old black-and-white films, LeClerq exudes a distinctive charm far from the idea of the pin-headed automaton. A 'non-Balanchine' type such as Hayden relished the challenge of Balanchine's work, as it changed her rounded, strong muscles into elongated, fast ones. Others, and especially later generations of dancers, seemed more constrained by his expectations. Even Farrell, a great supporter and exponent of Balanchine, wrote of how she 'seemed to grow extrasensory receptors to his every step, nod, word, and glance'.[55] In the 1980s, and especially with Balanchine's death in 1983, there was a backlash against his influence. Critical studies and autobiographies revised his glorification of 'Woman', reinterpreting it as a kind of misogyny. His dancers, it was argued, were degradingly subjected to his idea of what they should be, even if this meant self-starvation to the point of suppressing menstrual cycles and impeding the development of a 'womanly' figure. He is reported as believing that dancers were stupid, though there are claims to the contrary.[56] There can be no doubt that he created a fashion for very thin, almost pre- or non-pubescent dancers, and there is a certain irony here. He once conveyed a measure of scorn for Diaghilev with the anecdote that, while they were watching Alexandra Danilova, Diaghilev commented: 'Her tits make me want to vomit'. Yet Diaghilev had numerous full-figured ballerinas in his company, whereas, increasingly, Balanchine did not.

One might suppose that Balanchine represents an anti-queer shift in the history of ballet in that he distanced himself from the Ballets Russes tradition, and made good on his 'Ballet is Woman' formula. He oversaw the careers of a series of wonderful women dancers, including, amongst others, Maria Tallchief, Diana Adams, Tanaquil LeClerq, Allegra Kent, Suzanne Farrell, and Merrill Ashley. He also seemed to steer ballet away from much of the melancholy glamour, the 'red-and-gold disease' that had led men such as Kirstein into the theatre. In backing Balanchine, Kirstein was, to some extent, working against or narrowing down his own tastes. Reynolds and McCormick suggest that, in promoting 'the unadorned body moving to music', Kirstein was choosing to 'sublimate his own vision of dance'.[57] Former New York City Ballet principal dancer Edward Villella commented in his memoir that 'Lincoln would probably have liked to have had more artistic input in the New York City Ballet'. He noted of Balanchine and Kirstein:

> [T]hey were basically very reserved with one another. Temperamentally they were very different, and they were

> not really pals . . . They held opposing opinions on many subjects. Their values and their points of view were often opposite as well, and most of the time they acted as very separate entities.[58]

Kirstein himself said of his relationship with Balanchine, 'We were barely friends . . . I hardly ever saw him except at the theater. We hardly ever talked'.[59]

As the discussion of Kirstein's work with Ballet Caravan indicates, Kirstein had intentions and goals that were not to be fulfilled by Balanchinian neoclassicism. There are, though, two wrong-headed and mutually contradictory suppositions that one might make at this point. One, that Balanchine's formalism excluded queer interest, and two, that homosexuals were somehow invited in by misogynistic implications in Balanchine's work. As far as Modernist formalism is concerned, homosexual men had, as noted earlier, championed those painters and writers who experimented with form, even to the point that Modernism and homosexuality were sometimes identified with each other as part of an anti-American, anti-masculine conspiracy. If the sexual other was unrepresentable under the terms of realism, the same rules of inclusion and exclusion did not hold in – or were irrelevant to – avant-garde formalism. As for the idea that an indirect misogyny would appeal to homosexuals, this may correspond to a particular idea of homosexuals as 'woman-hating' (an idea Balanchine plays with in the anecdote about Diaghilev wanting to vomit at the sight of Danilova). But it is hard to locate evidence of 'woman-hating' as a consistently strong element of twentieth-century homosexuality (it seems no stronger an element than among heterosexual men or, for that matter, than among women). It is also hard to locate a clear and sustained connection between 'woman-hating' and an enthusiasm for Balanchine.

What does emerge is a diverse and complex response to neoclassicism, a response that can be related to homosexuality but that does not conform to a monolithic notion of 'the homosexual response'. To offer two brief examples, there is the critic who has already been cited, Edwin Denby (1903–1983), and the poet Frank O'Hara (1926–1966). Denby had performed in modern dance troupes in the 1920s and 1930s, but his work was increasingly threatened by the rise of fascism. He returned to the United States before the Second World War, and began to write dance criticism. Though reticent in manner, he knew 'everyone', from Kirstein to de Kooning to Dalí, and in Balanchine he found the inspiration for many of his finest essays. He

was especially drawn to the unusual complexity of effect that he found in Balanchine. If ballet has difficulty in telling a story, the complete absence of story allows for a strangely free and subtle impression to emerge. Denby found distinctive emotional values in Balanchine's work, but he recognised that the absence of story was a problem for many of his contemporaries. Without story, it is not so easy to know how to feel about what one sees. There are no obviously good or bad characters to identify with or against, no sure sense of what constitutes the 'climax' of the evening, beyond what the choreography itself can muster. But this, as Denby noted, forces the viewer to pay a different kind of attention:

> You don't watch the dance to see if the dancers come up to an emotion you expect beforehand, you watch to see what they do, and their variety in animation exhilarates; you are interested without knowing how to label the emotion. And so you are not tempted to excuse your pleasure, or rationalize it, or appreciate it mentally. I think that this direct enjoyment of dancing as an activity is the central aspect of ballet style that Balanchine has rediscovered.[60]

Even where there did seem to be an identifiable emotion, this was not anchored within an unambiguous moral and dramatic scheme. It was presented with inflections that Denby relished, but that made others uneasy. Denby observed a 'joyous irony in [Balanchine's] tenderest pathos, and irony in sentiment seems subversive to good people who like to think that sentiment is something comfortable, secure'.[61] Balanchine's inventiveness reminded Denby of the most complex proto-modern writing, and it chimed with his sense of his own modern experience. He commented of *Danses Concertantes* (1944) that it was 'like a conversation in Henry James, as surprising, as sensitive, as forbearing, as full of slyness and fancy'. This unencumbered invitation to respond to the work in all its intricacies was part of the 'pleasure of being civilized, of being what we really are, born into a millennial urban civilization'.[62]

Denby admired the more traditional narrative ballets of Sadler's Wells or the Paris Opéra, though he could also seem tired of grand melancholy, of the 'expressive' gesture that would 'tax your nervous sympathy'.[63] He was ready for the new theatrical experience that Balanchine provided. It seemed to speak to his own unattached but highly responsive disposition. It evinced a playful and contemplative ability to be inside and outside of its own concerns and environment.

Denby seemed drawn to the opportunity to equivocate, to immerse himself in an experience that did not impose an unyielding definition. There is an interesting correspondence between this playing with contraries and his occasional comments on his own nation. He once confessed privately that he had 'been scared of America all [his] life'.[64] He seems a post-national figure who, as with Kirstein's comment on his ballet company, finds that he is a New Yorker rather than an American. He is that modern paradox, the figure who is most 'at home' in a constantly changing scene, with its equal and opposite invitations to affiliation and anonymity. Certainly he seems to have felt safer with this than with the flagrantly tell-tale exoticism of the Diaghilev tradition. This emerges in his review of the English-language edition of Lifar's *Serge Diaghilev* (1940). In a gently ironical discussion, Denby conveys his own fearful enjoyment of Lifar's narrative:

> It reads like a house afire, like a Russian novel. Hotel furniture is smashed all over Europe; broken ankles lead to triumphant premières; apathy turns to illumination, too deep a love takes the form of estrangement, and passion rises dialectically by its reversal. It all sounds very improper in our flat country. A decent American finds it too personal, too portentous, too eloquent; even possibly too aptly fitting a classic pattern.[65]

Denby seems to admire the full-out nature of the Ballets Russes existence as recounted by Lifar, and yet it is clearly impossible and amusing to him. The contrast is with 'our flat country', an image which seems safe but less than compelling. Is Denby more of the party of the 'decent American', who is repulsed by that which is 'too personal' or 'too eloquent'? There is a distance and an amusement, though, at the thought of 'flatness' and 'decency'. Again, he betrays his preference for irony, for the passing or equivocal affiliation, as opposed to the fixed shapes of either American 'decency' or Lifar's 'classic pattern'.

There is a similar ambivalence in the writings of a man with whom Denby often attended the New York City Ballet, the poet Frank O'Hara. In 'Notes from Row L', a series of *aperçus* that O'Hara wrote for a New York City Ballet souvenir programme, O'Hara resembles Denby in writing of being inside and outside of 'Americanness'. But O'Hara does so with a revelatory – and somewhat ungrammatical – effusiveness:

> It all depends on whether you want your heart to beat, your blood to pound through your veins and your mind to go blank

> with joy, until you are brought back to self-consciousness by an embarrassing tear your neighbor might see (we are still Americans, aren't we?)[66]

O'Hara and Denby went to New York City Ballet with, among others, O'Hara's fellow poets of the 'New York School', John Ashbery and James Schuyler. As Denby commented, 'We were all mad about George Balanchine. We all thought he was a genius. He was like de Kooning – going through difficult periods, defending what he wanted to do, seeing what else was possible'.[67]

These men were all deeply involved in mixed but preponderantly heterosexual art scenes (O'Hara particularly with the 'New York School' of painters). In this case, as in others, it would be wrong to suggest a prime, flat, or exclusive equation between ballet and queerness. O'Hara is especially interesting because he offers some equivalence between his writing and Balanchine's choreography, but in O'Hara's work a queerness is also present. In 'Notes from Row L', he stated that '[o]ne of Balanchine's greatest achievements is in making the dancers be the dance, be human and yet have the theatrical grandeur of the specific occasion of the dance'. O'Hara's biographer, Brad Gooch, observes in this the link to the poet's own practice. Gooch cites from O'Hara's notes elsewhere: 'I hope the poem to be the subject, not just about it'.[68] O'Hara's poetry is often 'occasional', in that it refers to the moment of its inception and seems to exist within that moment. It is often too particular to lend itself easily to a broader or more metaphysical vision. O'Hara coined a phrase to define this practice. He called it 'I do this I do that' poetry. In this respect, both Balanchine and O'Hara fit David Levin's analysis of formalism in the arts. Levin observes a move towards 'an aesthetic of immanence, of self-revealing presence', as opposed to 'an earlier aesthetic of mimetic connotation and transcendent symbolism'. Modern art, as Levin explains it, 'exists solely for the revelation of its own inmost (and latent, or immanent) defining conditions'.[69]

But if Balanchine's formalism made it seem to some that the subject had been 'left out', O'Hara's poetry is full of references to his own life and times, and more specifically to his own sexual nature. Where I think O'Hara finds a valuable equivalence between himself and Balanchine is in the endless inventiveness, an inventiveness that does not seek to confirm a preconceived image of 'serious art', and which can seem both within its material and at a distance from it. O'Hara presents a playfulness and an irony which do not exclude the serious and the affective. To offer one example, he wrote 'Glazunoviana, or Memorial

Day' in 1960. The suggestion of the label, 'Glazunoviana', is perhaps of an artful concoction rather than 'the real thing'; a sampling or an off-cut rather than a major work (and one thinks again of Denby's comment that *Ballet Imperial* is not 'a classic' so much as 'like a classic'). The title may evoke Massine's *Cimarosiana* (1924), a *divertissement* cut from the complete production of Cimarosa's *Le Astuzie femininili*. More nearly, the echo might be of Balanchine's own *Mozartiana* (1933), a version of a version of a version, in that it was set to Tchaikovsky's re-working of four pieces by Mozart. Or again, there is Balanchine's *Ivesiana* of 1954 (his *Glinkiana* was not premièred until 1967). In O'Hara's poem under the title of 'Glazunoviana, or Memorial Day', the speaker envisages a 'life of civil happiness' in which Maria Tallchief dances at the City Center in a setting of Glazunov's *The Seasons*. This has a specific personal reference, noted by Gooch, in that O'Hara had, at Lincoln Kirstein's request, written a libretto for a ballet to Glazunov's *The Seasons*. As O'Hara's partner of the time, Vincent Warren, remembered it, O'Hara came up with an improbably lush, old-style narrative of nymphs and fauns, though it was to be done in modern dress. As Warren commented, it 'doesn't sound very Balanchinesque', and it was rejected.[70] To return to the poem, the 'vision' of Tallchief, O'Hara writes:

> hovers in the air like a cyclone over sordid Kansas
> as her breathing limbs tear ugliness out of our lives
> and cast it into the air like snowflakes[71]

The speaker of the poem seems to cast himself or his life as the Judy Garland film, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), as Tallchief's violent beauty has the power to transform a dull or 'sordid Kansas' existence into something more rarefied. Then, though, the image changes again, as the speaker recalls Tallchief as a young and tender Sylvia, who seems to perform with 'the Public Gardens in her arms'.[72] The woman here is inscrutable, devastating, redemptive, vulnerable, supreme – a succession of different values that Tallchief the actress-dancer has at her command. And yet, alongside the compelling figure of the ballerina, and the red-and-gold disposition of 'ugliness' and 'snowflakes', there is a gentler commonality. Memorial Day may correspond to the period of the poem's writing, but the naming of the day was originally meant to commemorate those killed in the Civil War. The poem offers a prospective and even optimistic view on this with the vision of 'a life of civil happiness'. This interplay of the stunning individual and the civil–City Center commonality is picked up again in the last line, with the idea of the ballerina holding the 'Public Garden' in her

arms. Tallchief is a small figure who can disrupt multitudes with bloody tearings, and who can embrace vast spaces. Finally, though, she appears as the nostalgically pastoral guardian of the urban 'Public Garden' space. It would perhaps be crass to offer as 'themes' the images and possibilities that O'Hara allows to flicker briefly at edges and across surfaces. Yet, for all that 'Glazunoviana' has his characteristically inconsequential air, it also presents dance as something that envisages – and might even restore – coherence. His Memorial Day poem echoes and alludes to the commonality that was restored by the victory of the Union troops in the Civil War. But O'Hara also uses the poem, incidentally and automatically, to produce a Union that is full of balletic and Garlandised queerness.

O'Hara's poetry is so different to Balanchine's choreography, and all assertions of an equivalence between dance and poetry are surely as fraught as they might be evocative. Balanchine is one figure among others to give encouragement to O'Hara's and others' formalist and Modernist impulses. There is the sense in both men's work of ballet and poetry as practice rather than self-consciously great art, as something that may combine 'high' and 'low'. O'Hara's poem has no punctuation, and yet its emphases and rhythms are clear from the power of his idiomatic phrasing. He seems to have an endless facility for intricate but non-totalising expression. As Denby noted of Balanchine, O'Hara's 'complexity never looks elaborate'.[73]

Taken together, Denby and O'Hara indicate the uses that ballet had in queer circles, even as Balanchine seemed to lead the form in a non-queer direction. Beyond that, Denby and O'Hara also demonstrate once more that the queer tradition of ballet is not a closed tradition. These writers had a variety of affiliations, from uptown to downtown, avant-garde, Surreal to Neo-Romantic to Abstract Expressionist, and so on. They were part of what Thomas Bender refers to as a 'loose, complex and crosshatched art world network'.[74] They attest to continuity, in that they exemplify the ballet tradition's ongoing power to foster queer expression. But perhaps they also indicate the further development of modern queerness, in which 'closed shop' seems ever less adequate to describe the proliferation and intermixing of queer images and ideas.

6

THE PRIMA AND HER FANS

Legend has it that in 1842, shortly before Marie Taglioni left St. Petersburg, she presented a group of balletomanes with a dance slipper that she had worn. The men had a *soirée* at which the slipper was cut into small parts and boiled up. The men then ate the parts, and the 'soup' that had resulted from the cooking process.[1] The history of ballet is full of fetishistic exchanges between dancers and their fans, although few are quite as peculiar as the eating of the shoe. Other ballerinas gave swatches of tulle or some sequins to their more fervent admirers, or they gave signed portraits of themselves. It was in their interests to make such gifts. The balletomanes tended to pledge themselves to one particular ballerina, and they would make sure that 'their' ballerina got good ovations. The balletomanes also presented the ballerina with gifts in their turn, and these tended to be a great deal more expensive than a bit of costume or an old shoe.

Balletomania, as the name suggests, was an impassioned and even a frenzied condition. It was an eroticism that was played out in fetishistic and sacralising forms (fetishistic in the sense that the balletomane worships a part of the woman in the absence of the whole, and sacred in the sense that, in the case of Taglioni's slipper, this part was then consumed at a 'last supper'). Perhaps there was an element of fear or anxiety in balletomania, in that the balletomane seemed more confident of his desire because it was a copy of the desires of other men. He entered into a community of desire; the woman was worshipped in and of herself, but she was also worshipped in a way that enabled the man to bond with his own sex. Again like Taglioni's slipper in the cooking pot, it was a process of translating a pretty thing into a shared mess of sweat and glue. In this view, balletomania is not homosexual, but an instance of anxious homosociality.

There have, though, been instances of queer balletomania, and, more generally, fandom has often been a definitive aspect of queer culture. This chapter looks at the way in which one particular ballerina –

Margot Fonteyn – functioned as a point of queer identification. The focus is also on how the prima may be a queer creation, as in Fonteyn's relationship with her chief choreographer, Frederick Ashton. First, though, what more general or conceptual argument can we make about the queer resonance of the prima? Or, rather, why should the queer viewer be the obsessive viewer, the 'maniac'? Writing especially of cinema in the mid-twentieth century, film historian Richard Dyer suggested that homosexuals and lesbians were likely to have an extra hunger for spectacle because mainstream society did not recognise their existence in any positive way. If ballet, film, or opera were escapist pleasures, then the assumption might be that the queer viewer had more need to escape than most. Film was not likely to offer a positive version of same-sex relationships, either, but perhaps the fantasies of the screen were peculiarly open to creative reconstruction. As mentioned in earlier chapters, queer spectatorship in this sense involves cropping or reordering a narrative to make it fit with particular desires. Film theorist Brett Farmer is typical in suggesting that the queer fan engages in a 'process of textual reconstruction' that prioritises 'other moments' or, indeed, 'moments of otherness'.[2] The queer viewer might identify with an incident or character that seems relatively trivial to others. He or she may choose to see the close friendship at the beginning of the story as the crucial episode, rather than the marriage at the end. The queer viewer makes a fetish of the particular moment in the sense that he or she invests it with all the 'extra' that the narrative does not actually provide. The story might not give us a sustained version of ourselves, but it might, whether inadvertently or not, give us glimpses upon which we can build. This fandom as a way of seeing also permits fandom as a form of community. The fan might discover that others reconstruct narratives in similar ways, and with similar motives. In a scornful or repressive society, one's viewing habits and preferences can serve as a way of establishing a semi-clandestine interest group. This argument has been ventured by J. P. Telotte:

> [The cult] effectively constructs a culture in small, and thus an island of meaning for an audience that senses an absence of meaningful social structure or coherence in life outside the theater. In essence, therefore, every cult constitutes a community, a group that 'worships' similarly and regularly, and finds strength in that shared experience.[3]

Fans usually learn to recognise each other via their shared identification with a particular star. This is an identification that is all the more

obvious because it is often an identification with the 'wrong' gender. Male fans especially seem to adopt female stars, to see themselves as the other and through the other. Wayne Koestenbaum, who has explored the codes of opera divas and diva worship so vividly (and whose arguments anticipate my own at many points), describes his own process of coming to homosexuality in terms of learning from and reading himself against singing stars:

> Divas are my dolls; I play with the stories of their lives, and learn from their fables how to transcend affliction, as a little girl is supposed to learn proper femininity from her dolls.[4]

Koestenbaum confirms the idea that the theatre gives us models for living, models that we can adapt to our own, particular uses. Perhaps he also confirms that stardom is an offering up of the self for objectification, and the fan completes the process in his or her consuming, manipulating, mimicking, and becoming. Fandom is a series of devotional exercises that allow us to enter into the diva's or prima's magic circle of power and desire. This may mean that the fan has to take on the star's personal tragedies, but in the removed and meaningful form of allegory. The heroine is visited with difficulties, but only as part of a longer narrative of endurance and triumph. Even the story that ends in tragedy can give consolation. It can dignify the fan's own losses by setting them in parallel with the lives of the great. There is also a maternal aspect in this pattern of loss and compensation. The fan praises the star and, in cultivating her legend, he protects her from oblivion. At the same time, he seems to project maternal values onto her. She has saving powers and, as Koestenbaum puts it, she can help him to 'transcend affliction'.

