

**“The Dance That Does Not Speak Its Name”:  
Choreomusical  
Masculinity in the Works of Frederick Ashton**



Maria Schreurs

6886817

RMA Thesis Musicology

Utrecht University

Supervisor: Dr. Annelies Andries

Second Reader: Dr. Kara Yoo Leaman

15 July 2024

## Abstract

This Master's thesis in Musicology investigates choreomusical presentations of masculinity found in the ballets of Sir Frederick Ashton (1904-1988). Masculinity in ballet is a contested topic, both inside and outside of academia. Mainly, the figure of the male dancer brings much discomfort and is riddled with stereotypes. Despite these assumptions and stereotypes, many aspects of ballet are gendered, such as the steps. However, as this thesis shows, a loosening of these strict gender binaries can be found in the works of Frederick Ashton, with many of Ashton's male characters displaying a wide range of masculinities. A founding choreographer of the Royal Ballet in London, Ashton's choreographic style is also known to be inherently musical. This thesis hypothesises that Ashton's inherently musical choreography, and wide display of masculinities are linked.

In order to assess the traces of masculinity in Ashton's works, this thesis takes a choreomusical approach as the base of its methodology. Choreomusicology is a relative new and interdisciplinary field that advocates for the analysis of music and choreography as a unit. By analysing masculinity through a choreomusical lens, this thesis shows that choreomusical research can also be employed to unveil socio-political contexts present in ballet. Central to this thesis are two works by Ashton: *La Fille mal gardée* (1960) and *The Dream* (1964). Choreomusical analysis of these two works shows that the relationship between music and dance heavily impacts a male character's masculinity. Ashton does this by playing with the rules and conventions of *musique dansante*, a nineteenth-century composing style that links musical elements to choreographic ones.

**Key Words:** masculinity, ballet, Frederick Ashton, choreomusicology, *musique dansante*

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Table of Contents .....	3
List of Figures .....	5
Introduction .....	7
Chapter 1: Literature Review and Methodology .....	13
Masculinity and Men in Ballet .....	13
Choreomusicology .....	19
A Methodology of Choreomusical Research.....	29
Musical Analysis .....	31
Choreographic Analysis .....	33
Putting it Together .....	34
Conclusion .....	38
Chapter 2: <i>La Fille mal gardée</i> . .....	40
The Wayward History of Ashton's <i>La Fille mal gardée</i> .....	40
Analysis: Colas's Leitmotiv .....	45
Colas, The Ideal Son-In-Law? .....	55
Colas, Alain, and the Relativity of Masculinity .....	60
Conclusion .....	62
Chapter 3: <i>The Dream</i> (1964). .....	64
A Midsummer Night's Dream .....	64
Frederick Ashton's <i>The Dream</i> .....	66
Fairies, Queerness, and the Complex Masculinity of the Fairy King.....	69
Quarrels, Fairies, and Toxic Masculinity .....	75
The Reconciliation <i>Pas de Deux</i> , Trust, and Equality.....	83
Titania, The Subdued Wife? .....	90
Conclusion .....	92
Conclusion.....	94
Bibliography .....	98
Literature .....	98
Audio-Visual Materials .....	101
Musical Scores.....	101

Website Content .....	101
Appendix 1: Glossary of Ballet Terms.....	103
Appendix 2: Full Choreomusical Analyses.....	107