Stars may be chosen because they are rumoured to have same-sex tendencies, or because their romantic troubles seem to correspond to the agonies of the closet. Farmer makes a different point, though, in his discussion of film. He notes that mid-twentieth-century homosexuals tended to identify with stars who gave 'an excessive or parodic performance of femininity', such as Joan Crawford, Mae West, and Marlene Dietrich. This 'excessive' femininity was so obviously a performance that it had the effect of denaturalising femininity altogether. These stars offered a 'hypersimulation' of traditional femininity that was always in danger of toppling over into farce. This allowed the possibility that all femininity is simulation, that all gendered categories are open to – constructed by – various acts of performance and

subversion. We might return to ballet at this point, and make the case that the ballerina can fit the same pattern. As noted in Chapter 1, ballet seems to make visible an 'excessive' and obviously 'worked' version of gender, whereby the woman produces, through much labour, an extreme version of feminine lightness and delicacy. As with Tchaikovsky impersonating Amalia Ferraris, there is the sense that the ballerina was an earlier instance of 'hypersimulation'. Ballet was a self-conscious acting out of gender, and for Tchaikovsky and his friends it triggered other acts of mimicry and projection.

What makes for a prima ballerina, and how might that relate to queer fandom? The prima must be an excellent dancer, and she may also be a dancer who initiates a new technique. She may establish her preeminence with a particular bravura skill, or she may be the 'muse' of a major choreographer, and have important roles created on her. The prima's legend usually contains a heady mix of suffering, discipline, modesty, triumph, and ruthlessness. Hers is, above all, a narrative of reinvention. She must submit to the painful training that will enable her to become a new, stronger, and resplendent self. Her ultimate triumph is balanced by these preceding years of abasement; she is someone who carries within her tired and deformed muscles an apology for her trespass on glory. There is an underlying moral coherence to the legend, in that the prima has worked – suffered, even – to acquire her amazing skills. As Koestenbaum notes of the opera star's 'large' and 'exorbitant' voice, it 'exclaims, "A price has been paid"'.[5]

The prima's legend is, finally, about justice; achieving one's rightful place in the face of the general unfairness of life. In a more modern idiom, it is about overcoming prejudice and reversing discrimination, except that the legend has more of a sacred than a social aspect. Like the lives of the saints or the stations of the cross, the prima's progress can be told in a series of tableaux. A typical series would include: the discovery of her talent; the submission to a tyrannical teacher; the début in a particular city or in a particular role; the challenges from other notable ballerinas; the injury and the return; and so on. For all that the narrative moves towards triumph, it is also always about sacrifice. Her special role as a prima will eclipse any other life that the woman might live. As with a certain idea of homosexuality, she is visited with a peculiar destiny, and this destiny is experienced as both a trial and a privilege.

Margot Fonteyn is a typical example of prima legend, in that her life falls into a number of exemplary scenes, the static moments or 'stations' that indicate her moral and romantic worth. Her origin itself – or, rather, the backdrop to her life – is static in that she was born in a dull,

respectable English town, and in her own account of her life, she often defines herself in terms of a modest, self-repressive respectability. She seems surprised by the incidents and the triumphs that life presents her with. From the first momentous incident in childhood – moving to China as a result of her father's work – she faces up dutifully to the challenges. She is always brave, but never bravura. The sacrifices continue with her leaving her father and her home in China to return with her mother to London, to dedicate herself to her training. The next moment in the legend is when she, amongst all the other girls in the ballet class, is picked out by de Valois. She is called into being, chosen for a lonelier destiny, by an irresistible power (by a founding figure who had had to call herself into being – a 'de Valois' who was connected to the French royal dynasty merely by asserting that it was so). The fledgling prima must continue to pay for her special status, and the exemplary scene for Fonteyn is when she cannot satisfy the choreographer, Frederick Ashton. Already she is found wanting, and her only means to progress is to surrender everything, to put herself completely in his hands. Whatever is her, but not what de Valois and Ashton value in her, she must give up. She must reduce and expand to fit her new role. And, for all that the nascent prima is found to be special, her elevation to a 'royal' line is menaced by defects. Fonteyn has feet that are too soft (that are 'like pats of butter'), and she lacks an impressive jump. She must spend her whole career agonised by these underlying faults. She must obscure them. She must gain control of every trick, every disguise, that will prevent her exposure.

The discovery and the effortful rebirth are followed by the opportunity. The company's prima, Markova, abandons them all, and someone must rise to take the prima's place. Among several promising young dancers, it is Fonteyn who has the most special quality, and who also has the power of self-sacrifice. Her special stage power at this point in her career is unusual: she can make her watchers want to cry. It is as though her audiences can see the scenario that surrounds the performance, as well as the performance itself. They are watching a soft and lovely creature who is in the grip of a merciless fate. For those in the know, that fate may be Ashton and de Valois, but it is also Time. Everyone can see that this perishable, sixteen-year-old beauty will have to change and harden if it is to survive. In the coming years, she will arrive at a classical, regal beauty that still retains that earlier glow. But her relatively minor personal legend will also be fused with the national legend. The company continues to perform in London and the provinces in the midst of Nazi air-raids. She and her fellows acquire a new mystique when they refuse to respond to the sirens as they

announce the arrival of horror. The dancers' fragile and inessential gestures become part of the essential rite of resistance. After the War, there is the triumphant début in New York, when she exceeds her own high standards with a series of breathtaking balances. This is followed by the partnership: a rebellious Russian defector knows he must dance with her – and only she will do – if his own instant legend is to acquire a historical lustre.

Following on from the discovery, the sacrifice, the opportunity, the triumphs, and the partnership, there is, inevitably, the decline. Fonteyn makes endless compromises for her husband, Arias, a worthless man who betrays her. He squanders her money, and she must continue to display her now mildewed charms in smaller theatres. The ebullient Russian leaves her for younger ballerinas. The story ends in pathos, as she dies, penniless, in a small, distant country. Although one can think of exceptions, the lives of the great primas, it seems – Taglioni, Pavlova, Brianza, Spessiva, Kchessinska – must end in pathos. The career must offer the promise of vindication, but it must also reaffirm the unavoidable sadness of life.

Such is the life, when reduced to scenes or phases. Among the several qualities that make Fonteyn unusual – and worth much closer scrutiny here – is the extent to which she acknowledged and analysed the performed aspect of her life. In her autobiography, she traced the collapse between life and legend. She was interested in the way in which her role as prima usurped a different, more 'real' self: the effect on 'Peggy Hookham' of having to become 'Margot Fonteyn'. She made great efforts to live up to the image of the ballerina in her offstage life. She was careful to appear in the height of fashion, and always to be stylish and elegant. This included her notionally 'private' life, in that there were numerous magazine photo-essays that presented Fonteyn 'relaxing at home', but which showed a woman who was as poised and perfect – as 'hypersimulated' – as she was in the role of Swan Queen.[6]

In her memoirs, Fonteyn discussed the uncertainty of the boundaries between a 'real' self and a 'performed' self:

> [M]y own identity was completely eclipsed by my idea of the image I should project to others: a glamorous, chic personage; gracious and a little aloof; but effervescent with gaiety after the performance.

When she was further advanced in her career, she claimed to have realised this was a problem:

> I had reached the furthest point in the great arc of my life, and was out in the emotional wastelands of some fallacious person who was yet, in some ways, also me.[7]

She does not make explicit the prehistory of this person. She confesses her overwhelming desire to please, and perhaps we realise at this point that the earlier self, too, is a part of the myth. She had always learned her 'role' from her mother, and subsequently from de Valois and Ashton. Even the moments of becoming a ballerina are already like a ballet, as the prodigiously ambitious elders play Queens of the Wilis to Fonteyn's Giselle. Mrs. Hookham was an affectionate and shrewd woman who was known in the company as 'The Black Queen' (a reference to the domineering character in de Valois's *Checkmate* [1937]). She saw potential in her daughter, and, as noted, left her husband and moved to the other side of the world to make the girl into a dancer. Similarly, de Valois decided that this reticent child should become the company's new star, and she drilled her mercilessly in the techniques and the ethos of primadom.

Fonteyn wrote of her frustration at recognising herself, her life, as a production. She was unsure of her own motives, and mistrustful of the fact that her 'identity was only clear to [her] when [she] assumed some make-believe character'. She judged herself as 'some fallacious person', but even at this moment she does not surrender the privileges of her role. She unhesitatingly refers to the 'great arc of [her] life', knowing that, as one of the most famous women in the world, no one would question her right to the phrase. And Fonteyn, like other stars, seemed only to enmesh herself more deeply in her role at the very moment that she sought to escape it. In her autobiography, she describes leaving the 'fallacious person' behind for the reality of her loving marriage with Roberto 'Tito' Arias. But Arias was a philanderer who made use of Fonteyn's name and money, and who betrayed her with other women. He was shot by a man whom he was thought to have cuckolded, and spent the last twenty-four years of his life as a paraplegic. Fonteyn kept dancing to pay his huge medical costs, and she seemed throughout their lives to be a slave to his every whim. As a friend wonderingly commented after Fonteyn's death, her performance as wife in the perfect romantic marriage was the most demanding and fantastical she had ever given. But if Fonteyn seemed to be enslaved to a domineering and resentful man, that too was a performance of sorts, for it was she who had the fame, the money, and the power.[8]

The narrative of Fonteyn's life – with its dramatic combination of success and pathos – could be presented with other, more social or

political dimensions. What if we factor in her dancing in apartheid South Africa, and for General Pinochet? There is also her taking tea with General Noriega, and her holidays with President Marcos. Fonteyn was, in the words of her biographer, 'implacably right-wing'.[9] There is the uncomfortable sense that the ballerina's ruthless devotion to her art and her role might have translated all too easily into social and political totalitarianism. Under the influence of 'The Black Queen' and then of de Valois, Fonteyn herself was, as it were, the product of absolutist régimes. In the Fascist other, she sees a violent simplicity that corresponds to her own reduced and projected self. The queer fan might argue that these unattractive aspects can be dismissed, or that they might even add a camp lustre to the story. The identification with the star makes no pretense to social completeness or social justice; the queer identification is always aware of its own partial and opportunistic cooptation of the star's life. A classic fictional exploration of this issue is Manuel Puig's *The Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (1976). That novel, set in a Latin-American dictatorship, is about a left-wing activist, Valentin, and an effeminate homosexual, Molina, who are imprisoned in the same cell. Molina helps them both to pass the time by recounting the stories of films that he has seen. But the two disagree when Molina professes his enjoyment of a Fascist propaganda film in which the Nazis are heroes and the Maquis and the Jews are traitors. Molina says that he knows that the Maquis were heroes and that the Nazis were bad, but that he loves the film for its 'divine' moments. Valentin warns him that this selective vision, alongside Molina's other gestures of queenly escapism, is dangerous, 'like taking drugs'. Molina, though, claims the ability to pick out and appreciate the bits of the film that appeal to him, without his being affected by – or approving of – the hateful aspects. For him, the maker of the film and the viewer have to salvage what they can from the contaminating forces around them: 'The political stuff, well, it was probably foisted onto the director by the government, or maybe you don't know how these things work'.[10] One might also argue, though, that there is a surrounding cultural logic that fosters a sympathy between the homosexual and the absolutist figure, whether Fascist or prima. The clarity of the totalitarian régime may be attractive to the subject who has been produced to think of himself as confused and shameful. Like 'Peggy Hookham', who must die to make way for 'Margot Fonteyn', the homosexual may also feel that uncertain or messy dispositions must be shed or killed off. This problem – of the imaginative and actual overlays of self-suppression and totalitarianism – emerges again in Chapter 7, in relation to Genet's uniformed and disciplined icons of

masculinity. But at this point we might propose that homosexual identity for much of the twentieth century – however diverse it may have been – was inevitably involved in an awkward relation with social power, an awkward relation that the ballerina, with her fragility and her predominance, seemed to share, but that she seemed magically to have resolved.

The prima, then, is a figure that is more 'sacred' and 'mythical' than 'social'. Her narrative reduces itself to the forces of good and evil, to episodes of love and loss, and it always aspires to the ultimate. It is an extreme and romantic, rather than a realist narrative, and as such it permits wishful identification and reinvention. In the events of her own life, she extols the possibility of reinvention; she is an example of the weak becoming strong. I have suggested that these various features may have made a particular invitation to – may have *signified* for – a queer spectatorship. There is little evidence of precisely how or why queer audiences may have identified with Fonteyn, but there is the simple fact that she seemed to have a large and devoted queer following. Fonteyn performances sometimes became occasions for a campishly competitive fandom. Mrs. Hookham remembered one performance in the United States in the early 1950s at which 'some very eccentric men' vied for attention, with 'the most successful being a bald elderly man wearing a tiara'.[11] For her part, Fonteyn seemed to make a public point of acknowledging the homosexuals among her devotees. In her autobiography, first published in 1975, she presented a photograph of herself with a male couple who were fans and with whom she was on friendly terms. The photograph has a caption which offers no preparation or apology: 'John and Tug always gave a party for the Royal Ballet in New York'. In the narrative proper, she writes of them as 'two people of exceptional generosity', but again there is no attempt to explain or 'pass off', and for an establishment heroine in 1970s England this is unusual.[12] It was also thought among her contemporaries that she was closest to men who, in private circles, were known to be homosexual. Fellow ballerina Nadia Nerina commented that Fonteyn was especially at home with 'the boys' – that she was 'more relaxed with them'.[13] This ease of understanding was something that carried over from her professional life. Her understated prima qualities seemed to combine well with homosexual men whose dancing personae were to one side of the traditional *danseur noble*. Her first major partnership was with Robert Helpmann, who had an unusual, rather mournful face, and a skimpy body, but who was renowned for his tremendous dramatic presence. Similarly, Fonteyn's other great partner, Nureyev, lacked the height and classical elegance of the archetypal romantic

lead, but he too had an individualistic intensity that worked well with Fonteyn's ultra-pure classicism. In both partnerships, the splendid normality of the prima was offset by the slightly deviant charms of the men. Her other lengthy partnership was with the tall, conventionally handsome Michael Somes, but he seemed to become invisible when he partnered Fonteyn. This was expected of the *danseur noble*, but it has meant that Somes holds a minor place in the Fonteyn legend.

I want to return to the idea of the fan, particularly in the form of William 'Billy' Chappell's hungrily adoring book, *Fonteyn: Impressions of a Ballerina* (1951). But perhaps the clearest and most productive instance of Fonteyn and queer identification and projection was that of her relationship with the choreographer Frederick Ashton. We might set Ashton's story alongside Fonteyn's, and even see his story as a precursor of hers. His life begins in the well-to-do English expatriate community of Lima, Peru, in the early part of the twentieth century. Many years before Koestenbaum was born, Frederick Ashton was another boy who liked to play with dolls. As a friend remembered, he did not play with them in a 'motherly way', but 'as if they were marionettes'. This type of play was very suspect, and Ashton exhibited a more general effeminacy that caused embarrassment and annoyance to his father and brothers. He discovered ballet – or, rather, he discovered *something* – when he was taken, at the age of thirteen, to see Pavlova perform at Lima's Teatro Municipal. The friend he went with found the ballet tolerable because it featured Alexander Volinine in a Crusader costume in the part of Jean de Brienne. 'For hours afterwards', this other boy remembered, 'I was Volinine'. He was impatient for the performance to be over, however, because they were to drive home in an impressive American car. Ashton did not care for the car, or for Volinine, but when Pavlova began to dance in *The Fairy Doll* his sense of his life changed completely: 'Seeing her at that stage was the end of me. She injected me with her poison and from the end of that evening I wanted to dance'. He had no interest in the male dancers: 'I wanted to dance like *her*'.[14] More than that, Ashton seemed to want to assume or to assimilate Pavlova's whole existence. He lingered outside her hotel in Lima so he could study how she got down from a carriage, and how she walked in her sable stole. In Pavlova, he was taking his cues from a remarkable instance – and, again, one might say a hypersimulation – of femininity. So dramatic and so finished was Pavlova's presence that, as Lydia Sokolova thought, 'the only time she wasn't acting was when she was asleep'.[15]

Shortly after his exposure to Pavlova, Ashton was sent to boarding school in England. He received little encouragement in his ballet

ambitions, and after his father's death he and his mother endured several years of impoverishment. During that time, his dreams of dancing seemed ever more unlikely. As a kind of compensatory activity, he collected photographs of Pavlova onstage, at home, and in her dressing room, and stuck them onto a screen. He would never, of course, become Pavlova. He was not, after all, a woman, and while he had some excellent dancerly qualities he lacked the looks and the training to be a purely classical dancer. Not that this logic would ever overcome the wish and the sensibility. Dance critic and historian Alastair Macaulay reports that, '[a]s late as the 1970s, [Ashton] was rushing around the classroom, showing female dancers how to do their roles, and saying, "I should have been a ballerina"'.[16]

After an important period of working for Nijinska in Paris, Ashton began to choreograph for the fledgling English organisations Ballet Club and the Camargo Society. He was then taken on as chief choreographer for the Vic-Wells Ballet in 1935, and rose to fame with that company as it became the Sadler's Wells and then the Royal Ballet. The young and unknown Ashton was fortunate to have a top-class ballerina to work with in Alicia Markova, a Ballets Russes dancer who had come to the Vic-Wells after Diaghilev's death. Ashton was thought to have worked well with Markova, in that he added a saucy and humorous element to her classicism in ballets such as *Façade* (1931) and *Rio Grande* (1931). But the relationship soured. Markova may have been unnerved by romantic feelings towards Ashton, and Ashton's failure to reciprocate them. The friendship and the working relationship became brittle, and were marked by moments of one-upmanship and 'star' behaviour. After Markova's success in the Vic-Wells *Giselle* (1934), Ashton felt that she became 'frightfully grand', and he was clearly wounded when she refused to 'stoop to do my little things'.[17]

When Markova left the company to form the Markova–Dolin Company, she invited Ashton to join them, but he turned the offer down. This must have been a difficult decision, because in Markova he had found a ballerina who had the skill and the charisma to embody his wishes. In a sense, he had become through Markova the dancer he had always wished to be. This was more especially the case in that Markova, as a Diaghilev dancer, was close to the Russian tradition, and she had been particularly influenced by the example of Pavlova. Perhaps, though, Markova was too ambitious and too aware of her own position for Ashton to be able to feel that she was an extension of him. Also, she was too advanced when they began to work together. Although he may have extended her dramatic range, she would always

be seen either as a 'Ballets Russes product' or simply as herself; she would never be seen as an 'Ashton product'. Ashton began to search for a young dancer whom he could shape into his ideal ballerina. He wanted a demure, loyal person who would be formed by him, for his repertoire. De Valois pushed a shy fifteen-year-old at him as a possibility. Ashton was not convinced that the girl had the ability, but he vengefully declared to Markova: 'I'm going to take Margot and make her much greater than you *ever* were'.[18]

Fonteyn is often described as Ashton's muse, in that she inspired him to develop his own – and the company's – distinctive, English style: restrained, sweet, musical, and respectful of tradition. She described him as her 'friend, mentor, and master'.[19] Although Fonteyn developed her own ideas about her roles, and although she subjected herself to various teachers and influences, she was in large part created as a ballerina by Ashton, out of his reservoir of images and ideals. He was determined from the outset to make her conform fully and exactly to his wishes, and their early experiences together were difficult. Ashton's biographer writes that he became frustrated when he 'was unable to mould her as precisely as he had wanted'. Fonteyn seemed to sense and to resist the strength of his intentions. Eventually, though, under his intense and cruel scrutiny, she burst into tears, and with that the difficulty passed. Fonteyn had effectively surrendered to him and, as Kavanagh notes, it was the subsequent 'malleability and humility which made her his muse'.[20] Fonteyn's biographer, though, suggests that this is another instance of the old story of the woman winning by allowing the man to think that he has won. Where exactly did the power reside? In one sense, Fonteyn was no more than a secondary or substitute figure. Ashton tried to convey what he wanted from her by doing impersonations of Pavlova for her to copy. Fonteyn became 'herself' by impersonating a man impersonating a woman. But it would be more accurate to observe that each became something through the other that they could not have been on their own. As Ashton admitted many years later, 'Had I not been able to work with Margot I might never have developed the lyrical side of my work'.[21]

Ashton capitalised on Fonteyn's strengths of poise, line, and musicality, but he was also very strongly motivated by her dramatic potential. In making Fonteyn into a child-like Ondine, a faithful Chloë, and an earnest Sylvia, he extolled a femininity that was, by turns, chaste, modest, and regal. This stands in marked contrast to the campishly embittered femininity that Ashton himself sometimes displayed. His romantic and idealistic tendencies were counterbalanced by disappointment and vengefulness. He had the wit to make play out

of this contrast in his work. He cast himself as the venomous Carabosse to Fonteyn's Aurora in the production of *Sleeping Beauty* that Sadler's Wells took to New York in 1949. As a young man, he had played Prince Charming in Andrée Howard's *Cinderella* (1935), but he cast himself with Helpmann as the two ugly sisters to Shearer's and Fonteyn's Cinderella in 1948 and 1949. If the thirteen-year-old Ashton had failed to acknowledge the impossibility of his identification with Pavlova, the mature Ashton seemed to signal a rueful, good-natured awareness of how at odds he was with the ideal that he helped to maintain. Edwin Denby's review captures the ironic subtleties of 'ugliness', as played by Ashton:

> She is the shyest, the happiest, most innocent of monsters . . . after the slipper test she accepts the truth as it is, she makes a shy stately curtsy to the princely couple, to the power of Romance and Beauty, and paddles sadly off. No wonder such a monster wins everybody's heart.[22]

Ashton also developed such dramatic possibilities in private performances. He was a brilliant mimic of a range of pitiable, heroic, and monstrous women, including Madame Butterfly, Edith Sitwell, queens Victoria and Alexandra, a Mother Superior, and Gertrude Stein.[23]

Although there seems to have been a mischievous fondness in his impersonations of eccentric, ugly, independent women, his first and final allegiance was to the Ideal. Lincoln Kirstein thought that Ashton limited himself as a choreographer by sticking to the Ideal, and to the delicately feminine English style that he had helped to create. In allying himself so fully with de Valois, Kirstein thought that Ashton had committed himself to endless repetitions of nineteenth-century Romanticism. For Kirstein, at least, de Valois herself was a monster, a 'combination of Montgomery of Alamein and Mrs. Bowdler'. Perhaps Kirstein regretted the loss of the Ashton that New York had seen in 1950. In *Illuminations*, mounted by the New York City Ballet, Ashton had choreographed Britten's musical settings of Rimbaud's poems. He had represented the relationship between Rimbaud and Verlaine with, in Vaughan's words, 'the kind of grapplings and rolling about that depict sexual activity in a way that is usually called "explicit"'. Vaughan suggests that this was something Ashton 'felt he could get away with' in New York, but that 'he would not be allowed to do in the Establishment atmosphere of Covent Garden'. And yet *Illuminations* was as fearful as it was bold. The male–male 'grapplings' were offered as a degrading counterpoint to the beauteous love of man

for woman. All the same, when New York City Ballet performed in London in 1951, *Dancing Times* described this particular work as 'sordid and unhealthy'.[24]

If Fonteyn was, in some important ways, an Ashton creation, then perhaps it was for him to decide how and when the creation should die. He choreographed a suitable final role – a role about the end of a romance and the death of youth – in *Marguerite and Armand* (1963). This was a return to his first inspiration, in that Ashton wanted Fonteyn to cultivate a Pavlova-like aura for this ballet. But the role of Marguerite – otherwise the 'Lady of the Camellias' – is also something of an unveiling of the chaste, noble ideal. She is an aging courtesan who falls in love with the youthful and impetuous Armand. Armand's father tells Marguerite that Armand must make a good, respectable marriage, and that if she loves Armand she will renounce him. Marguerite does so. She dies of consumption, but in poetic terms she dies of a recognition of her own unworthiness. Also, she dies of fulfilment: she dies at the moment she has found love. Marguerite dies of love and for love. Ashton seems to accept that, while the chaste Aurora may live forever, the improper Marguerite must renounce and die. In this, the ballet also suggested something of the death of Fonteyn to Ashton as she fell under the sway of Nureyev. A friend recalled that 'Fred felt in a way that she was deserting him', and he chose not to mount important ballets on Fonteyn after *Marguerite and Armand*.

While Ashton and the Royal Ballet were happy to exploit the box-office potential of the Fonteyn–Nureyev partnership, he became as vengeful and begrudging as he had been with Markova three decades earlier. He clearly retained an immense if somewhat ambiguous fondness for Fonteyn, though, as was apparent when he tried to retire her again in 1979. On that occasion, he choreographed a short piece called *Salut d'amour* (or 'Farewell to Love'). This was in celebration of Fonteyn's sixtieth birthday, but it was also a further gentle attempt to bring the curtain down. In this piece, Fonteyn, alone onstage, seems to think through her past. In doing so, she dances brief sequences of steps from some of her most famous roles. She no longer dances 'in full', but in charming, reduced phrases. Then, when the memories are exhausted, Ashton himself appears on the stage. He threads his arm through hers and gently leads her into the wings, gesturing toward an imaginary offstage future. Fonteyn, though, still needed money, and she was slightly reluctant to obey the implied instruction of *Salut d'amour*. In the following years, she displayed her pitifully diminished powers a few more times to audiences who were eager to be in the presence of a legend.[25]

The creation or adoption and recirculation of the ballerina is perhaps inevitably a process of reducing and exploiting the woman. In a way, the prima is more usable, more easily invoked, once she is dead. Arlene Croce has argued that, when a dancer dies, her body enters 'the dim galaxy of immortal dancing artists whose bodies are to subsequent generations a mere series of immaterial presences'. She notes of legends such as Taglioni, Duncan, and Pavlova that 'they might be a perfume, almost, each with her own tangy essence, each handily labeling the epoch in which she danced'.[26] Croce is suspicious of any simplification and self-indulgence that the legends of ballet may seem to permit. Perhaps all biographical ventures are reductive and parasitical, as later generations use figures from the past as a kind of proving ground for their own sense of self. Then again, our reduced sense of these women is often founded on the simplified and aggrandised images that the dancers themselves sought to project. Our adoption of the legend is a testament to the creative sacrifice, as the ballerina becomes the sign under which other, similar kinds of punishing negotiations are carried out.

Surely, though, there *are* dangers in queer identification and projection, even if, in the past, it permitted an exploration that had otherwise seemed impossible. William 'Billy' Chappell, perhaps inadvertently, touched on these issues in his book (1951), which is a classic instance of fan discourse. It articulates the relationship between the ballerina and the fan, and it also indicates that such a relationship must always prove, at one level at least, unsatisfactory.

Chappell was in a very unusual position as a fan, in that he had been a dancer in the early days of the Sadler's Wells, and had partnered Fonteyn in *Rio Grande* (1931). He was also a close friend of Ashton, and he designed some of the sets for the early Ashton ballets. Many years later, he also designed the dress that Fonteyn wore for *Salut d'amour*. In her memoirs, Fonteyn remembers having had a crush on Chappell; she does not mention Chappell's homosexuality. In his book, Chappell addresses himself to what it is that makes for a 'prima ballerina assoluta'. He decides, though, that she is essentially unknowable. Her special quality is 'as mysterious and as inexplicable as the seasons of the sky'.[27] His worship of the idea of the prima – and of Fonteyn, in particular – turns constantly on the sense of a truth that is obvious to the devotee, but that remains incommunicable. Chappell's prose is both anguished and flamboyant, as he attests to presences that are in danger of being missed or misunderstood. Anyone who has watched an interesting performance and tried to write about it afterwards will agree that it can be difficult, if not impossible, to capture in words the

precise nature of a dancer's stage-power. But Chappell seems fixated on the dancer's impenetrable mystique. He is insistent on the idea that the prima belongs to a race apart – a race, indeed, of fairies – and one begins to suspect that, consciously or not, Chappell's commentary on the impossibility of defining the ballerina relates to the impossibility of speaking the form of his own desire.

Chappell tries to explain:

> These creatures, one feels, must have been nurtured on the petals of flowers, slept cradled in the southern wind, and have led a life as carefree and lyrical as any released Ariel.

Fonteyn in particular looks toward another world, as 'her wide eyes seem to search a great and beautiful darkness'. By the very power of her gaze, she creates a 'dream world, strange, romantic and mysterious'. He concludes:

> I am not altogether certain whether dancers should be allowed out at all in the daytime. They are nocturnal creatures and appear at their best after dark. Like moths, their wings reveal more fanciful markings, subtler colours at night.[28]

Chappell asserts the prima's special world and her special allure. Further, he approximates her ineffable qualities in his ever more queenly and pathetic prose. In offering a writerly version of the dancer's bravura performance, this is indeed an impression – an impersonation – of a ballerina.

Chappell is aware of and impatient with his own expressive tendencies. He refers to his 'greedy and flamboyant admiration'. The phrase is telling, in that it suggests the usurpation of identity that is implicit in balletomania. Chappell is 'greedy' for her qualities and, in becoming 'flamboyant', he mimics her own wondrous presence. The ambivalence of this exchange between ballerina and fan is made most clear in the drawings and montages that Chappell used to illustrate his book. He surrounded photographs of Fonteyn with pen-and-ink sketches of strange, ugly, winged creatures, and also with drawings of cats and harlequinised cats. He noted Fonteyn's own love of cats, and he commented on her feline persona. But in his montages the ballerina is as much the imprisoned plaything of cats and fairies as an object of their adoration. In one picture, the creatures wait attentively on the dancer, while in another they stare hungrily at a bird-like ballerina who is held within a cage.

At no point does Chappell offer his balletomania as an adjunct to or symptom of his same-sex desires (it is worth remembering that the book was published during a period which saw a significant rise in prosecutions for homosexual behaviour). But, while there is no final revelation, the style becomes ever more revelatory, ever more flaming. As if to prevent himself or others from some final realisation of a connection, he struggles to arrest his own stylistic indiscretions. He notes the danger of 'run[ning] amok in purple passages'; he thinks that this will, finally, produce nothing more than sentimental nonsense. In his effort to calm and regulate his thoughts, he decides that the identification with the ballerina may allow for prodigious emotions, but that it is also delusory. It permits him the illusion of significance, but it also prevents him from achieving any final and precise meaning:

> The road which had appeared for a moment clear and straight twisted abruptly and vanished into the tangled forests of flub-dub. Sometimes, here and there, a small track led me to some open space where a glimpse of the horizon and the open sky could be seen. But I wandered far afield, lost most often in a bewildering star-filled darkness, trying to keep up with a dancing figure, a sylph, a ghost, gliding, darting far ahead like a white bird, always at a distance which made it difficult to see it distinctly.[29]

Although Chappell goes on to resuscitate once more the image of the woman as inspiration, he cannot recover from or fully account for this moment of anguish. The prima and the 'star-filled darkness' are no means to a final and satisfactory truth. For a moment, she serves as a means to speak, but what he might finally wish to say cannot be said through her. She will escape his clutches anyway. He will be left, bewildered and far afield, with himself.

7

DANCE OF THE SAILORS

An unusual encounter took place in the Théâtre Marigny in Paris, in June 1948. Margot Fonteyn had decided to take a leave of absence from the Sadler's Wells company. After twelve years as the company's ballerina, and hundreds of performances in leading roles, she felt tired and in need of a new direction. She also wanted a break from the austerity of postwar London. In Paris, she was to dance a sexy, inconsequential role in *Les Demoiselles de la nuit* for the youthful and modern Roland Petit, with whom she was having a casual, friendly romance. At that time, Petit's Ballets de Paris was also producing *'adame Miroir* (1948), based on a libretto by Jean Genet. Genet was rising to fame as a writer of low life and deviant sexuality, and his apparent rejection of traditional morality had made him a favourite of Left Bank intellectuals. But Genet's criminal past still caused him problems, and in 1948 he was wanted by the police for various petty thefts. He often visited the Théâtre Marigny, partly to supervise the production of *'adame Miroir*, and partly because, in the darkness of the closed theatre, the police were less likely to find and arrest him. So writer and dancer met.

To England's prima ballerina, Genet seemed 'furtive' and 'shy of daylight'. She did not write about him at length, but clearly she liked him. She thought that he had 'enormous charm', and she regretted that he 'soon slipped back into his preferred world of vice'. She notes that she subsequently saw his pornographic film, *Un Chant d'amour*. Without specifying that the film, set in a prison, featured aroused men alone and in couples, she has the courage to commend it, if in slightly defensive terms. She writes that she found it 'quite inoffensive because it was touched by poetry'. She ends, however, on a wryly disapproving note: 'His ballet was about sailors, as I suppose one might have expected'.[1]

They make an odd couple, the 'princess ballerina' and the thieving pornographer. Perhaps there are certain poetic resemblances. When

she describes this shy being who slips away into his own 'preferred' world, it is as though he were an undine or a sylphide, one of the sublime ballet creatures that always vanishes before the fall of the curtain. Beyond the passing detail of the encounter with Fonteyn, though, Genet is further evidence that ballet – especially after Diaghilev – provided a repertoire of myths and images that helped others to develop a queer aesthetic. Yet if Genet can be seen as part of a tradition, he also evokes his own very particular moment. Born out of wedlock in Paris in 1910, he was abandoned by his mother before he was a year old. He was fostered out to a family of artisans in a village in the Morvan. The family had a financial incentive for taking him in and, while he would not appear to have been mistreated, he and children like him often sensed that they were despised. They were, in the local phrase, the *culs de Paris* ('arses of Paris'), a name that supposes they had been born to prostitutes.[2] As was customary for public wards, Genet was removed from school at thirteen. After a period helping his foster family with agricultural labour, he was, as a result of his exceptional school marks, apprenticed to a typographer. However, he soon became a thief and a runaway, and he spent various periods in prisons and psychiatric clinics, before being sent to the agricultural penitentiary at Mettray at the age of fifteen. He joined the army at eighteen as a way of getting out of Mettray, and he spent the next fifteen years either in the Army, in prison for further petty thefts, or as a vagrant.

In jail during 1941 and 1942, Genet wrote his first important work, an autobiographical novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, which would be privately printed in 1943. In 1942 he also met – or was 'discovered' by – an old Diaghilev associate, Jean Cocteau. For Cocteau, Genet was a 'miracle' whose 'obscenity is never obscene'. Cocteau was inspired by Genet's early work because 'a great, magnificent sweep dominates the whole thing'. Genet's biographer notes that Cocteau in his turn would 'leave a lasting mark on Genet – practically, because Cocteau would launch his public career, but spiritually as well, since it would be Cocteau's example that Genet would follow and adapt, then finally reject'.[3] In a prodigious period of work after his release in 1944 and until 1947, Genet would write various narratives exploring scenes of criminality, including the novels *Miracle of the Rose*, *Funeral Rites*, *Querelle of Brest*, and *A Thief's Journal*, as well as poetry, and the plays *Deathwatch* and *The Maids*. When he went to work with the Ballets de Paris in 1948, he was forging links to the old Diaghilevian avant-garde beyond Cocteau. Petit seemed to wish to revive the excitement of the Ballets Russes seasons, and gathered other remnants of the Diaghilev circle about him. Soon Genet became friendly with men such as Boris

Kochno and Christian 'Bébé' Bérard, while former Ballets Russes composer Darius Milhaud provided the music for Genet's ballet, *'adame Miroir*.

For all its famous antecedents, the Ballets de Paris was a relatively anti-establishment group. Petit had been trained at the hierarchical and tradition-bound Paris Opéra, where he had been a Lifar *protégé*. But he chose at the age of twenty to join with other young talents to make more exciting and innovative ballets as the Ballets des Champs Élysées. This group broke up, and Petit, with the backing of Cocteau and Kochno, formed the Ballets de Paris. Although he benefited from the support and ideas of old-school controversialists in Cocteau, Kochno, and Bérard, Petit was also heavily involved with the emerging generation, including dance star Jean Babilée, artist Léonor Fini, and the choreographer of *'adame Miroir*, Janine Charrat. Genet may have been drawn by the bisexual and intensely charismatic Petit, or by the desire to work with his new friend, Fini, a flamboyant Italian-Argentinian lesbian who had made the designs for Balanchine's *Le Palais de cristal* in 1947. But, as we will see, Genet also had an older, deeper sense of affiliation with ballet.

'adame Miroir has not been revived, and in the event, Genet was disappointed by the company's efforts to realise his ideas. He was especially unhappy with Petit's dancing, which was too winsome and effete for the characters and the world that Genet had imagined. However, Genet's libretto for *'adame Miroir*, and his references to ballet elsewhere in his work, reveal once again how ballet could function as frame and material for a queer sensibility. Genet's libretto is only the final version of an interest that can be traced in some of Genet's major works, and especially in his novels.

This interest emerges most clearly in his first novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1943). This was not a reliable autobiographical narrative (he combines his own experiences with those of others), but among all his novels it is the one that constitutes an extended treatment of his own background.[4] His protagonist, Culafroy, is, like himself, a public ward who has been fostered with a family in a mean country village (and the name again invokes 'culs' or 'arses', along with an implied psychological sensitivity or trauma of 'effroi'). The novel tells of the boy's dull, lonely life, and his subsequent escape to Paris and to the life of a petty criminal and sexual deviant. Culafroy's life is rendered with a disordering or Surrealist extravagance. Genet tells us directly that the novel is not the best form for Culafroy's 'Saga', because language is too weighty and too precise. He writes that the narrative should be a ballet, but as it is not he will at least try to lighten his words with 'expressions

that are trivial, empty, hollow, and invisible'.[5] At this moment, he values ballet as self-consciously artificial, fanciful, and escapist, and as a form that is oriented toward expressiveness and pleasure. As such, it represents a rejection of the petty, grasping environment of the village. Culafroy grabs onto ballet as something that gives a better justification to his outsider status. He is one of the 'vagrant children for whom the world is imprisoned in a magic lattice, which they themselves weave about the globe with toes as hard and as agile as Pavlova's'.[6] In Pavlova he finds an attractive version of his own homelessness (all stars are essentially homeless). Like her, he must weave a 'magic lattice' out of his difference; he must invent a self that is to one side of the ordinary life that has excluded him. He must re-imagine that exclusion to the effect that he is free and the normal world is 'imprisoned'.

Genet also relates ballet more specifically to homosexual desire. When the narrator remembers a soldier's smile, he writes that it causes a pointe-step to 'blossom' in his chest. This use of ballet to signal the birth of queer desire becomes more obvious when Culafroy, still a boy, meets another village outsider, the 'thievish, brutal, and coarse' snake-catcher, Alberto. Culafroy is drawn to Alberto, who makes him touch the snakes he has caught. Acquiescing to the older boy's authority, Culafroy learns to like the otherwise ugly snakes, and this invokes and acts as prelude to a desire for Alberto. Having overcome his 'uncontrollable repulsion for reptiles', Culafroy is ready to break other taboos, including that of touching another youth's penis. But for Genet, this marriage of two males implies a birth of the feminine in one of them. It is precisely after his encounter with the 'true cock' that is Alberto that Culafroy tries to dance on pointe for the first time. Alberto's phallic masculinity induces in Culafroy the queer-feminine of the ballet that he has read about in *Screen Weekly*:

> [With] an amazing sense of divination, this child, who had never seen a dancer, who had never seen a stage or any actor, understood the page-long article dealing with such matters as figures, entrechats, jetés-battus, tutus, toe-shoes, drops, footlights, and ballet.[7]

Lacking any other queer cultural model, ballet is the form that presents itself to Culafroy, as if it had been waiting to give shapes and a vocabulary to his feelings. It is so foreign to him that he cannot know if he has understood it or not, but that very foreignness means that ballet corresponds to his sense of his own difference. Ballet allows him to believe that he has a coherent, if unusual, identity. It permits him a

sense of destiny in a life that is otherwise made up of a series of accidents. Enlivened and encouraged by this discovery, his boy-life becomes a 'perpetual ballet' in which the countryside is filled with 'a host of figurines who thought they were dancers in white tulle tutus, but who nonetheless remained a pale schoolboy in a black smock looking for mushrooms or dandelions'. Ballet permits and becomes the sign of Culafroy's unnatural love; but in placing these scenes in the countryside – and beyond the eyes and the values of the village – Genet allows the relationship to seem a potent natural phenomenon.[8]

Genet tends to model homosexual desire on a conventional image of heterosexuality. In the homosexual pairing, as with Alberto and Culafroy, he locates a masculine and a feminine, an active and a passive. But at times he modifies this idea, combining masculine and feminine in the same figure. To this end, he again draws on ballet, and especially on the figure of Nijinsky. Culafroy becomes the drag-queen Divine, and his lover, Darling, represents a queer oscillation between masculine and feminine. Darling is observed sleeping with 'the heel of one foot on the instep of the other', and when waking 'his eager face offered itself, as it bent backward facing heaven, that, when standing, he would tend to make the basket movement we see Nijinsky making in the old photos where he is dressed in shredded roses'.[9] The reference is to the Diaghilev-produced ballet, *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911), and to one of the most famous of all ballet images. As discussed in Chapter 4, Nijinsky was considered remarkable in this role of the spectre because he seemed to make visible a new kind of masculine beauty. He was very strongly built, and with his thick neck and small head drawings of him often deliberately or unconsciously stressed the idea of his entire body as a phallus. Nijinsky was almost grotesquely male, like Alberto and his snakes. But in *Le Spectre de la rose* he was dressed in the prettiest of costumes, and he incarnated a mischievously flitting, indeterminately sexualised being. Darling, too, is offered as a phallic being (the narrator describes the immensity and beauty of his penis), but when Genet wishes to characterise Darling's confounding mix of masculine and feminine, he turns to Nijinsky. Or rather he acknowledges that the Diaghilevian image is what enables or gives form to his own. Indeed, the title, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, suggests, among other references, a play on Nijinsky's persona of the *rose*. (The other references would most obviously include a deliberately sacrilegious co-optation of the Virgin, but also perhaps an echo of the 'Lady of the Camellias').[10]

Ballet also features, somewhat improbably, in *Querelle of Brest* (1947), Genet's novel about sailors. Querelle, his hero, is a thief, a drug

smuggler, and a murderer. At one point, Querelle needs to persuade an acquaintance to trust him, and he does so by staging a burglary by which the friend profits. At the moment of the burglary, Querelle imagines himself as one of the Russian highwaymen of legend who stopped Marie Taglioni's coach in the middle of a forest. Instead of robbing her, the highwaymen compelled Taglioni to dance. In imagining himself as highwayman, and his hapless colleague as the ballerina, Querelle romanticises his exploits. He allegorises his own attempts to turn the chaotic criminality of his life into a coherent story of power and seduction.