## List of Figures

- Title Page: Oberon (McRae, 2017 – photo by Bill Cooper)
- Fig. 1: excerpt of ‘Colas’s entrance’ (L1) - notes Maria Schreurs
- Fig. 2: excerpt of ‘Colas’s entrance’ (L1) – notes Maria Schreurs
- Fig. 3: excerpt of ‘Colas’s variation’(L2) – notes Maria Schreurs
- Fig. 4: excerpt of ‘Colas’s entrance’ (L1) – notes Maria Schreurs
- Fig. 5: Colas swaying with hands on his heart (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)
- Fig. 6: Colas raises his fist (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)
- Fig. 7: excerpt of ‘Colas’s entrance’ (L1) – notes Maria Schreurs
- Fig. 8: *cabriole* (McRae, 2015 – photo by Tristram Kenton)
- Fig. 9: Colas mimes hearing the churchbell (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)
- Fig. 10: Colas’s walk in ‘Colas’s variation’ (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)
- Fig. 11: Colas on his way to the festival, *sauté* with split (McRae, 2010 – photo by Tristram Kenton)
- Fig. 12: excerpt of ‘Coda’ (L5) – notes Maria Schreurs
- Fig. 13: Colas kisses Lise (McRae and Osipova, 2015 – photo by Alice Pennefather)
- Fig. 14: *pas de deux* with pink ribbon (McRae and Osipova, 2015 – screenshot DVD)
- Fig. 15: *pas de trois* (McRae, Kay and Osipova, 2015 – photo by Dave Morgan)
- Fig. 16: Alain riding his umbrella (Paul Kay, 2015 – photo by Tristram Kenton)
- Fig. 17: double supported *arabesque penchée* (Dowell and Sibley, 1964 – photo by Houston Rogers)
- Fig. 18: Oberon in Balanchine’s *A Midsummernight’s Dream* (Anthony Huxley, 2019 – photo by Erin Baiano)
- Fig. 19: Oberon in Ashton’s *The Dream* (Steven McRae, 2017, photo by Tristram Kenton)
- Fig. 20: Bottom with pointe shoes and Titania in *The Dream* (Bennet Gartside and Akane Takada, 2017 – photo by Tristram Kenton)
- Fig. 21: excerpt of the Fairy March (Quarrel Oberon and Titania) – notes Maria Schreurs
- Fig. 22: Titania defiantly walks away (Akada and McRae, 2017 – screenshot DVD)
- Fig. 23 and 24: Oberon and Titania perform *arabesques* (Akada and McRae, 2017 – screenshots DVD)
- Fig. 25: *saut de chat* (McRae, 2017 – photo by Tristram Kenton)
- Fig. 26: excerpt of the Fairy March (Quarrel Oberon and Titania) – notes Maria Schreurs

Fig. 27: excerpt of the Fairy March (Quarrel Oberon and Titania) – notes Maria Schreurs

Fig. 28: Oberon supports Titania in *arabesque*, dips her, and then twists her around while she ducks under her own leg (McRae and Takada, 2017 - screenshot DVD)

Fig. 29: double supported *arabesque penchée* (McRae and Takada, 2017 – photo by Andrej Uspenski)

Fig. 30: excerpt of the Nocturne (Reconciliation *pas de deux*) – notes Maria Schreurs

Fig. 31: excerpt of the Nocturne (Reconciliation *pas de deux*) – notes Maria Schreurs

Fig. 32: Titania draping herself over Oberon's knee, while Oberon triumphantly raises his right arm above his head (McRae and Takada - screenshot DVD)

## Introduction

This Master Thesis in Musicology will concern the intersection between masculinity, choreography and music in the ballets of English choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton (1904-1988). Ashton was one of the founding choreographers of the Royal Ballet in London, and became a highly influential figure in ballet in the second half of the twentieth century. Much like his contemporary George Balanchine (1904-1983) redefined American ballet, Ashton created a distinctly ‘English’ style of ballet which became the signature of the Royal Ballet.<sup>1</sup> His style is distinctive, often described as ‘very classical [...] with a slight tweak on it’.<sup>2</sup> These tweaks can be found in Ashton’s distinct *épaulement*, the ‘Fred step’,<sup>3</sup> but also the humoristic edge present in many of his works. Another feature of Ashton’s works is their elegance and seeming effortlessness, while simultaneously being extremely technically demanding.<sup>4</sup> Ashton’s choreographies are also inherently musical, presenting a distinct relationship between music and choreography.<sup>5</sup> In this thesis especially, I argue that one of the most striking aspects of Ashton’s work, apart from his musicality, is how he choreographs for men, presenting a masculinity that is quite unique for ballet.

The notion of ‘masculinity’ will play a central role in this thesis, referring to the qualities, attributes, and behaviours that are considered to be characteristic (and often desirable) for men. As the concept of masculinity is fluid and ever-changing, I will not be working with only one notion of masculinity, nor will I try to define it.<sup>6</sup> Instead, I will treat masculinity as a spectrum, which allows for a variety of (valid) expressions of said masculinities. In the realm of ballet, which will be the focus of this thesis, the notion of masculinity is an inherently loaded one. As Ramsay Burt writes in his seminal book on the subject, the male dancer is a contested figure riddled with homophobic stereotypes set out to emasculate him.<sup>7</sup> A man who dances purposely presents himself and his body as an object to

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘Frederick Ashton,’ Royal Ballet and Opera, accessed 15 July, 2024, <https://www.rbo.org.uk/people/frederick-ashton>.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Ballet and Opera, ‘What makes choreographer Frederick Ashton a genius (The Royal Ballet),’ 20 June, 2017, YouTube Video, 4:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkpICgXfQNO>.