Ballet is otherwise unimportant in *Querelle*, but the novel is of interest here because it was the most significant precursor of Genet's ballet, and helps to explain its meanings and intentions. We might recall Fonteyn's heavily ironic comment that Genet's ballet was 'about sailors, as I suppose one might have expected'. Historically, the all-male nature of life at sea led to the understanding that sailors were more interested in or susceptible to same-sex activity. Various sources, from sailor's diaries, to court cases, to the novels of Herman Melville, to the paintings of Paul Cadmus, indicate a frequent expectation of sex among sailors, and between sailors and men who sought their company.[11] The sea also has metaphorical possibilities, in that, among many other things, it can represent the unknown of homosexuality. Putting to sea can represent a birth into a different self. Genet's interest in sailors indicates his homosexuality, but it also points to his Existentialist affiliations. Given the Existentialist belief that it was necessary to define one's own reality in the face of an otherwise absurd and meaningless universe, the sea becomes a powerful symbol. Genet suggests that the sea 'is the natural symbol of liberty'.[12] In its empty expanses and its constant movement, it confronts us with the solitude and the uncertainty within which we may discover authenticity. Genet was so interesting and useful for Sartre because his writing offers so many locations and acts that might enable or even enforce an Existential rebirth. To take to sea, or to murder, or to perform the masculine self-murder of sodomy, forces the male subject beyond the known and into an authentically independent state. The Existentialists found in Genet a wonderful resource, in that he focuses obsessively on composites of sailors, criminals, and homosexuals: men who may be supposed to live beyond the rule of bourgeois morality.

Genet, however, thought it was ridiculous to see homosexuality, after the manner of Sartre, as a choice that enabled authenticity. In his own work, homosexuality is usually rendered as a deeply rooted – perhaps an essential – condition, and not a choice. Also, Genet indicates

the dangers, the narcissistic entrapments, that beset the Existentialist hero. There is the sense, with regard to the hero's homosexuality and his alienation, not that one 'causes' the other, but that these two states are endlessly twinned. Alienation produces a desire for the other man, and/or the experience of the desire for the other man is traumatic and alienating. This is the torment faced by Genet's hero (the *querelle* or 'quarrel' alluded to in the name and the title). The handsome sailor seeks an authentic or stable sense of self, but this only leads him more deeply into narcissistic alienation. As one reviewer would describe Genet's ballet, *Querelle* too is an instance of 'Sartrean narcissism'.[13] Querelle's acts of rebellion do not lead to independence, so much as to a need to invent and perform yet more possible selves. He exists in relation to others' fantasies; he is structured by the desires that surround him and, for all that he attempts to betray or cast off this inauthentic social self, he will always find himself entering into further performances that will necessitate further betrayals. Like Culafroy worshipping the ultimate reality of Alberto's phallus, Querelle seeks some more final, concrete sense of selfhood not through rebellion and independence, but through subjection. In the brothel-owner, Nono, he sees a 'brutal vitality' that will give definite limits to his sense of self, and will annihilate all that is secondary or inessential:

> What he felt was a new *nature* entering into him and there establishing itself, and he had the exquisite satisfaction of knowing that it was having the effect of subtly traducing him and changing him into a catamite.[14]

In surrendering to Nono, Querelle practises what Genet calls 'self-obliteration' (and the names again seem emblematic at this point, as Querelle says 'Yes' to Nono). But this only gives rise to a different and monstrous self. His desire to be mastered by a Fascistic other only gives him a momentary sense of security: 'It was very restful, very comforting, to feel oneself so deeply possessed and to sense inside one such a sovereign presence'.[15] Ultimately, such acts of subjection do not so much confirm his sense of his own existence as make him feel even less stable. He has betrayed his own manhood, and this pushes him ever further into an unending cycle of murder and betrayal. The search for an ultimate authority, in the self or another, only leads Querelle to act out ever more desperately his interlocked selves of sailor, criminal, homosexual, and traitor. Seeking authentication, he finds that he must continue with the task of reinventing and performing a self. This returns us to Querelle as highwayman, staging incidents that

compel his associates to 'dance'. Having no confirmed self or role, he is left with the burden of having to stage relations with others. He creates moments of consolation, in which he becomes witness to his own power.

Genet's ballet *'adame Miroir* is a condensed version of his novelistic preoccupations. It invokes many of the themes and images that are to be found in *Our Lady of the Flowers*, *Querelle of Brest*, and other texts. The ballet is indeed 'about sailors', and, like *Querelle*, it is about the disorientation of the subject under the experience of 'criminal' desires. The title was meant to suggest the grotesque excitements of the fairground: Madame Miroir is a strange attraction, the presiding genius of a hall of mirrors. One goes into the hall, and sees oneself transformed into various shapes that, however grotesque, are still oneself. The experience may be funny, terrifying, or a mixture of both. In dropping the initial M to make ''adame Miroir', Genet suggests the accent of Belleville, a working-class area of Paris that was associated with underworld gangs. But Genet also liked the resulting 'Adam'. In the libretto, he invites us to think of the word 'Madame' as seen 'in a slightly cloudy mirror, the image blurred and deformed'.[16] His title indicates confusion, in that the ideal, original man, Adam, extends into more than he is supposed to be. The suggestion is that, if Adam looks hard enough in the mirror, he will see a woman. Yet in seeing a woman, Adam sees an image of himself that is incomplete, or blurred and deformed.

The dance explores these possibilities. It presents us with a sailor who 'has no past' (a fact that is Adamic and Existentialist) and who is young and beautiful. Genet explains that, throughout the ballet, the sailor's face should remain impassive, and that it would be more beautiful if he were to begin dancing with his eyes closed. He has entered into a hall of mirrors, in which he becomes confused. He bumps into the mirrors and dances faster and faster until he falls to the ground. But his reflection or Image comes to life. At first he is afraid of his Image. He attacks it, and then retreats before it. But little by little, he becomes curious and gains in courage. He touches the Image, and they kiss. In the act of kissing, the Image takes a cigarette from the sailor's mouth into his own, and the two begin a stylised form of waltz. Genet stipulated that this waltz should be in a close embrace, 'extremely lustful' and 'erotic'. The Image then takes a rose from the sailor's belt into his mouth. They are about to join together and dance again when a domino enters. The 'domino' is the traditional guise for masked balls, and in this case she is a veiled, cloaked woman. She wears purple silk, black gloves, and carries a black fan. The men dance with the domino.

She then stabs the sailor with the shaft of her fan. She pulls him by the hair down the hall of mirrors, and they vanish. The domino then returns for the Image. She dresses the Image in her cloak and gloves, and in unveiling herself in this way we learn that the domino is also the sailor. But now the sailor is a sailor once more, and he seeks to evade his Image-as-domino. He escapes into a mirror. The domino is left with only the sailor's beret as proof of what has taken place. Then, via a trick of the mirrors, the domino disappears from the stage like the mast of a ship sinking beyond the horizon.

Although it is hard to imagine a scenario further removed from the airy poetry of Romantic ballet, there are echoes of the great tradition. In the 'lost' impassiveness of the sailor's trance-like state, there is a correspondence with the wilis and swan-maidens that are under the sway of sinister powers. Equally, when the sailor dances faster and faster, only to fall and then to be rescued, this reproduces the drama of *Giselle* (1841). In that ballet, Albrecht is condemned to dance until he is dead, but he is rescued by the intervention of the ghost of Giselle. If Genet was aware of these echoes, he did not wish to develop them in the style of the movement. He wanted the dancers' movements to be earth-bound and vernacular. With his slow, 'lustful' male–male waltzes, Genet rendered the homoerotic potential of classical ballet in much more obvious form. The sailor desires his own Image – he experiences a homoerotic desire – but is also afraid of it. The exchange of the cigarette and of the flower indicates an exchange of gratifications. The passing of the cigarette by mouth suggests fellatio, but also the sharing of a phallic desire that seems essentially male. The exchange of the flower perhaps suggests sodomy, but also points to the feminising possibility of homosexuality. This feminising implication of love for another man is then realised in the figure of the domino. She represents death: the death of the heterosexual self, but also death as punishment for failing to respect the taboos of conventional masculine selfhood. The domino is also the 'Madame' of the scene, the monstrous she-male that the sailor has become in looking in the mirror, in allowing himself to desire his own sex. The Image is left with the beret, a fetish that summons the impassive masculinity of the sailor, and that, in its materiality, seems to counter the phantasmic domino. The beret reminds us of Genet's own admission that he is always drawn to 'objects in which the quality of males is violently concentrated', such as badges, belt buckles, cigarette lighters, and switchblades. In *The Thief's Journal* he comments of a policeman's badge that to touch it would be 'as if I had been opening his fly'.[17] The material object is a substitute for the phallic presence of the sailor, of Alberto, or Nono. It signifies the

possibility of an indivisible maleness, an ultimate real that produces the secondary figure of the feminine.

At times, Genet seems to present homosexuality as an inferior state, as manhood alienated from itself and reduced to the feminine. The conditions of his temperament, his upbringing and, more generally, of his society, seem to have produced twinned and ineradicable tendencies toward homophobia and misogyny. Yet his idea of an undeviating masculinity is of a man who is not so much heterosexual as dominant and self-contained. The feminine-homosexual is figured as a necessary and inevitable side effect, and as proof of, or testament to, manliness. It is also, at times, figured as attractive, especially when it is represented in balletic terms. Suddenly a pointe-step springs up in the heart; sailors embrace and dance; a lonely boy is transformed into the powerful and resilient figure of a ballerina. Genet's work is structured around such moments of wondrous revelation. He envisages ultimate failure for his characters, though, in that their moments of honest confrontation with desire are moments of criminality, and all sorts of baleful consequences must follow.

Ballet was not a lasting and conspicuous presence in Genet's work, nor is he especially important to the history of ballet. One suspects that his dealings with the form in the 1940s were an effect of his interest in the young Ballets de Paris crowd, and his friendship with Cocteau and others of the Diaghilev generation. Nonetheless, in ballet Genet found something that he could use to precipitate homosexuality, to create a situation, a logic, and a shape for it. Ballet enabled him to envisage an attractive and powerful otherness within an otherwise intractable reality. But clearly, in these various scenes of sailors and criminals, Genet was abandoning a tradition as much as he was reworking it. For all that Genet may have been the 'discovery' of a Ballet Russes insider, Querelle and the men in *'adame Miroir* did not conform to the charming sailor as embodied by Lifar in *Les Matelots* (1925) or *The Triumph of Neptune* (1926). Nor are Genet's working-class heroes after the same insistently naïve pattern of *Filling Station* (1938) or *Fancy Free* (1944). Fonteyn seemed, in her ironic dismissal of *'adame Miroir*, to deplore its overt queering of ballet. It is a fairly safe assumption that others, too, would have deplored it. If ballet tradition had enabled queer expression, it was also – for men such as Kirstein, Ashton, and Petit – a way of denying it. For the most part, they felt at home with the ambiguities of 'discretion'; they had little desire to proclaim their sexuality, nor to allow an explicit articulation of the connection between their sexuality and their work. In a way, a man such as Genet threatened to 'spoil it all'.

Aside from the explicitness of his representations of homosexuality, Genet represented it in a very particular form. In his work, the dichotomy between a contemptuous heterosexist culture and a guilty and self-abnegating homosexuality reappears as the homosexual encounter itself. The notion of a distinct heterosexuality is encircled, embraced, and denied. It is 'traduced' as Querelle is 'traduced', whether by Genet's restless imagination or by the insistent mirrorings of same-sex institutions – prisons, ships, criminal fraternities. Genet accentuates and destabilises traditional images and forms. And if, in the process, he seems in part to confirm homosexual abjection, he also makes it the basis of a new power and a new ideal. There is, within the psychological nightmare of *'adame Miroir*, a foundational tenderness, even if it consists of nothing more than roses and cigarette smoke. As Fonteyn noted of *Le Chant d'amour*, there is some 'poetry' to be found within the prison.

CONCLUSION

Traces

This queer history, which has from the start been a reduced version of a longer, fuller story, becomes altogether untenable as it progresses through the twentieth century. The idioms of ballet proliferate, especially as they hybridise with modern and postmodern dance, and 'ballet' becomes ever less useful as a defining term. Equally, queerness too begins to signify differently, and it would require another book to take account of the range of work. In place of an attempt to cover that range, and by way of conclusion, this chapter picks out a few works that offer specific comment on the traditions that have been traced so far. The chapter includes explicit revisions of the tradition in versions of *Swan Lake* by John Neumeier (1976) and Matthew Bourne (1995). It also explores the way in which ballet exists in residual form in two postmodern works, Pina Bausch's *Nelken* (1982) and Angelin Preljocaj's *Casanova* (1998).

To begin with the 'new swans', the figure that still haunts the tradition – even more, perhaps, than Tchaikovsky – is Ludwig II of Bavaria, or 'Mad King Ludwig'. As noted in Chapter 3, Ludwig, like the hero of *Swan Lake*, Siegfried, was a German prince who shocked society by renouncing suitable brides, and who had an obsession with swans. From *fin de siècle* novels and paintings through to Visconti's film, *Ludwig* (1972), Ludwig's story has been a recurrent feature of the queer tradition. The correspondences between Ludwig and Siegfried have also been the subject of further exploration. The German theatre designer Jürgen Rose was especially keen to use Ludwig and one of his greatest *folies de grandeur*, the castle of Neuschwanstein (or 'new swan building'), as inspiration and setting for a production of *Swan Lake*. He introduced Neuschwanstein in a revised production of John Cranko's *Swan Lake* at Munich in 1970, but Cranko's version, first produced in 1963, was more oriented towards Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Rose, however, found an ideal partner in John Neumeier, the German-American choreographer and director of the Hamburg State Opera.

One evening in 1974, after dinner and a few drinks, Rose explained his idea to Neumeier, who was struck by the number of connections between Ludwig, Siegfried, and Tchaikovsky. In his essay on the development of his version of *Swan Lake*, Neumeier does not focus explicitly on homosexuality as the defining topic. For him, the great advantage of twinning Ludwig with Siegfried was that it made Siegfried into a realistic and credible character. Neumeier explained that for him to work on the ballet he needed a sense of an interesting, likable man. His problem with Siegfried had always been that the characterisation in *Swan Lake* is 'fairly thin'. Siegfried's existence is peculiarly insubstantial for Neumeier, in that the score does not give him his own musical motif. But by superimposing Ludwig onto Siegfried, Neumeier could create a central figure that met the choreographer's own taste for psychological realism.[1]

The result of Neumeier and Rose's discussion was *Illusionen – wie Schwanensee* (or 'Illusions – like a swan lake'). This version includes extended excerpts of the Ivanov-Petipa choreography, but these excerpts are framed by the Ludwig narrative. The result is that the ballet literalises the queer potential of the original, and provides a psychological rendering of the 'double life' of the nineteenth-century homosexual. The action centres on the character of Ludwig, who, at the start of the ballet, has been declared insane. He has been locked up in a bare dark room in one of his own great palaces, and he is troubled by the 'Man in Shadows'. This black-clad figure seems real, but is, we must assume, a symptom of the King's delusions. The Man in Shadows disappears, and Ludwig begins to dream of his past life. He remembers the day on which the foundation-stone was laid for a new palace, and the memory is recreated before us on the stage. The scene is filled with bare-chested artisans who give themselves to work and then to games and feats of strength. The King loves the company of these unselfconsciously physical young men and, along with his friend, Count Alexander, he joins in the fun. They are then joined by the Queen Mother and by the King's and the Count's fiancées, and all enjoy a picnic and dances. In the midst of the pleasure, though, the King falls prey to a strange gloom. He moves away from the rest. His fiancée, Princess Natalia, comes to him to try to help him, but he sends her away and is left, once more, with the Man in Shadows. In this way, the ballet alternates between a bleak, imprisoned present with the Man in Shadows and a sunlit world of memory and dream.

Ludwig's next dream is of *Swan Lake*, in which he assumes the part of Siegfried; the Man in Shadows appears as Rothbart. Following the pattern of the ballet, Ludwig then remembers a masked ball that he

had attended as Siegfried, and that Natalia had attended as Odette. But the Man in Shadows/Rothbart appears at the ball and precipitates the King's descent into madness. In the final scene, Natalia visits Ludwig in his locked room and tells him once more that she loves him. But Ludwig knows that he cannot escape his fate. He sends her away and turns toward the Man in Shadows.

Neumeier's *Illusionen* presents us with a hero who falls in love with or identifies with a fantasy of heterosexuality, as suggested by the love between Siegfried and Odette. Further, Ludwig's social and political authority is dependent on his ability to recreate this fantasy in his own life, with Natalia. But, even as he tries to act this out, he is tormented by a darker and more persistent self. Like Tchaikovsky, who was driven to a nervous breakdown by his attempt to live a conventional married life, Ludwig is tormented by the allure and the impossibility of the heterosexual romance. He may also desire the friendly artisans who build his castles, but he is not one of them. He discovers his alter ego in the dark, alienated figure of Rothbart. In *Swan Lake* (1895), Rothbart uses his sorcery to bring Odette and Siegfried into his power. In one sense, Ludwig is Rothbart, in that his desires prey upon scenes of normality, whether the artisans or Siegfried and Odette. But, in being claimed by Rothbart, Ludwig is both predator and victim. For all the feudal dressing of his environment, Ludwig again seems a classic instance of the tormented and blackmailed late nineteenth-century, upper-class homosexual. He is revealed as a man whose desires are dangerous to him, and who must, at whatever cost, approximate the models of desire that he sees around him. 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.[2]

Neumeier's *Illusionen* is a historically specific representation of closeted homosexuality. It presents us with a self-hating and doomed homosexual, but this is not seen as the essential state or condition of the man who desires his own sex. Neumeier and Rose relate the 'doom' of homosexuality to a particular set of social conditions. A more recent revision of *Swan Lake* was choreographed in a modern dance vocabulary by Matthew Bourne for his 'Adventures in Motion Pictures' company. Premièred in 1995, Bourne's version introduces imaginative and far-reaching changes to the dance-text and the narrative. And yet, perhaps it also confirms Neumeier's vision of *Swan Lake* as a tragedy of homosexuality.

Bourne's version, designed by Lez Brotherston, is loosened from specific historical references. The look is that of the 1950s and 1960s;

there are beehive hairstyles and bell-skirts, but the characters also use mobile telephones. The design has a cartoon quality after the manner of Roy Liechtenstein, in that the décor has an imprecise but self-consciously 'retro' aspect. The scenery is more expressionistic than realistic, in that it is reduced to a few massive, emblematic features: the pillars of the palace walls; the Prince's huge bed; a ballroom illuminated by torches in giant, gilded fists that project from the wall. This *Swan Lake* features a royal family, but with the brutal décor and an Evita-esque Queen there is also the sense of a Fascistic dynasty or junta. For all the nostalgic, 'retro' charm, the outsize dimensions of the sets announce a concern with the more extreme forms of power.

We first see the Prince as a boy asleep in the vast bed. He clutches a soft-toy swan, and he tosses and turns in the throes of a tormenting dream of a Man-Swan. Perhaps the suggestion is that the boy's innocent preferences and affections – indicated by the toy swan – will take on a dangerous aspect as he moves into adulthood. The size of the bed seems to allude to the impact that the boy's desires will have on his life, although more generally it indicates that the boy's life will be overwhelmed by the powerful forces that surround him. This latter sense is confirmed in the opening scenes. The Prince is dominated by a cold Queen Mother and by a Machiavellian Private Secretary. The Prince is rapidly transformed into a bored and frustrated adult, whose only relationship is with a good-hearted but trashy girlfriend.

One night, however, he escapes from the Palace and goes to a bar that is full of spivs, prostitutes, and sailors. He gets drunk and is thrown out. He wanders around in despair, and finds himself by a lake. He writes a suicide note and is about to jump into the lake when the Man-Swan appears. With a bare, whitened torso, short white hair, a black 'beak' mark on his forehead, and white, shaggily fringed leggings, the Swan performs a series of sinuously captivating arabesques and *jetés*. He is soon joined by a corps of male swans. The style of movement is weighty and athletic, but the swans also make menacingly insinuating approaches to the Prince. Neither effeminate nor extravagantly macho, the swans move in twists, turns, and leaps, and their swan-ness is cleverly signified by raised, turned, neck-like arms; backward, wing-like arms; and arms held forward and crossed at the wrist (this last being the classic 'folded wings' gesture of *Swan Lake* and of Fokine's 'Dying Swan'). The Prince dances with the Swan in a series of sturdily erotic adagios, intercut by the more agitated swooping and clustering of the corps. At times, it seems as though the swans' interest in the Prince is aggressive, and the Swan seems, Giselle-like, to intervene. This is not a particularly pretty or sentimental lake scene. It turns upon

the competitive posturings of pack animals, with tests and displays that may be preliminary to actual violence.

When the Swan and the swan-corps disappear, the Prince is alone again, but he is happy. His childhood vision has returned in the noble but unmistakably sexual form of the Swan. The audience may wonder if the Swan and the corps are real, or projections of the lonely and desperate Prince. The suggestion of delusion becomes stronger in the following 'Black Act' or royal ball. The Swan seems to be present in the form of a swaggering young man. He is unshaven; he wears black leather trousers, and carries a riding crop; there is a strong hint of sadism and 'rough trade'. He proceeds to dance in an aggressively sexual way with several women, and – introducing echoes of a Freudian *Hamlet* – he and the Queen discover a special rapport. He also dances with the Prince in a sadomasochistic *pas de deux* in which he forces the Prince into various holds. But the lighting changes during the dance between the dark stranger and the Prince, indicating that this interlude is the Prince's fantasy. In his jealousy over the Queen's dalliance with the stranger, the Prince aims a gun at them, and a shot is heard. But it is the Prince's girlfriend who falls dead, and the Prince is dragged away. The stranger smiles knowingly at the Private Secretary, who smiles back. The Private Secretary also carries a gun, and we realise at this point that the stranger is an accomplice of the Secretary, and that the two have used their knowledge of the Prince's weakness to provoke the incident.

In the final act, the Prince is seen in his bed once again. He wakes and wanders around dementedly. Under the direction of the Secretary, he is held down and given what appears to be electro-convulsive shock therapy. He is returned to bed, and his vision of the Swan and swans returns. The corps is overtly threatening on this occasion. They separate the Swan from the Prince, and seem to kill the Swan. The Prince falls dead in his bed. The Queen enters; she clasps her son and weeps. In the background, however, the Swan is seen, above the bed, holding the Prince-as-boy in his arms. The Swan and the Prince, as in the 1895 version, have escaped into death, and into love.

Bourne's *Swan Lake*, like Neumeier's, capitalises on the symptomatic crises of its great precursor. In conversations with the critic and dance historian Alastair Macaulay, Bourne mentioned his sense – both sincere and campish – of the double or subliminal possibilities of the earlier version:

> The Prince always interested me quite a lot in the traditional *Swan Lake* anyway. I suppose it was the possibilities of what

> was really going on. After all, he turns down one batch of women his mother puts before him in Act One; then he turns down another batch in Act Three, more emphatically. With some dancers in the role, I couldn't help giggling.[3]

Bourne seems to de-sublimate the traditional ballet by making the swans into homosexuals who, living in a repressive society, must cruise each other under the cover of darkness. The various *pas de deux* between the Swan and the Prince leave us in no doubt that this is a powerfully romantic and erotic attraction, and the other swans seem, unmistakably, to act out jealousy that an outsider has drawn the interest of the most conspicuous among them. The swans seem mistrustful of a man who wishes to visit rather than to join them. But it might make more sense to remember that the swans may only be the Prince's delusion. If we try to tease out the psychological significance of the swans, as the Oedipal nature of the drama invites us to do, the Swan and swans represent the Prince's attraction to and repulsion from homosexual experience. He idealises his longing in the noble, romantic image of the Swan, while the creepy swan-corps expresses his guilt and homophobic revulsion.

For the Prince, and for his choreographer, such problems are resolved by the united-in-death ending. In a way, then, homosexuality is introduced, but also evaded. This sense is also confirmed by the casting in the tremendously successful first production. In casting Adam Cooper, a well-known heterosexual principal with the Royal Ballet, as the Swan, the homoerotic–homophobic tensions of this *Swan Lake* become intertwined with tensions between classical and modern dance. This production is modern dance in that the choreography is very grounded; it lacks the refined and dynamic footwork of ballet, and it is defined more by expressionist movement than by line. But Bourne created on Swan-Cooper a style of movement that is more prone to stasis, that makes use of Cooper's ability to find and maintain a pure line. The noble Swan, then, has this highly geared, finely legible classical aspect. Bourne's own modern dancers lack this virtuoso clarity, and this seems to compound the implication that homosexuality is a messy and inferior state.

The choreography also contains allusions to the classical tradition that suggest an opposition between the Ideal-balletic-romantic and the social-modern-sexual. Bourne makes use of signature gestures. Aside from the Ivanov-Petipa 'folded wings' pose that all the swans adopt at various points, the Swan is repeatedly given the gesture of wrists crossed above the head: the modified fifth position that Nijinsky

made famous in *Le Spectre de la rose*. The Swan, Bourne seems to suggest, is historical, sculptural, and true; the swans, on the other hand, with their restless twisting and turning, are ambiguous and unreliable.[4] Dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster argues that Bourne's version reduces homosexuality to stereotypes. Although my reading is at odds with hers in some respects, she anticipates my argument in stating that homosexuality is 'rendered deficient and pathetic on the one hand, and unpredictable and bestial on the other'. Critic Bruce Fleming is similarly troubled by the ending, which signifies for him a shameful retreat: 'No growing up! Bourne seems to be ordering. No coming out! No normalcy! Back into the closet! Back to fantasy! Back to the womb!' For Fleming, Bourne offers a 'titillating but ultimately deeply conservative parable'.[5]

In both Neumeier's and Bourne's versions of *Swan Lake*, there is the sense that ballet must confront all the queer possibilities that had been buried under a more acceptable narrative. However, we might think that these confrontations produce a new evasiveness of their own. While, in both cases, there is the implication of an unveiling, we should not see either as a final, true *Swan Lake* (and neither choreographer argues that his version is somehow more 'authentic' than earlier productions).

Pina Bausch and Angelin Preljocaj exist within an entirely different tradition. Their choreography is relentlessly and obviously anti-classical; or, rather, they have explored a kind of dance-theatre that is to one side of the classical. Yet, Bausch and Preljocaj have not rejected the classical in the thoroughgoing way of some of their contemporaries. There is no complete ideological reaction against ballet. On the contrary, there are odd moments of balletic resurgence within their work, and these moments also signal the resurgence of a queer thematics.

Bausch's *Nelken* (1982) is set against a black backdrop, but the entire stage is covered with large, upright, pink carnations (*Nelken* being German for 'carnations' or 'pinks'). The pink–black contrast announces the main dramatic and psychological oppositions of the piece. The world on the stage is patrolled by black-suited, tough-looking men who seem to be police or semi-official enforcers of some kind. The black-suited men ask to see passports, or they guard the other characters with the help of Alsatian dogs. Those whom they guard seem infantile or troubled; but they seem to struggle as much with their own panicked, emotional incoherence as with the fact that they are so closely monitored. The guarded characters – men and women – undress and put on loose-fitting, silken dresses. These are dated, 'party dresses' that give the dancers the appearance of children

who have found a dressing-up box. Many of their subsequent activities are child-like, as they bunny-hop around the stage, and have tantrums. But this is no nostalgic or therapeutic return to childhood. It is compulsive, demented behaviour, as though the characters are submerged in traumas from which they cannot 'grow up'. The black-suited figures survey these scenes of disorder, but there is also the implication that their totalitarian watchfulness contributes to or enforces the infantile dementia.

Given the queerly Edenic or Elysian connotations of the pink carnations, the scenes combine aspects of paradise, a lunatic asylum, and a police state. If the extremity of the situation seems to encourage or even require disturbed behaviour, it also seems to allow other kinds of activities to flourish under the cover of dementia. Early on in the drama, for instance, a smartly dressed man comes forward and begins to sign and to speak the lyrics to 'The Man I Love'. This seems a further flouting of black-suited normality, in that the song is traditionally for a woman to sing. There is also the peculiarity of the 'double translation', from woman to man, and from sung to signed. The man speaks and signs in a quiet, intent manner. The audience often laughs at this point; but it is a nervous, mocking laugh, as though the man were doing something demented or, at least, ridiculous. But, as the man continues in his gentle, intent way, the awareness emerges that the man is not, at all, infantile or demented, but that the audience's laughter is both a kind of dementia and a kind of policing.

There are many other moments in *Nelken* that are similarly intricate, beautiful, and surprising. The incident initiates a concern with other languages and with the ability to locate within anxiety the possibility of strength. This is played out in relation to dance itself, and in relation to its different vocabularies. At one point, one of the dancer-actors breaks away from his activities and turns to berate the audience. We seem to him to have been unhappy or unimpressed with the performance. He yells at us, 'What do you want to see? *Manège*? *Grand jeté*?' (*Manège* is a difficult balletic feat, involving an *enchaînement* of steps – *pirouettes* and/or *jetés* – performed in a circle around the stage.) The dancer then hurls himself into a series of bravura classical movements before demanding once more, 'What else do you want to see? *Entrechat six*? As many as you want'. He begins his *entrechats*, but he then declares himself to be tired, and he stops.

What is the intention or effect of this sudden and aggressive referencing of the classical tradition? The dancer confronts the audience with what he takes to be the audience's expectations. He affects to despise our desire for the disciplined and pretty banalities of ballet. At

this point, ballet serves as a sign of the demand for order. We, monitors of this performance, require the incipient wildness of dance to be based within a known and regularised format. But there is a contradiction in the dancer's performance of what he affects to despise. He *has* mastered these virtuoso feats, and he seems – understandably – proud of his ability to bring them off. His brief exhibition is very much at odds with Bausch's more usual choreography. There is much in *Nelken* and other Bausch works that is not 'dance' at all, but 'expressionist theatre'. But there are also moments of dance that reveal an unusually subtle and humorous choreographic artistry. In one scene, the dancers perform a quirky but beautiful bent-over, swaying, shuffling dance on top of a table. In another scene, they form a long line that resembles the 'Kingdom of the Shades' scene from *La Bayadère* (1877). But whereas in *La Bayadère* the corps performs a stately series of arabesques, Bausch gives her dancers an eclectic combination of gestures, with Duncanesque, frieze-like poses being succeeded by intimate, musing rolls of hand and wrist. The procession offers a compelling mix of values, from the grand, stylised gesture to the casual and individualistic. In this way, the exactness of the classical *grand défilé* is transformed into a conga-like moment of approximate cohesion – a moment that will soon fall back into dementia.

If in *Nelken* ballet seems a rigid imposition, a learned, false, and exhausting language in comparison to the small-scaled charm of Bausch's own choreography, this sense is complicated by the way in which the performance ends. The man who had signed 'The Man I Love' comes onto the stage once more, again wearing his smart suit. He takes off the suit, and puts on one of the loose, silken party dresses. He then raises his arms above his head in a delicate, classical pose (the curved outline of the *bras en lyre*). It is a slightly forlorn pose, in that he is foolishly dressed, and he does not bother with the straight-backed, turned-out posture of ballet. It is as though he has finally accepted an idea of himself, and its proper or conventional guise. He tells us, seemingly in explanation of his cross-dressed, balletic queerness: 'Even in the Kindergarten I was different'. Then other dancers, male and female, come on to the stage, each in a party dress, and with their arms *en lyre*. In turn, they offer a brief phrase that explains why they became dancers: 'because it was easier than speaking'; 'because I saw *Sleeping Beauty*'; 'because I wanted to be different from the others'; 'because I fell in love with a dancer'. Once they have given their brief explanation, they join, one by one, a static ensemble in the middle of the stage. There they stand in their dresses, arms raised, forming a quaintly traditional grouping, like the famous nineteenth-century

lithographs of the sylphides or of the 'Pas de Quatre'. The dementia seems to have given way to a calm acceptance of alienation. This queerly happy ending is achieved by a return to the moment at which ballet enabled them to begin to explore their difference. It betokens a fondness for ballet as a foundational or initiatory moment, the first step, as it were, toward this final moment of more complex self-acceptance.

Moving to Angelin Preljocaj's *Casanova* (1998), we might begin with *his* explanation of why *he* became a dancer: 'Quite simply, it was about a girl'. Preljocaj was eleven years old, and the girl took dancing classes. She lent Preljocaj a book in which there was a photograph of Nureyev with the caption: 'Rudolph Nureyev – transfigured by dance!' The boy-meets-girl scenario becomes one, for the boy at least, of transcendent aspiration: 'He had a luminous quality. It made me want, also, to be transfigured and luminous. So I signed up for the dance class'. Preljocaj lost interest in dance in adolescence, but when, a few years later, he discovered that, in contemporary dance, 'you could invent a language with your body', his interest returned.[6]

Preljocaj now choreographs for his own company, Ballets Preljocaj, and for leading contemporary and classical companies around the world. We might think of him as a typically postmodern or deconstructive choreographer, although his work incorporates strong elements of Expressionism and of the French, German, and American modern dance traditions.[7] In creating *Casanova* (1998) with the Ballet de l'Opéra Nationale de Paris, he might seem to have chosen a charmingly roguish figure and a picturesque world. He might seem to have found a subject that would suit a great classical company and its ornate theatre. But, as Preljocaj was quick to make clear, he wished to do something that was 'far from Venice and its carnivals'. His ballet uses incidents from Casanova's life, but if Casanova's *History* is an account of desire, then Preljocaj seeks to offer the same thing with modern metaphors and images. His is a 'radiography' or an X-ray of desire.[8]

The dance begins with three chic male–female couples who perform truncated movements to a loud and monotonous electronic score. This gives way to a smooth, erotic meeting of the couples to the 'Blue Danube' waltz. But this is in turn offset by readings from a medical encyclopedia, giving details of the etiology of various sexually transmitted diseases. Throughout, the more poetic or transcendent possibilities of desire are punctured by a sense of the body as a biological machine. The characters may seek fulfilment through desire, but they are also tyrannised by it. Their behaviour is often programmatic and violent. Neither they nor we are permitted the traditional humanist

illusions of roundedness and stability. The more 'human' characters seem more anguished, in that they have some perception of how their agency – their power of choice – is compromised by social and biological forces. In one scene, a man who is naked to the waist struggles heroically up a wall that looks like a huge, flayed spine. As he keeps trying to climb up this enormous back, the musculature of his own back is brought out by the effort. In this moment, the character struggles with bodiliness, with being trapped within or measured against a massive corporeality; but the irony of this humanistic moment is that it produces him, for us, as a splendid body. Meanwhile, in the foreground, there is a corps of *écorchés*: women who wear costumes that make them resemble the skinned drawings and models of medical science. They move into and out of arabesques and attitudes with incredible slowness. They might put one in mind of the slow, zombie-like figures of *La Bayadère* and other *ballets blancs*, except that the mesmerising vision of an 'alternative world' is rendered here as the stillness of the dissection room. These eerie bodies await the climber on the wall in the way that undines and wilis used to wait for princes. The man seems strong and heroic in contrast to the *écorchés*, but eventually he must succumb to them; his attempt to rise above their stripped biological and mechanistic truth will end in failure.

The thematic aspects of *Casanova* gain complexity and interest from the way in which they are choreographed. Preljocaj claims that the dance must always go beyond the initial idea. For him, the idea is inevitably 'pulverised' by the choreographic process. The initial motive is not so much carried forward as reduced to barely recognisable elements, which may then form new compounds. Preljocaj's dance language fits with this understanding. His choreography is most obviously defined by its intense micro-inventiveness. He uses a lot of small-scaled movement, and especially movement that functions in terms of immediate modification or contradiction. The dancer performs a gesture, only to 'correct' it; this then becomes an *enchaînement* of brutally regimented adjustments.

The effect of this style – at once spasmodic and mechanistic – is to isolate the different parts of the body (the arm moves, then the head, then a leg, and so on). This produces a sense of a progress that is endlessly indirect, that works by a process of constant self-interruption. Brigitte Paulino-Neto makes the subtle and telling point that Preljocaj tends to 'privilege the extremities' – hands, wrists, feet, and ankles – and that this obsession with isolated detail works against the sense of a 'homogeneous' or 'global' body.[9] Preljocaj interrupts or qualifies this deconstructive implication in turn, though, with moments of academic

élan, of vernacular fluency, or with intensely rhythmical sequencing. With such choreography, Preljocaj seems to immerse his dancers within physiological and psychological determinisms, but also to indicate nostalgia and resistance.

Taking the choreographic together with the thematic, and looking especially at queerness in relation to heterosexuality and homosexuality, *Casanova* has a de-essentialising implication, in that the choreography for women is usually as athletic and as aggressive as the choreography for the men. The central, defining images and relationships are heterosexual, but they are not used to suggest stability or completion. As with the chic couples at the outset, or the man on the wall, Preljocaj's heterosexual behaviours and identities are often extreme, forced, exasperated, and violent. His choreography seems to exemplify a concept of queerness that is not related to homosexuality, nor to a deeply interiorised notion of heterosexuality. He explores various heterosexual acts and roles, all of which seem dysfunctional or in some way peculiar. He envisions heterosexuality – and most forms of relationship – as deeply troubled and troubling conditions, but also as necessary or perpetual issues.

What is especially curious about *Casanova*, however, is that when Preljocaj choreographs a male–male pairing, the movement becomes lyrical and balletic. The 'noise' of Vejvoda's electronic score gives way to a particularly tuneful excerpt from Bach, as two men come onto the stage. One of them then performs a series of stunning classical *jetés* and turns. He calls his partner to join him, but he then falls prey to a sudden weakness, and has to be supported by his partner. This becomes a pattern, as one moves about the stage in a series of ecstatic and flamboyant solos, while the other waits and supports. This scene in turn seems to allude to the traditional ballets to be seen in the Palais Garnier, in that it seems a *reprise* of the nighttime scenes in *Giselle*, in which Albrecht dances to the point of death, but is repeatedly rescued by Giselle. Preljocaj's male–male pairing stands out so strongly from the rest of *Casanova*, musically and choreographically, and above all in that it presents us with a speaking and sympathetic relationship in an otherwise bleak realm of desire. The scene is easily understood as an allusion to AIDS, in that one of the characters is prone to bouts of increasingly serious illness. Preljocaj is at times a polemical choreographer, and he seems in this scene to make a sociopolitical point. He questions assumptions about 'healthy' and 'sick' desire, as the supportive relationship between the two men stands in contrast to the opportunistic and damaging relationships between the men and the women. In *Casanova*, homosexuality is troubled, but it is still

envisioned as a momentary and lyrical release from a confrontation with the queerness of heterosexuality.[10]

Perhaps, in this anomalous male–male scene, Preljocaj was also remembering his own initial inspiration, the 'luminous' Nureyev, who seemed 'transfigured by dance'. Nureyev's last production for the Opéra was a new *Bayadère* in 1992. This was also the occasion of his last public appearance, on the stage of the Palais Garnier. When he died three months later, his funeral was held in the *grand foyer* of the theatre. Nureyev was a master of the spectacular solo of the kind that Preljocaj choreographed for the ailing character. In creating *Casanova* with the Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris, Preljocaj was working with Nureyev's last company, and with dancers whom Nureyev had made into 'stars' (at the Opéra, it is the Director who elevates a dancer to principal status, and they are then officially known as *étoiles* or 'stars'). In *Casanova*, Preljocaj stages the death and the resurgence of classicism, the emergence of heterosexual queerness, and the crisis in homosexual life. He reminds his audiences of the queer-homosexual creative presence within the 'constellation' of French cultural life, and he memorialises the link between queerness and ballet.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Fraleigh and Hanstein (1999) include a section on the 'Deafening Silence'; Burt (1991) writes of 'The Dance That Does Not Speak Its Name'. See also Macaulay (1995), who discusses the issues with particular reference to Ashton.
2 Burt (1995), p. 5.
3 Koestenbaum (1994), p. 41.
4 I borrow the phrase 'heteroscopic sapphism' from Tamsin Wilton, who used it in this sense in her plenary lecture at the Que(eo)ries Symposium at University College, Dublin, in January 2004.
5 'Queer' itself might be used in more or less exclusionary ways. I use it mostly to designate same-sex object choice. The term is often used, however, to signify a behavioural 'misalignment', rather than a specific and fixed object choice. As Sedgwick's classic statement has it, 'queer' may refer to 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically'. There is a move away from a stable, definitive self (as might be implied by 'lesbian' or 'gay'), towards something that is still and necessarily in process: '"Queer" seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation'. But if Sedgwick's definition of 'queer' seems not, necessarily, to include same-sex object choice, she also observes that the prohibition against same-sex object choice has been so marked and so ubiquitous that 'queer' almost inevitably has 'same-sex sexual expression' as, or as part of, 'the term's definitional center'. See Sedgwick (1994), pp. 8–9. In what follows, I try to avoid restrictive assumptions as to what sexual difference might be or how it is constituted. What strikes me at this point is that there is a nostalgia for origin in the making of a tradition, and in the tracing of it.

NOTES

1 COMPONENTS: SPACES, BODIES, MOVEMENT

1 Stokes (1934), p. 56.
2 Barthes (1986), pp. 245–246.
3 This last phrase I take from Mulvey (1995), p. 835. Mulvey's full argument concerning the 'male gaze' and cinema does not work particularly well in this context. For further discussion of dance, gender, and perspective, see Copeland's essay in Thomas (1993), pp. 139–150.
4 Gérard Fontaine (2000), p. 49: 'une façade mise en scène'.
5 See Marian Smith (2000). Smith borrows the phrases 'erotic daydreaming' and '*prostitution légère*' from Louise Robin-Chaillan and Martine Kahane respectively (pp. 68–71).
6 This contrasts with the more open design of a modern opera house such as the Bastille, where the performer, according to Lionel Delanöe, has the feeling of being 'far from everything' ('loin de tout'). These quotations are taken from a special anniversary publication of the Opéra Nationale de Paris, *Bastille An 10* (July 1999), pp. 22 and 28: 'À Garnier, on se sent "observé." J'ai parfois l'impression d'avoir des "voyeurs" en face de moi, et je ne veux pas jouer les exhibitionnistes'; 'Quand on est à Garnier, on a un échange circulaire avec le public: j'ai l'impression de pénétrer dans une arène'. The phrase 'pénétrer dans une arène' perhaps also has the combative sense of 'entrer dans l'arène' – to enter into the ring.
7 Susan Manning (2001) provides a neat formulation of the possibilities. She writes that she is 'developing a model of spectatorship that posits performance as an arena within which spectators may consider perspectives other than those conditioned by their social identities outside the theatre, as a cultural space where spectators negotiate their simultaneous habitation of multiple and overlapping social formations'. For Manning, this includes 'straddling the boundaries between gay subculture, ethnic/racial/immigrant subcultures, and/or class formations' (p. 405).
8 See Mark Franko (1993), in which he prints the 'Letters Patent of the King for the Establishment of a Royal Academy of Dance', of 1662, from which I quote here (p. 183). See also Franko (1986), in which he quotes de Calviac on how to carry oneself (pp. 45–46).
9 For general histories of the ballet, with reference to the development of turn-out and of ballet as professional performance, see for instance Au (1988), Greskovic (1998), and Lee (2002).
10 Cohen (2000), p. 11.
11 Janin's critique was published in the *Journal des Débats* for 2 March 1840; it is quoted by Ivor Guest (1975), as is Gautier (p. 21). I have added the emphasis to 'as a woman does'.
12 Ibid., p. 21.
13 Garafola (1985–86) comments on the subscribers' resentment of dancers' male family connections. Indeed, she traces through the various aspects of gender, class, and ballet in the period, dating the major shift in audience to the July Revolution of 1830. Burt (1995) theorises the competitive

aspect with a Sedgwick-type analysis. The argument is that power is structured and managed via male bonding, but that this bonding is always haunted by the possibility of a homosexual interest. All-male institutions may be aggressively homophobic because they sponsor the very all-male closeness that can appear homosexual. The spectacle of the male dancing body activates the anxiety that lingers between the homosocial and the homoerotic (pp. 25–27). Bruce E. Fleming summarises a modern heterosexual response to the male dancer: 'When [he] enters from the wings, all horrified male eyes are on his buttocks and thighs, molded to shimmering white curves of muscle . . . Straight males tend to want to stand up for a guy whose behind is vulnerable like this, or to resent him because he's flaunting illicit parts of his body'; see Fleming (2000), p. 13.

14 For a more detailed study of the travesty dancer, see Garafola (1985–86).
15 See Butler (1999), p. 179 (emphasis in original).
16 Ibid., p. 178.
17 Other theorists have observed the way in which gendered behaviours are subject to policing – that the very care with which identities are scrutinised and maintained gives us a clue to their tenuous nature. So Sinfield (1992) writes about 'faultline stories' as those conventional scenarios that we need to see repeated over and over again, precisely because they are in some way improbable or open to question.
18 The journalist was Algernon St. John-Brenon, who is quoted by Money (1982), p. 120. English audiences too relished Mordkin's physique. The English dancer Lydia Sokolova remembered that Mordkin performed 'strong character dances with scanty costumes to show off his wonderful limbs'; she also recalled that 'the audience went mad even at matinees'. See Sokolova (1960), p. 11.
19 English (1980), p. 18. See also Foster (1996) on 'The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe'.
20 One might discourse at much further length on the subject of pointe, male viewers, and women's power. Aside from Foster, see for instance Sayers (1993).
21 Dyer (1992), p. 41. One also thinks of Diane Wiest's poem 'Order and Excellence', in which ballet again features as an escape from, in this case, childhood confusion: 'When I was nine years old, I took my first ballet class. I remember/ it chiefly as a great relief. There was one hour of order and certainty./ One hour of exact places to put fingers and feet'. See Wiest (1998).
22 Kopelson and Edelman choose, at this point in their respective narratives, not to own the prancing body, to render it as a homophobic construct. See Kopelson (1997), p. 31. He is quoting from Edelman (1994), pp. 206–207.
23 This is Arlene Croce, as cited by Jane Feuer in 'A Mistress Never a Master?'. See Desmond (2001), p. 386.
24 Daneman (2004), p. 420.
25 Jones (1995), p. 74.

26 See Long (1989), p. 120. For a case study, see Dunning (1998). For discussion of Ailey's co-optation of ballet technique, see also DeFrantz (2004).
27 Rainer is quoted by Cohen and Copeland (1983), p. 107.
28 Cohen and Copeland (1983), p. 118.
29 Stokes (1934), p. 72. Stokes's unkind example of a bad dancer in this respect is Isadora Duncan, who, according to him, 'followed the music as a bear might pursue a mouse' (p. 15). Stokes, Béjart, and Balanchine may also have had in mind André Levinson's 1922 review of Pavlova: 'She is at once the instrument and the musician: a dancing Stradivarius'. Levinson is quoted by Richard Buckle, in *Diaghilev* (1993), p. 404. Gautier may, again, be the original source, however. He commented that dancing is 'silent rhythm, music to be seen'. He is quoted by Guest (1970), p. 30. Béjart made his comment in Belle and Dickson's television documentary *Suzanne Farrell* (1996).
30 Quoted by Banes (1998), p. 7.
31 Pater (1986), p. 153.
32 Beaver (1981), p. 105. Beaver's argument also puts us in mind, perhaps, of Neil Bartlett's argument on the ephemeral text, and particularly the scrapbook, as bespeaking queer ambivalence about evidence and visibility: 'Do these [scrapbook] fragments provide evidence of concealment of our lives, or are they declarations; if you speak in code, obliquely, are you really trying to reveal something, or to conceal something?'. See Bartlett (1988), p. 99.
33 Muñoz (2001), pp. 430–432, 441. In recent times, the sense of the ephemeral has also been given new life in Derridean discussions of dance. The brief and uncertain presence of dance has been placed in dialogue with post-structuralist discourses on indeterminacy. I am thinking of Mark Franko's discussion of Derrida, and of dance as the 'flesh of *différance*'. See 'Mimique', in Goellner and Murphy (1995).

2 NUNS AND FAIRIES

1 The *Grove Dictionary* claims the success was unparalleled, though the editors of Meyerbeer's letters note that Meyerbeer's own *Les Huguenots* (1836) surpassed *Robert le Diable*, with a thousand performances before 1900. See Becker and Becker (1989), p. 12.
2 Quoted by Judith Mackrell (1997), p. 21. Aschengreen (1974) gives some sense of the context of the description (p. 15).
3 This is the reviewer for the *Journal des Débats* of 16 December 1831, as quoted by Jürgenson and Guest (1997), p. 6.
4 For Palianti's production notes, see Jürgenson and Guest (1997), p. 23.
5 Véron (1854): '. . . je m'étais dit: La révolution de Juillet est le triomphe de la bourgeoisie: cette bourgeoisie victorieuse tiendra à trôner, à s'amuser; l'Opéra deviendra son Versailles', 1853–1855, vol. 3, p. 171; Guest (1975), pp. 4, 22–23, 28, 106. I would not want to overstate such changes

regarding prostitution. The dancer often had a courtesan or mistress role before the July revolution, and she continued to have such a role in Russia, under the Imperial patronage of the ballet. Further, while there seems to have been a defining shift with the July revolution, changes in the social composition of the Opéra audience took place throughout the latter part of the eigtheenth century. For a detailed discussion, see Johnson (1995).

6 Another resonance of the pathos, wickedness, and theatricality of the nuns might be with contemporary descriptions of prostitutes. Béraud (1839), for instance, writes of prostitutes as both fugitive and on display; as women who, for all their boldness, 'have the air of their abject status', and who carefully seek to avoid being recognised by those who knew them before their 'fall' ('elles ont le sentiment de leur abjection . . . elles évitaient soigneusement d'être reconnues par ceux qui les ont vue avant leur abaissement'; p. xcvii). Noting that the number of prostitutes in Paris tripled in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, Banes (1998) anticipates me in suggesting a possible connection in the viewers' minds (p. 33).

7 Diderot (2000), p. xxxi. See also Delon (1987).

8 Ibid., p. 108: 'Il m'en coûtera beaucoup, car je suis née caressante, et j'aime à être caressée'. In a careful and sustained reading of the novel, Sedgwick notes the debate surrounding Suzanne's apparent ignorance over the Mother Superior's intentions. Sedgwick admits the apparent tension between Suzanne's 'descriptive exactitude' and her 'diagnostic obtuseness', but she refuses to fall in with the idea that Suzanne is simply disingenuous (that she 'gets what she asks for'). Rather, Sedgwick stresses that it is only from the interventions of male clerics that Suzanne comes to understand her experiences as sex (and their importance as such). See Sedgwick (1994), pp. 38–44.

9 See Alexandrian (1989), pp. 149–152, 189, 202, 205. Alexandrian places *Vingt Ans* in the nineteenth century, noting that it was falsely dated as 1789. Banes (1998) also makes the connection between ballet and anti-clerical erotica. Drawing on work by Joellen Meglin, she writes: 'For a group of women who only find pleasure in each other's company and go around killing men might well suggest lesbian "perversion", and the idea that nuns indulged in homosexual activities was already a familiar theme in literature at least since the eighteenth century. In the first scene of de Sade's *L'Histoire de Juliette* (1797), for instance, the adolescent heroine is initiated into Sapphic love at her convent school during a small orgy involving the abbess and another pupil' (p. 31).

10 Guest (1975) recounts the gossip surrounding Montessu (p. 187), and he translates and quotes from Second. He notes that Second was brought before the court for defamation, and the sly comments on Roland and Forster in the serialised version of *Petits Mystères* were deleted in the book version (pp. 27, 282–283).

11 I paraphrase comments that Gautier made of Jules Janin and of the generation as a whole: 'Romantique, sans doute il était comme tous les

jeunes d'alors . . . avec une nuance d'ironie indisciplinée qui raille tout en admirant'. See Gautier's *Portraits Contemporains* (1874), p. 204. Gautier's comments on morality and utilitarian critics are to be found in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1981), pp. 19–20. I also quote from Gautier's own lively explanation of Romanticism, in *Histoire du Romantisme* (1874), in which he recollects: 'Comme tout cela était jeune, nouveau, étrangement coloré, d'enivrante et forte saveur' (p. 8). For the 'galanteries poétiques' and 'lettres ordurières', see Alexandrian (1989), p. 207 (these phrases might be translated as 'amorous poems' and 'filthy letters').

12 Gautier (1981), p. 39.

13 Ibid., pp. 70, 102, 146, 184.

14 Ibid., p. 273. For an introduction to sexological writings, with a series of excerpts, see Bland and Doan (1998).

15 P. E. Tennant (1975) notes Wilde's indebtedness, along with Swinburne's (p. 139). We should not understand Beardsley as homosexual. He was assumed to be attracted to women, but, as others have noted, there is evidence of a sexual taste that was 'muted or equivocal' and he drew phallic and homoerotic images with some frequency. See Fletcher (1987), p. 10, and also Zatlin (1990).

16 Gautier (1981), pp. 272, 276.

17 Reprinted from *Le Figaro* for 19 October 1837, in Gautier, *Portraits Contemporains* (1874): 'Et cette même indécision se remarque dans le caractère du sexe: ses hanches sont peu développées, sa poitrine ne va pas au delà des rondeurs de l'hermaphrodite antique; comme elle est une très-charmante femme, elle serait le plus charmant garçon du monde' (pp. 374–375).

18 Théophile Gautier, *Giselle ou Les Wilis*, in *Théâtre* (1877), pp. 245–277.

19 Marian Smith notes that there are residual 'ethnic references' in the score, and that contemporary audiences would have recognised them. While Gautier's idea of national costumes was discarded, Smith speculates that there may well have been some 'national steps' in early productions (pp. 192–194).

20 Banes (1998) offers a very persuasive discussion of *Giselle* as an allegory of class relations in contemporary France. In her reading, Giselle stands for bourgeois womanhood, while Albrecht, 'like the French monarchy itself, is not totally absolved of his sins, but rather, he is pardoned; he is reinstated to his former condition, yet – perhaps like Louis-Philippe, or at least like the official images of the citizen-king – somewhat chastened' (pp. 33–34).

21 Again Sedgwick (1990) is useful here. She suggests a phrase drawn from psychology, 'homosexual panic', in relation to this type of scenario. This sense of a phobia being produced by the nearness of the Ideal to a structuring Other is perhaps strengthened by the sense that the Sylphide is always and already close to her notional opposite, the witch. As James thinks of the Sylphide in Nodier's libretto, 'I thought she was an angel . . . but she's a demon'. This kinship of opposites was further implied by

Erik Bruhn and John Pierce's production of 1968, in which the Sylphide is directly related to Madge. See Aschengreen (1974), p. 7.

22 For accounts of fairies, see Briggs (1976), Silver (1999), Purkiss (2000), and Schacker (2003). Sir Walter Scott plays with the idea of 'glamour' in his fairy ballad 'Alice Brand', in which the fairies 'now like knight and lady seem,/ Now like dwarf and ape'; quoted by Beddoe (1997), p. 27.

23 Jameson (1971), p. 94.

24 For examples and commentary, see Packer *et al*. (1980) and Martineau (1997).

25 See Chauncey (1994). Chauncey also records the different nuances of 'fairy', 'faggot', 'pansy', 'queer', and 'gay', and how men adopted such terms in tactical ways. Although this kind of subcultural visibility is often associated with the late nineteenth century, it would be wrong to assume that there were not other, earlier, urban subcultures. Accounts of earlier groups and practices are to be found in Norton (1992) and Cook (2003). The long-established locales of Paris and other European cities are noted in Higgs (1999).

26 Chauncey (1994), pp. 50, 177. Cook (2003) confirms the argument here. Although effeminate homosexuals may have been the most visible, Cook observes 'the impossibility of conjuring a unitary "gay" metropolis or a singular "gay" urban type' (p. 5). Contrary to some previous studies, which overstress the importance of Oscar Wilde, Cook writes that 'if the [Wilde] trial manufactured an infamous image of the modern homosexual, it did not comprehensively stall the circulation of other ideas and explanatory narratives'. Cook refines this further by arguing that, while it has often been supposed that Wilde's punishment destroyed his influence and, more generally, led to a decline in homosexual activity, the 'cult of Wilde' continued after the trials, and judging from police records, there was no significant fluctuation in homosexual activity in response to the Wilde case (pp. 119–120).

27 For examples indicating the shift in language, see White (1999). For the 'invention of homosexuality', see Foucault (1987).

28 Jackie Wullschlager (2000) assesses Andersen's dispositions (pp. 111–112). Alison Prince (1999) writes more bluntly of his 'suppressed homosexuality' (p. 13).

29 Anderson (1974), p. 754.

30 Ibid., p. 772.

31 See Lederer (1985), pp. 114, 130.

32 See Lederer (1985), p. 151. It should not be assumed that homosexuality is or was the underlying truth or natural destiny in such a case. 'Homosexuality' may be what our culture sometimes produces out of a labile disposition such as Andersen's, but I am not sure that there is an essential or ultimate meaning in such an outcome.

33 Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888–1891; London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 77–78, 130.

34 Ibid., p. 97. Ian Small and Josephine Guy (2000) have suggested that

Wilde's first collection of fairy stories, *The Happy Prince*, was more traditional and priced for a younger market. *The House of Pomegranates*, however, is more aestheticised and more homoerotic, and was priced to appeal to a specialist, collectors' market. Kim Marra (2002) offers the example of Clyde Fitch, a writer who knew Wilde and who also used the fairy story 'to express same-sex desire in a thickly coded array of tropes' (p. 41). See also Caroline Sumpter (forthcoming 2007), which develops a lengthier analysis of the fairy's queer resonances in *fin de siècle* literary culture.

35 There was, though, a Soviet *Ice Maiden*, produced in Leningrad in 1927 to music by Grieg and based on *Peer Gynt*.

36 See Goellner and Murphy (1995), p. 60.

37 Stravinsky's account of his intentions is somewhat mysterious in its logic. In a note prefacing the published score, he suggests that the Fairy 'withdraws [the hero] from life on the day of his greatest happiness in order to possess him and preserve this happiness for ever' (Koegler [1988], p. 29). Again in his autobiography, he explains that the 'magic imprint' of the kiss 'made itself felt in all the musical creations of this great artist', and that 'the final kiss enables him to live with the fairy in supreme happiness'. Stravinsky is also enigmatic on the subject of the first production. He does not comment on Rubinstein's stage persona, though he does record that in Nijinska's choreography there was 'a good deal of which I could not approve'. See Stravinsky (1975), pp. 147–148.

38 See Kavanagh (1996), pp. 186–187, 231–232.

39 The 1890 production is usually cited as the first, though Koegler (1988) notes a Paris Opéra production of 1829, choreographed by Jean Aumer to music by Louis-Joseph-Ferdinand Herold. Certainly Véron wrote of staging a ballet on *La Belle au bois dormant* at the Paris Opéra in the 1830s, and Guest (1952) discusses this production.

40 See Salter (1978), p. 93. Florimund also goes by the name of Prince Désiré, or Prince Charming.

3 SWANS

1 The first passage is from a Paris police report of 1868, and is quoted by Sibalis (1999), pp. 17–18. The second is a description of Bird Cage Walk in St. James's Park, London, from 1781. See Cook (2003), pp. 8–9. Chris White gives a comparable description, but of London in the mid-nineteenth century. It is taken from a book that will have served as advertisement and as warning, *Yokel's Preceptor: or, More sprees in London!* (c. 1850): 'They generally congregate around the picture shops, and are to be known by their effeminate air, their fashionable dress, etc. When they see what they imagine to be a chance, they place their fingers in a peculiar manner underneath the tails of their coats, and wag them about – their method of giving the office. A great many of them flock the saloons and boxes of the theatres, coffee-houses, etc. . . . There have also been

many fellows of this description in the theatrical profession, who have yet been considered respectable members of society'. See White (1999), pp. 114–115. The third passage is from Mayne (1975), pp. 438–439.

2 As noted, this version of the story follows the libretto of the first production of 1877 (the libretto was published in 1876), as translated and reprinted in Wiley (1985), pp. 321–327. This version was not a success. The story was simplified by Modest Tchaikovsky, and the ballet re-choreographed, to make the more familiar 1895 version. Some of the most famous features of the more familiar version were, therefore, introduced after Tchaikovsky's death in 1893. The main changes in the 1895 version were to simplify the representation of evil from the witch and Rothbart to Rothbart alone, and to remove the incident in which Siegfried plucks the crown from – and kills – Odette. Siegfried is a more faithful, more pathetic figure in the 1895 libretto. For a comparison and assessment of narrative and music, see Wiley's (1985) commentary on '"Swan Lake" in St. Petersburg', pp. 242–274. It is hard to know what may have been kept in from the original production that was not clear from the original scenario. For instance, I assume that the women retain something of their 'swan-ness' when they are women, not least because the illustrations and narrative of the original version suggest a close, interchangeable aspect. When, in the later St. Petersburg production, Petipa and Ivanov gave the swan-queen and swan-maidens some residue of bird-like quality throughout, this may have been in keeping with the earlier version. However, the libretto for the first version only describes Odette as wearing a white dress and a crown; it does not specify feathers or bird-like movement. A later corruption of the original and of the 1895 version is the idea of Odile as the 'Black Swan'. In the nineteenth-century versions, she is not described as being black (Greskovic [1998] points out that this coloured thematisation begins in the 1940s [p. 245]). When Siegfried first sees Odette, the libretto comments that he is 'astonished' and 'in confusion' (p. 323); to write that Siegfried does not know whether to rape her or to shoot her is an impressionistic elaboration on my part.

3 Healey (1999), p. 40.

4 Ibid., p. 42.

5 Mayne (1908), p. 217. For more information on Mayne-Stevenson, see Gifford (1995), and especially pp. 105–110.

6 Healey (1999), p. 44.

7 Healey (1999), pp. 45, 47, and Poznansky (1993), pp. 468–469. The earlier testimony was given in a prosecution for sodomy, which was then reported in a social study by Ivan Meerzheevsky. Healey and Poznansky each quote different parts of the statement; Poznansky leaves out the parts about heterosexual voyeurism, but he includes the attendant's comment that he did not allow himself to be sodomised on the grounds that 'I believe that it must be painful'. Whether citing Healey or Poznansky, I am relying on a secondary and translated source of 'evidence' acquired

under duress. I am reluctant to make strong imputations as to the tone, the motive, or even the truthfulness, of the account.

8 Poznansky (1996), pp. 4–5; and (1993), pp. 463–83.

9 See Mayne (1975), pp. 427, 439, 625, 633.

10 Cook notes 'an urban circuit of homosexuality' which included Paris, Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg and other cities. He also observes that sexological studies often gave undue prominence to the 'mobile, wealthy and self-confident homosexual'. Men such as Ellis, Krafft-Ebing, and Bloch conducted their work in large cities, and so their evidence often included men who were 'able to move around and between various European cities'. Further, sexologists were sometimes working from the same subjects; or rather, they borrowed each other's material. Krafft-Ebing, for instance, cites Tarnowsky's St. Petersburg studies and Coffignon's analyses drawn from Paris. See Cook (2003), pp. 84–86.

11 Weinstock (1966), p. 13.

12 Poznansky (1993), pp. 56–57.

13 Ibid., p. 17.

14 The school became notorious after Tchaikovsky had left, when the sexual activities of the students became more widely known. Tchaikovsky's own attitude toward the school shifted between the bitter and the nostalgic. See Poznansky (1999), p. 12.

15 Poznansky (1996), pp. 10, 3, 263, 562.

16 Greg Woods (1998) comments on the 'tragic sense of life' that was often to be found among educated homosexuals of the late nineteenth century and after. He quotes John Addington Symonds's speculation that 'the tragic accent discernible throughout Michelangelo's poetry may be due to his sense of the discrepancy between his own deepest emotions and the customs of Christianity'. Woods comments that this probably tells us more about Symonds's period than Michelangelo's, and the tragic sense means 'unhappy endings' but also, as in classical drama, the 'fatal imperfection or error of the hero' (p. 217). See also Kopelson (1994) on homosexual fatality and Wilde's 'love-deaths' (pp. 27–35).

17 Poznansky (1993), pp. 132–133.

18 Ibid., pp. 466–467.

19 Poznansky (1999), p. 104; (1996), p. 16; (1993), p. 325.

20 Weinstock (1966), pp. 27, 121–122; Poznansky (1996), p. 11.

21 Poznansky (1993), p. 492, cites the relevant extant references in letters and journals. The remarkable diligence and honesty that Poznansky brought to his research was impeded in this area, though, by the deletions made to the material by Soviet authorities.

22 Poznansky (1993), p. 361.

23 Among early responses, Havelock Ellis stands out as someone who was curious – in a non-condemnatory way – about the possible connections between the nature of the work and the man. Basing his idea either on hearsay or guesswork, he suggested that the *Pathétique* symphony might be called a 'Homosexual Tragedy'. See Weinstock (1966), p. 365. David

Brown's monumental 'biographical and critical study' (1982) is the classic example of the analysis that admits queerness but finds it more or less irrelevant. Alexander Poznansky's recent work has advanced our understanding of Tchaikovsky enormously, but even he seems to want to shy away from this issue. He begins *Tchaikovsky* (1993) with the announcement, 'This is not a study of Tchaikovsky's music' (p. x).

24 Brett (1994), p. 17.

25 Poznansky (1993), pp. 56–57. Poznansky allows us to see a more playful, camp side to Tchaikovsky. He reveals that the composer liked using drag names, and took 'Petrolina' as his own.

26 Marcel Schneider (1984) notes the absence of librettist (p. 4). For Wiley's comments, see Wiley (1985), pp. 33, 38; Wiley notes that Modest's version was itself revised, presumably by the theatre director (p. 249).

27 The joke was that she could put her garter on without bending down. Taglioni's father instructed her to cross her arms to hide her defect. Such was her success, however, that her shape and her way of dealing with it led to a lower *port de bras* among other dancers. See Levinson (1930), pp. 93, 100, 103.

28 Andersen (1994), p. 146.

29 Wiley (1985), pp. 34–37.

30 Poznansky (1993) quotes the letter (p. 461). Tchaikovsky may have intended to show his sympathy for someone he knew von Meck had admired, but there is an intensity and embitteredness about the statement. Poznansky, on whose translation I rely, notes this as a moment at which Tchaikovsky's 'ordinarily rather prim notion of social propriety' seems to give way to something more fervent. For information on the life of Ludwig, see Chapman-Huston (1990) and McIntosh (1982).

31 Wiley (1985), p. 323.

32 See Schneider (1984), p. 7: 'Sa blancheur et sa grâce sur les eaux évoquent la pureté, la virginité, le mystère souriant des jeunes filles. Mais sa violence, son aggressivité, son humeur belliqueuse, peuvent également suggérer le désir viril au même titre que la colonne ou l'épée . . . Tchaikovsky . . . pouvait très bien voir son double sous la forme du cygne et en même temps l'objet de son désir'.

4 QUEER MODERNITY

1 This account is taken from Boris Kochno's French translation of Diaghilev's unpublished memoirs, to be found in the Fonds Kochno at the Bibliothèque Nationale-Musée de l'Opéra: 'J'ai trouvé Piotyre Illytch peu changé et aussi jeune qu'il l'a été jusqu' à la fin. Je courus chercher des fleurs et pendant toute la première journée, seule, ma couronne est restée à ses pieds'. Nesteev (1999) notes the letter in which Diaghilev writes of his own sonata (p. 40).

2 He claimed that audiences 'didn't want to see anything in [Tchaikovsky] beyond Germanic pathos' ('Quant à Tchaikovsky, on ne veut voir en lui

rien que le pathétisme allemand'; Fonds Kochno, Bibliothèque Nationale-Musée de l'Opèra).

3 Dukelsky published his memoirs under his later name of Vernon Duke; see Duke (1955), p. 124.

4 Nabokov gave his views in an early and fascinating BBC *Omnibus* documentary, written and directed by John Drummond, and first broadcast in 1968. The documentary is available in the Dance Division of the New York Public Library. Drummond collected many more and longer interviews than he was able to use; since then, the films have been lost, but the interviews are available as transcripts in Drummond's book (1997). For Nabokov's comments on Diaghilev as an 'assertive homosexual', see p. 300.

5 Osbert Lancaster remembered the 'pale face' and the 'flutter of aides-de-camp' for Drummond (1997), p. 261. Karsavina comments in the same volume that the effect of Diaghilev was 'fatalistic', and that he would have seemed 'too good-looking' had he been 'a lesser man'; she also likened him to a 'sea-lion' (p. 89–90). In her memoirs, *Theatre Street* (1950), she wonders if the grey streak is the 'mark of Ahasuerus or [the] mark of genius' (p. 148). For 'enormous head', see Drummond (1997), p. 136. For 'Look!' and 'Chinchilla', see Buckle (1993), pp. 51, 431; for 'baby' and 'monkey', see Beaton (1961), pp. 127–128; for 'adventurer', see Lifar (1940), who cites Comtesse Greffuhle, p. 168; for 'bear' and 'ageing magician', see Acton (1948), pp. 86, 222; for Dukelsky, see Duke (1955), p. 114.

6 Cyril Beaumont, the dance historian and bookseller, remembered the caress, and Errol Addison the handshake, both for Drummond (1997); see pp. 127, 204. The 'nice fat old lady' was reported of Massine, to Ashton, by one of Massine's mistresses; see Kavanagh (1996), p. 230.

7 For 'shipping clerk' and 'plumber's apprentice', see MacDonald (1982), p. 170; for 'jockey', see Morrell (1963), p. 277; for 'slight stable-lad' ('un chétif lad d'écurie'), see Kahane (2000), p. 23; for Beaton's comments, see Beaton (1951), p. 34, and (1961), p. 127.

8 Kirstein (1932), p. 193.

9 Misia Sert had received a letter from another supporter of the Ballets Russes, the Marchioness of Ripon, in which the Marchioness commented that Nijinsky's marriage had 'predisposed everyone here in his favour'. Sert also reprints a letter from the Marchioness: 'The gossip about [Diaghilev's] new friend[, Massine,] . . . has reached us here. And so, more than ever, the ballet is branded as a "den of vice", etc'. See Sert (1953), pp. 122–123. Ottoline Morrell also seems to confirm this view. She saw Diaghilev as an oppressive influence, describing him as Nijinsky's 'guardian and jailer'. See Morrell (1963), p. 277. It was claimed by Buckle, and this claim has since been repeated, that the first printed statement that the relationship between Diaghilev and Nijinsky had been homosexual was in Buckle's biography of Nijinsky (1971). The Drummond television documentary is explicit about Diaghilev's sexuality, and the nature of the relationship

between Diaghilev and Nijinsky was described in print by Nijinsky's wife in 1933: 'To make Sergei Pavlovitch happy was no sacrifice to Vaslav. And Diaghileff crushed any idea of resistance, which might have come up in the young man's mind, by the familiar tales of the Greeks, of Michelangelo and Leonardo, whose creative lives depended on the same intimacy as their own'. This was in *Nijinsky* (1933), and reprinted with *The Last Years of Nijinsky* (1980), p. 109. Although this might seem oblique, Ned Rorem (1994) remembered the biography as 'scandalous'; he also records that he read it 'over and over and over' (p. 96).

10 '[H]is homosexuality is the assertion of a scandal in terms of morality. And this revelation of a scandal was one of Diaghilev's qualities and at the same time weaknesses, and therefore everything he did was a desire, a little bit to shock but always to react. Part of it was showmanship, part of it was superficiality, but the core was a real, very deep and very profound understanding of what he was doing'. See Drummond (1997), p. 301.

11 For previous studies of the 'sexual iconography' of the Ballets Russes, see Burt (1995), Kopelson (1997), and Garafola (1999, 2000). Garafola coins the phrase in her 2000 essay.

12 Quoted by Lifar (1940), pp. 221–222.

13 Chris White (1999) reprints Burton's essay. It is as well, perhaps, to note that other writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to collapse Greece and the Orient. As Robert Tobin (2000) observes, 'Greece was in fact far to the east and south for many Europeans, and during much of the eighteenth century part of the Ottoman empire; the Orient in turn was seen as a place where one could perhaps find some remnants of classical civilization – and classical sexuality' (p. 35). For a fuller sense of the history of Orientalism, see Said (1978), McLintock (1995), and Lane (1995).

14 Moon (1995) quotes Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity*, and notes that Zobeide 'resists enacting either her rage at her husband and master or her grief over the slaughter of her lover and other companions' (p. 60).

15 This is Geoffrey Whitworth, as quoted by Buckle (1998), p. 116.

16 Acton (1948), p. 113; Van Vechten (1974), p. 89.

17 Fokine (1961), p. 182.

18 It should be noted, perhaps, that Russia itself was often seen as more Oriental than European. Napoleon commented that if you scratch a Russian, you find a Tartar, and Diaghilev felt himself to be working against the same prejudice. He wrote that at the time of mounting *Boris Godunov* in Paris, 'we were "savages" to the Parisians; we then became "savage and refined," and it took twenty years of work to gain a position that was equal to theirs of the West or even, at times, superior' ('nous étions pour les Parisiens, "des sauvages," puis sommes devenus "sauvages et raffinés," et il a fallu vingt ans de travail pour pouvoir occuper une place égale à la leur, à celle des Occidenteaux, ou même, parfois, une place prépondérante' (Fonds Kochno, Bibliothèque Nationale-Musée de l'Opéra). Diaghilev relished Orientalist extravagance, though he also tired of it, and resented the understanding in Western Europe that his

Orientalist works were not conscious creations, but expressions of the barbaric soul of Russia. This Orientalist association was also projected onto Diaghilev's personal life. Those who knew something of Diaghilev's relationship with Nijinsky pointed out that Diaghilev created several ballets, including *Schéhérazade*, in which his lover was cast as a slave. The suggestion was that the ballet was a brightly coloured projection of the impresario's personal life.

19 For more on Diaghilev's aesthetic principles, see Acocella (1999).

20 'Plus d'un aurait donné sa vie, /Car j'ai ta gorge pour tombeau'. Kahane (2000) reprints the poem (p. 146).

21 Fokine (1961), p. 182.

22 Kahane and Kopelson reproduce many of these images. Garafola argues in 'Sexual Iconography' (2000) that the artists 'homoeroticised' Nijinsky for the 'private delectation' of a queer readership, and she observes the difference between the 'curving opulence' of the drawings and the dancer's 'heavily muscled' body (pp. 72, 74–75). Kopelson (1997) notes the contradictory accounts of Nijinsky in this role (pp. 107–108).

23 Buckle (1993) writes of Massine's appearance at this stage: 'If, in full face, Miassin was like an ikon, in profile he resembled one of the ripening boys whom Baron von Gloeden photographed at Taormina' (p. 272). Aldrich (1993) reproduces and discusses von Gloeden's work.

24 Massine (1968), p. 58; Buckle (1993), p. 274; Ricketts (1939), p. 233.

25 Beaumont (1951), pp. 731–732.

26 Ricketts (1939), pp. 233–237. Ricketts also comments on the 'exaggeratedly sumptuous, non-realistic Renaissance setting', which, he believed, revealed a misunderstanding of Venetian custom (p. 233).

27 MacDonald (1982), p. 119.

28 For 'virginal boy', see White (2005), p. 321.

29 Poulenc made his comments in Poulenc (1946), p. 57; this material is also quoted by Schouvaloff (1997), p. 242.

30 Nijinska revived *Les Biches* for the Royal Ballet (where it is staged as *The House-Party*) in 1964. Mason is quoted by Dowler (2001), p. 723. Buckle comments on 'a few dark hints about decadence', and cites the title of the review in his footnote; his source is an unidentified cutting in Anton Dolin's press album; I have been through Dolin's collection of cuttings in the New York Public Library, but I was unable to locate this particular review. See Buckle (1993), pp. 453, 578. Sokolova was another who 'saw everything'. She complained in her memoirs that she and her friend, Tchernicheva, were miscast as the inseparable pair, for 'few people ever have been less lesbian than Tchernicheva and myself'. See Sokolova (1960), p. 217. Haskell, too, chose to see beyond a naïve reading. Of the 1925 revival, he wrote that it is 'a modern *Sylphides*, the sylphs still there, an elegant house of pleasure substituted for the woods'. He also captures the English willingness to accept the ballet on the grounds that one is not obliged to recognise its connotations. He argued: 'It is vicious, exceedingly so, but never in any way vulgar. It does not intrude itself. If you

ignore the meaning, which it is easy to do when it is disguised as the *House Party*, it can still remain a thing of beauty'. See Haskell (1947), p. 84.

31 Buckle (1993), p. 418.

32 Beaumont is quoted in Schouvaloff (1997), p. 334. The athletic look would soon be exemplified by one of Diaghilev's later stars, Anton Dolin, in an equally modern though rather less louche ballet, *Le Train bleu* (1924).

33 Beaton (1951), pp. 29–30. The Shackleton review, for the *Evening Standard* of 26 May 1925, is excerpted by MacDonald (1982); see pp. 303–304.

34 The letter is quoted by Buckle (1993), p. 418. Barbette was very of the moment – a popular music-hall artist whom Cocteau and other literati admired. For an account of Barbette's vogue, see Steegmuller (1986). Nijinska did not like the 'Barbette' moment; it was one of the things she deleted from revivals (it does not feature in the filmed, Oakland Ballet version, nor in the version still in the repertory of the Royal Ballet).

35 This is also another example of Diaghilev's interest in mixing old and new possibilities. A ballet version of the fable of *La Chatte* had been staged at the Paris Opéra in 1837, with Fanny Elssler in the starring role.

36 Sokolova (1960), p. 259.

37 MacDonald (1982), p. 347.

38 Kochno (1970), p. 226; Beaumont (1951), p. 975.

39 Drummond (1997), p. 99; Buckle (1993), pp. 531, 540.

40 Garafola (2000), p. 74.

41 Lambert (1934), pp. 53, 64, 105. Similarly, the avant-garde theatre designer and director Edward Gordon Craig attacked Diaghilev in his essay, 'Kleptomania'. He wrote that the Ballets Russes purveyed a '*new theatricalism*' that was 'beliefless'. In their impersonations of Indian, Egyptian, and Greek cultures, they 'put on and put off anyone else's *belief*'. It was all a trick: 'They thought they could imitate so well as to deceive us into believing it was creation'. In Craig's view, this 'mixing of art-dressmakers-royalty-naked ladies-dancing and prostitution' was '[a]ll for commerce!'. Craig's article was published, under the name Julian Balance, in *The Mask* (October 1911), and it is quoted by Koritz (1995), p. 125. See also the notes for Craig's article, which were published by Lincoln Kirstein as an appendix, 'Gordon Craig and the Russian Ballet', in Kirstein (1967), pp. 121–123.

42 Lambert (1934), pp. 72, 75, 268. As noted in Chapter 1, Neil Bartlett would make a different and positive argument about scrapbooks, pastiche, and queer life: 'The scrapbook is the true form of our history, since it records what we remember, and embodies in its omissions both how we remember and how we forget our lives. We are always held between ignorance and exposure'. Bartlett captures the sense in which, having been written out of history, or having needed to avoid notice, queer men and women have also had to create 'makeshift' traditions, drawing on the

resources of widely disparate nations and epochs. See Bartlett (1988), p. 99.

43 Quoted by Lifar (1940), pp. 533. Similarly, Boris Kochno recounted Jean Cocteau's backstage fight with the composer Vladimir Dukelsky over Diaghilev's Constructivist ballet in praise of the Russian Revolution. Cocteau also reproached Massine 'for having turned something as great as the Russian Revolution into a cotillon-like spectacle within the intellectual grasp of ladies who pay six thousand francs for a box'. See Kochno (1970), p. 265.

44 Ricketts (1939), pp. 301–302; Acton (1948), p. 85.

45 See Sinfield (1999), p. 100.

46 Buckle (1993), p. 453.

47 Garafola (2000) quotes Farjeon and Page, and makes the point that the hard modernity of the Ballets Russes in the 1920s reflects 'changes in the homosexual audience at large' (p. 74). One wonders, though, if the Ballets Russes did not help to produce the changes as well as reflect them.

48 Acton (1948), p. 82; Rorem (1994), pp. 60, 97; Henry (1948), p. 482; White (2005), p. 340; Moon (1995), p. 57. The queer potency of the Ballets Russes is also the subject of Kevin Kopelson's *The Queer Afterlife of Vaslav Nijinsky* (1997). Kopelson does not so much provide a 'reception history' as (and perhaps more appropriately) offer a series of brilliant Paterian extemporisations on the legend.

5 NEW YORK AND THE 'CLOSED SHOP'

1 Rorem (1994), p. 467.

2 Griffey (2002) quotes Benton (p. 211).

3 See Douglas (1977), and Bederman (1995).

4 Weinberg (1993) quotes Wright, p. 205. Thomas Craven, a well-known art critic and a friend of Benton, is quoted by Griffey (2002), p. 210. Benton's, Craven's, and Wright's arguments notwithstanding, the campaigns against, rather than by and for, homosexuals, were unrelenting. Gore Vidal observes of the mid-century in particular: 'During the 40s and 50s the anti-fag battalions were everywhere on the march. From the high lands of *Partisan Review* to the middle ground of *Time* magazine, envenomed attacks on real or suspected fags never let up'. Quoted by Kaiser (1997), pp. 98–99. See also D'Emilio (1983) and Chauncey (1994). The composer Charles Ives may serve as another particularly clear example of the contemporary American artistic male who loved sports and condemned effeminacy. Ives could not but admire certain Europeans, however. He deplored Mozart, Wagner, and Chopin for a lack of masculinity, while Brahms, Beethoven, and Bach were above reproof. See Ives (1972) and Feder (1999).

5 Hubbs (2004), p. 7.

6 Chauncey (1994), p. 302.

7 Sinfield (1999), p. 8.

8 Gold's article, 'The Loves of Isadora', was first published in *New Masses* 4 (March 1929); it is reprinted by Franko (1995), p. 109.
9 Duncan (1996), pp. 58, 244. My point here is not that ballet is less racist, nor that it is 'only equally racist'. I want simply to destabilise the modern dance/natural, ballet/degenerate pairings that were presented so obviously in the early twentieth century (and that have been re-presented – if usually less obviously – on occasion thereafter). Julia Foulkes (2002) gives a very good sense of the uneasy relationship between white modern dance-makers, Graham, St. Denis, and their Black counterparts, Katherine Dunham and Edna Guy; Foulkes also discusses St. Denis's quota system (p. 30). For a contemporary explanation of ballet, over-civilisation, and modern dance, see Shawn (1946), and especially pp. 102–104.
10 See Buckle (1993), pp. 302–304.
11 See Buckle (1993), p. 310, and (1998), p. 434.
12 See Foulkes (2002), p. 89, and José Limón (1966). See also Siegel (1979). The 'Frontiersman' claim is made in an early souvenir programme for Ted Shawn and his company of male dancers. The programme is in the John Lindquist Collection at Harvard. It is as well to note that the modern dancers who made a play of 'virility' – Limón, Shawn, Horton, Weidman – were all bisexual or homosexual, and their dances were often at least as homoerotic as anything to be seen with the Ballets Russes.
13 Kirstein (1979), pp. 3–6. Cocteau explained the 'red-and-gold disease' as 'theatre-itis'. See Steegmuller (1986), p. 14.
14 The setting up of the magazine may have been an act of imitation, continuing a tradition from the *Yellow Book* to Diaghilev's *World of Art*. The group behind the magazine had a *fin de siècle* reputation in some quarters. Fraser (1981) notes a contemporary opinion that 'The *Hound & Horn* crew were a little too limp-wristed for me' (p. 59). But *Hound & Horn* was not obviously decadent. It contained jocular footballing anecdotes alongside the more intellectual pieces, and is without Beardsleyan flamboyance. In flatly literal terms, the cover was not yellow, but off-white.
15 Kirstein (1979), p. 21.
16 It was Austin's cousin, Stephen Etnier, who remembered that Austin was 'what we called a sissy at the time. Boys didn't go around having little theaters in their boathouses, the way he did. He was not much interested in sailing or sports of any kind'. See Gaddis (2000), p. 23. Gaddis also quotes Nikolais (p. 340). Austin wrote of his intense love of the Ballets Russes in a letter to the *Hartford Courant* of 19 November 1934. The occasion of the letter was an appearance by the Ballets Russes at the Bushnell Memorial in Hartford. The letter is in Scrapbooks (Box 16), Wadsworth Atheneum Archive.
17 Kirstein wrote about the coolness of the relation between the two men in 'The Ballet in Hartford', in *A Director's Taste* (1958), pp. 63–74. Gaddis (2000) quotes the Kirstein letter (pp. 198, 203).
18 Gaddis (2000), p. 198.

19 The inspiration that Kirstein took from Diaghilev has already been noted. Austin's resemblance to Diaghilev was commented upon on numerous occasions. See, for instance, the thoughts of Osbert Sitwell and Eugene Berman in Gaddis (2000), pp. 15, 46. Austin's comment on 'splendor devoid of vulgarity' is to be found in the essay he wrote on the occasion of the acquisition of the Lifar Collection. See Austin (1934), p. 32. I write that both men assumed an upper-class assurance, if only because both men were aware that they were not entirely acceptable to the established upper class. Kirstein's Jewishness, and the relative newness of his money, would have excluded him; he writes of how such factors manifested themselves in the New York City and Metropolitan audiences and governance (see Kirstein [1979], p. 105). Austin, as Gaddis shows, was considered *parvenu* in certain sections of Hartford society.
20 Kirstein (1967), pp. 14–16.
21 Ibid., pp. 22–24.
22 John Martin, reviewer for the *New York Times*, is quoted by Taper (1984), pp. 162–163.
23 Kirstein (1967), p. 45. Kirstein was again following in the path of Diaghilev, who in interviews during the 1916 tour had commented on how he was expected to admire 'ugly' imitations of European culture, and was laughed at when he expressed his enjoyment of indigenous American forms. '[T]here is plenty of American art, virile, characteristic art', he told journalists, but the 'only difficulty is that America doesn't know it'. These interviews with the *New York Times* and *Boston Post* for 23 January 1916 are quoted by Buckle (1993), p. 300.
24 Balanchine (1945), p. 23.
25 This film, of a performance at the Civic Theater, Chicago, in October 1939, is in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
26 Amberg (1983) reprints Kirstein's libretto for the ballet, pp. 83–84.
27 Weinberg (1993) points out the subtle but similar significances of *Shore Leave*, drawing attention to the encounter between a sailor and the young man, and to the significance of the red tie. Weinberg also notes the suggestion in *Shore Leave* of homosexuality in the Navy in the positioning of a bottle in relation to a recumbent sailor's buttocks (pp. 36–37).
28 Weinberg (1993), pp. 37, 40. See also Meyer (2003), pp. 37–52, who offers a detailed analysis of the painting and the debates surrounding it.
29 Ibid., p. 38.
30 Kirstein (1979), p. 73.
31 This reading also seems to correspond with Cadmus's own account of his contact with the world that he depicts in the paintings. In a reminiscence he offered during an oral history interview, it becomes clear that he was intrigued by the sailors and enjoyed watching their antics, but that he was also wary of any direct involvement with them. See Tully (n.d.).
32 Kirstein (1979), p. 72.
33 Elizabeth Bishop offers a different treatment of the same theme in her poem, 'Filling Station' (1965), which begins, 'Oh but it is dirty, this

filling station'. Bishop's station is populated by 'quick and saucy and greasy sons', whose dark translucence is the effect of oil and dirt.

34 Lawrence (2001), p. 59.
35 Ibid., p. 60.
36 Amberg (1983) reprints the libretto, pp. 132–139. For the quotes, see pp. 135, 133.
37 Ibid., pp. 136–137.
38 Vidal (1995), p. 131.
39 Kirstein (1979) mentions becoming New Yorkers, pp. 118–119.
40 Vidal (1995), p. 132.
41 *Dance Index* I.i (January 1942), p.3.
42 See in particular Lynes's photos of Nicolas Magallanes and Francisco Moncion in *Orpheus* (1948), reproduced in Woody (1980), and see also Weinberg's discussion in Garafola and Foner (1999).
43 Other, like instances would include Lynes's portrait of Moncion in dance tights, towering against a fake sky, in Woody's *Portrait* (1994), and the photo of John Kriza in *Billy the Kid*. This last, though, is perhaps a problem. It has been published frequently in recent years as by Lynes (in, for instance, Garafola and Foner [1999], p. 140), but the print in the New York Public Library is embossed with the name of another photographer.
44 See Weinberg (1999), pp. 134–135. Lynes used props in a similar way. As Anatole Pohorilenko (1998) observed, the photographer did not use props to lend a sense of the 'real', but to add to the compositional effects.
45 For Kirstein's own view on how New York City Ballet audiences compared with those of Ballet Theatre and the Ballet Russes, see Kirstein (1979), pp. 103–105, 184.
46 Kaiser (1997), p. 8. Such men had more grandiose ballet companies available to them than New York City Ballet. There were the frequent appearances of the Ballets Russes, with its glamorous, international image. Ballet Theater provided ballet in the grand classic manner, with a roster of starry principal dancers – Alonso, Baronova, Dolin, Eglevsky, Markova. Both of these companies diversified their repertoire with successful Americana ballets, and Ballet Theater pioneered the 'psychological ballet' with Tudor's choreography. And, Vidal notwithstanding, many were still drawn to the 'no stars' intellectualism of New York City Ballet.
47 Reynolds and McCormick (2003), p. 300.
48 Denby (1986), pp. 101, 419, 432.
49 Reynolds and McCormick (2003), p. 313.
50 Denby (1986), p. 424. Denby is criticising the tendency in the dancing in 1952; he does not suggest that this is an inevitable effect in Balanchine's choreography.
51 In Newman (1982), p. 153.
52 Blackmur (1983), pp. 354–361.
53 Schorer (1999), p. 4.
54 Farrell (1990), p. 48.
55 Ibid., p. 48.

56 See, for instance, Taper (1984), for a sense of the claims and counter-claims.
57 Reynolds and McCormick (2003), p. 310.
58 Villella (1992), pp. 279–281.
59 Joseph (2002), p. 188.
60 Denby (1986), p. 414.
61 Ibid., p. 65.
62 Ibid., p. 241.
63 Ibid., p. 432.
64 Ibid., p. 14.
65 Ibid., p. 68.
66 New York City Ballet souvenir programme, n.p. O'Hara wrote these notes in collaboration with Bill Berkson (1961). I do not know who wrote which parts. My impression is that most of the notes have an emphatically O'Hara aspect, though the collaboration between the two men began with Berkson writing in the manner of O'Hara. See Gooch (1993), pp. 219–220, 374. Gooch seems to assume that Berkson's contribution was negligible, inasmuch as he does not mention Berkson in this context.
67 Ibid., p. 220.
68 Ibid.
69 Levin (1983), pp. 127–128. I acknowledge that the primacy of form does not date from O'Hara, who was very much marked by earlier French and Anglo-American traditions.
70 Gooch (1993), p. 344. The reference perhaps has a deeper echo, in that Pétipa choreographed *Les Saisons* in St. Petersburg in 1890.
71 O'Hara (1995), p. 363.
72 Balanchine did not choreograph a full-length *Sylvia*, but he did set a *Sylvia pas de deux* for Tallchief and Nicolas Magallanes in 1950.
73 Denby (1986), p. 322.
74 Garafola and Foner (1999), p. 65.

6 THE PRIMA AND HER FANS

1 Haskell (1947) quotes Plestcheef to the effect that the balletomanes paid two hundred roubles for the slippers, which were cooked in 'a special sauce' (p. 36).
2 Farmer (2000) discusses Dyer's arguments on film spectatorships, and quotes Al LaValley, who indicates a way of watching that treasures a film 'not so much for its narrative fulfilments as for its great moments, those interstices that [a]re often, ironically, the source of a film's real power' (p. 80).
3 Telotte is quoted by Farmer (2000), pp. 29–30.
4 Koestenbaum (1994), p. 88.
5 Koestenbaum (1994), p. 155.
6 There are numerous journalistic examples of Fonteyn's public performance of a private self in the Margot Fonteyn Collection at the Royal Opera

House, Covent Garden. She was admiringly reported on as a model of femininity from the 1930s through to her death in 1979.

7 Fonteyn (1975), p. 127.

8 Among many similar comments by other friends, we might choose Otilia Koster, who observed for Benjamin's television documentary (1997): 'It was her last great performance – taking care of Tito'.

9 Daneman (2004), p. 381.

10 Puig (1991), pp. 79, 89. Koestenbaum notes the example of *The Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, though he suggests that Molina 'doesn't understand the film's sinister ideology'. See Koestenbaum (1994), p. 151.

11 Daneman (2004), p. 300.

12 Fonteyn (1975), p. 172.

13 Daneman, p. 248.

14 Kavanagh (1996), pp. 1–2, 21, 31.

15 Sokolova (1960), p. 24.

16 Vaughan (1999) reproduces some Ashton screens as endpapers. They have Pavlova photos, but also those of many other dancers, including those of Ashton himself, and dancers performing his choreography. One assumes that there was a great pride and pleasure in his being able, eventually, to paste himself into this balletic firmament. For Ashton in the 1970s, see Macaulay (1995), p. 12, where Macaulay also notes Helpmann's comment that 'every ballerina role Ashton ever made could have been made for Pavlova'. Ashton responded to this suggestion: 'Yes . . . I think of her when I'm working all the time'.

17 Kavanagh (1996), p. 181.

18 Ibid., pp. 181, 183.

19 Fonteyn (1975), p. 116.

20 Kavanagh (1996), p. 233.

21 Daneman (2004), p. 96. Again, my argument echoes Koestenbaum's at this point. He notes of photographs of Visconti and Callas, and Pasolini and Callas: 'These photographs attest to a specific historical configuration: the gay man venerating the theatrical woman and the woman responding gaily, the woman imitating the gay man and the gay man imitating the woman, the gay man directing and then listening and admiring, the man and the woman collaborating'. See Koestenbaum (1994), p. 151.

22 Denby (1986), p. 359.

23 Ashton's repertoire of impersonations also included more conventional beauties. Fonteyn remembered one evening in a New York restaurant when Ashton, 'his soul ablaze', produced 'the most sensational series of impersonations', with Pavlova, Duncan, Lopokova, Carmen Amaya, and Pastor Imperia; it involved a 'flying leap into the arms of the head waiter', who then entered into a *pas de deux* with Ashton (Fonteyn [1975], p. 143).

24 Kirstein is quoted by Kavanagh (1996), pp. 438–439. For the disapproving account of *Illuminations*, see Vaughan (1999), pp. 243–244.

25 The birthday performance of *Salut d'Amour* is to be seen in Fonteyn's own television series, *The Magic of Dance* (1979). The homosexual or bisexual

choreographer's use and abandonment of a ballerina was a familiar scenario in the mid-twentieth century. Speaking of Ashton, Macmillan, and Cranko, Lynn Seymour argued that there 'was something about their insecurity that made them want to dump those ballerinas who were their original inspiration. All three of us [Margot Fonteyn, Lynn Seymour, Marcia Haydée] were treated with equal cruelty'. As far as Fonteyn and Ashton were concerned, Daneman suggests that Fonteyn's loss of position at Covent Garden was also to do with 'the management's resolve to distance itself from the embarrassing political activities of Arias' (Daneman [2004], pp. 350–351).

26 Croce (1977), p. 97.
27 Chappell (1952), p. 34.
28 Ibid., pp. 1, 59, 117.
29 Ibid., pp. 123–124.

7 DANCE OF THE SAILORS

1 Fonteyn (1975), p. 109.
2 For biographical information, see White (1994). On the names given to the public wards, see pp. 20, 22.
3 Ibid., pp. 215–216, 222.
4 See especially White's discussion of the ways in which Genet manipulated autobiographical material in *Our Lady*.
5 Genet, *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1990), p. 61.
6 Ibid., p. 80.
7 Ibid., pp. 126, 127, 129, 130, 233.
8 Ibid., p. 130. One thinks here of Stockinger's discussion of 'homotextual' spaces – prison cells, the countryside. The countryside is a 'privileged space for the homosexual because it marks both his ostracism and the chance to recuperate his "unnatural" love in nature'. See Thomas E. Yingling's citation and qualification of Stockinger (1990), pp. 27–29.
9 Genet (1990), p. 54. 'Darling' is Frechtman's translation of Mignon; the character's full name is Mignon-les-Petits-Pattes, or 'Darling-of-the-Little-Feet'.
10 Alexandrian (1989) does not state an allusion to the Dumas play, but he describes the novel as the '*La Dame aux camélias* de la littérature homosexuelle' (p. 328).
11 See, for instance, Burg (1994). Winston Churchill put the matter bluntly when he said that the functioning of the Royal Navy had always been based on 'rum, sodomy, and the lash'. Churchill's comment is reported in Chapter 1 of Sir Peter Gretton's *Naval Person* (1968), and is to be found in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*: 'Don't talk to me about naval tradition. It's nothing but rum, sodomy, and the lash'.
12 Genet, *Querelle of Brest* (1990), p. 153.
13 For a more extensive discussion of Genet, Sartre, homosexuality, and bad faith, see Schehr (1995). '*adame Miroir* was characterised as 'le narcissisme

Sartrien' by Olivier Merlin in his review, 'Du Ballet existentialiste au pas d'acier', in *Une Semaine dans le Monde*. See Webb and Webb (1982), p. 446.

14 Genet, *Querelle of Brest* (1990), p. 69.

15 Ibid., p. 191. Genet seems of his age in this respect. See, for instance, the slightly earlier writings of George Bataille (1985, 1988) on how the subject seeks to escape alienation via the paroxysms of sex or death. Bersani has returned to ideas of abjection and new subjectivities on several occasions. See, for instance, his classic essay, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' (1987), and also his discussion of Genet, Fascism, and queerness in *A Future for Astyanax* (1978).

16 Jean Genet, '*adame Miroir* (1990): 'dans un miroir un peu brouillé, l'image estompée, déformée' (p. 33).

17 Genet (1967), p. 159.

CONCLUSION: TRACES

1 Neumeier (2000): 'J'ai besoin de croire en "l'homme", je dois pouvoir l'aimer pour le chorégraphier . . . dans *Lac des cygnes* précisément, la description du Prince est plutôt maigre . . . Même la musique ne l'associe pas à un theme propre, ne lui confère pas de niveau autonome . . . L'association avec Louis II de Bavière me donna – j'en pris conscience ce soir-là – la possibilité de créer une figure centrale qui, pour moi, était humainement crédible . . .' (pp. 37–38). It should be noted that Neumeier's and other revisions of *Swan Lake* are nearly always revisions of the St. Petersburg version of 1895.

2 Ibid., p. 38: 'À la fin, le roi se retrouverait tout seul et on en arriverait au tête-à-tête avec "l'homme dans l'ombre" qui'il avait rencontré au début du ballet et qui devrait rester présent sur scène pendant tout le spectacle comme son alter ego, son ange de la mort, l'incarnation de ses désirs'.

3 Bourne and Macaulay (1999), p. 203.

4 It bears noting that Bourne's use of the *Spectre* pose has the static quality of de Meyer's photographs of Nijinsky in the role, and not the swirling, lissom quality of Fokine's choreography. Bourne's version is otherwise a densely allusive text. In the final killing of the Swan, there is a visual citation of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), and also a reminder of Mankiewicz's film version of Tennessee Williams's *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959). Bourne seems a typical instance of Dyer's gay cinema-goer, who watches films in the hope of discovering clues to his own identity; he then replays these clues in dramas of his own making. Bourne mentions the allusions in Bourne and Macaulay ([1999], pp. 199, 275). He acknowledges that Ludwig was also important, and especially via Visconti's *Ludwig*, though his vague awareness of an earlier Ludwig-inspired *Swan Lake* – 'Was it John Neumeier's?' – discouraged him from developing the connection too much (pp. 230, 237).

5 Foster (2001), p. 198. Foster discusses Bourne's *Swan Lake* at length, and

situates it in a tradition of modern dance that includes Ted Shawn, Merce Cunningham, and Mangrove. Foster admires the swan-corps because they 'conjoin . . . oppositional attributes'. But she wonders at this production as an expensive, all-white theatrical venture, in which our consumerist guilt is assuaged by the fact that the swans are 'performing the important cultural labor of explaining a gay sensibility' (p. 197). For all her enjoyment of certain aspects of this *Swan Lake*, Foster is also disappointed by the fact that Bourne offers us 'only the most stereotypic of female character types' (p. 197). See Fleming (2000), pp. 29–30. While we might see some of Bourne's statements as an attempt to engage a wider audience, it is worth noting that he argued that his work was about love more generally, and should not be referred to as a 'gay *Swan Lake*'.

6 Preljocaj is asked what made him want to become a dancer: 'Une fille, tout bêtement. J'avais 11 ans, elle faisait de la danse et elle m'a prêté un livre où il y avait une photographie de Noureev. La légende disait: "Rudolph Noureev transfiguré par la danse!" Il avait l'air lumineux. Ça m'a donné envie d'être, moi aussi, transfiguré et lumineux. Alors, je me suis inscrit à son cour de danse'. Preljocaj continues: 'Je n'imaginais pas qu'on puisse inventer un langage avec le corps. Quand j'ai découvert ça, j'ai compris que c'était ce que je voulais faire'. See Spira (2001), pp. 6–7. I don't think my readings of Preljocaj's or of Bausch's work depend on assumptions about their sexuality. Perhaps it introduces a certain irony to state that I understand them both to be heterosexual.

7 Preljocaj was for several years a student of Karin Waehner – herself a student of Wigman – and he also trained with, amongst others, Merce Cunningham. For a discussion of Preljocaj's antecedents, see Brigitte Paulino-Neto (1992).

8 'Dossier de presse-*Casanova*', BNO Archive.

9 She is writing of *Liqueurs de chair*: 'L'on y confirme encore à quel point la multiplication des signaux cuneiforms, dont il émaille très précisément sa chorégraphie, privilégie toutes les extrémités: mains, pieds, coudes et genoux, au détriment du corps global. On finira par en déduire que la prééminence du détail, obsessionnelle parce que démesurée, vise à ruiner l'idée d'un corps global'. See Paulino-Neto (1992), p. 82.

10 For a more extensive discussion of 'how to make dances in an epidemic', and especially with reference to the U.S. West Coast dance scene, see Gere (2004).

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