<sup>3</sup> The ‘Fred step’ is a combination Ashton first saw on Anna Pavlova and consists of a piqué arabesque, développé à la seconde, pas de bourrée, ending with a pas de chat. A variation on this choreographic combination appears in nearly every Ashton ballet.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Frederick Ashton,’ Royal Ballet and Opera.

<sup>5</sup> Royal Ballet and Opera, ‘Why The Royal Ballet love performing Enigma Variations,’ 8 November, 2019, YouTube Video, 4:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNjg-zLPzZY>.

<sup>6</sup> Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 22-29.

be stared at, and therefore to be sexualised.<sup>8</sup> However, patriarchy and homophobia declare that these attitudes are seen as deviant, abnormal, and even effeminate. Because of these persistent stereotypes regarding the male dancer, there is often an urge to overcorrect. As Doug Risner and Jennifer Fisher both remark, this overcorrection is not done by challenging these patriarchal and homophobic attitudes, but instead by doubling down on heterosexual ideas.<sup>9</sup> Mainly, ballet is branded as macho, and only (often straight) dancers that fit a specific notion of masculinity are cast as role models.<sup>10</sup> This approach ignores that many male dancers and choreographers are in fact gay or do not otherwise fit the standard notion of masculinity.<sup>11</sup> It also minimises the impact that these people had on ballet. As an example, Rudolf Nureyev, arguably the most famous male dancer from the twentieth century, died from complications of AIDS in 1991. Frederick Ashton himself was known for his effeminate mannerisms and fondness for cross-dressing.<sup>12</sup> He also frequently had relationships with men, including ballet dancer Alexander Grant, who would inspire some of Ashton's most famous choreographies. Despite the fact that these men are two of the most influential figures in twentieth-century ballet, their sexuality and gender identity is almost treated like an inconvenience or afterthought.

Masculinity is also present within the ballet works themselves. Specifically, ballet has a mostly gendered choreographic vocabulary of ballet steps. For male dancers, this distinct vocabulary prioritises athleticism, power and strength, and mostly consists of large leaps and turns. Moreover, choreographic masculinity does not only influence the movements itself, but also how male ballet characters are constructed and perceived within their narrative content. Overall, this choreographic masculinity is rigid and perpetuates only one acceptable expression of said masculinity. In ballet, there is hardly any room for diverging expressions of masculinity in male ballet characters. However, in his ballets, Ashton consistently presents male characters that express a type of masculinity that differs from the norm. While Ashton's characters are still unmistakably masculine, they present a kind of masculinity that is gentler, softer, and elegant. Yet they still come across as powerful, both in choreography and narrative. My hypothesis is that Ashton presents such a radically different perspective on masculinity by how he specifically combines music and choreography in his ballets. In this

---

<sup>8</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Doug Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance: An Empirical Study of Male Identities in Western Theatrical Dance Training*, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 78-79.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Fisher, 'Maverick Men in Ballet: Rethinking the "Making it Macho" Strategy,' in *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders*, eds. Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33; 43-44.

<sup>11</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 24-25.



thesis I will explore that hypothesis, answering the question: **how do choreomusical structures interact with the perceived masculinities present in Sir Frederick Ashton's ballets?**

In order to answer this research question I will take a choreomusicological approach, meaning that I will assess the presentation of masculinity in Ashton's ballets by analysing both the music and choreography as a unit. Combining the arts of music, dance and scenery to bring a choreographer's vision across, ballet is inherently an interdisciplinary art form. Ideally, this would mean that researchers will take an interdisciplinary approach when analysing the impact of these works. However, in practice this interdisciplinarity is rare, with scholars preferring to focus on only one field. This is partially due to a historical divide between musicology and dance studies. The choreomusical movement, which was instigated by researchers such as Paul Hodgins and Marian Smith, aims to close this gap, prioritising analysing music and choreography as one unit.<sup>13</sup> My thesis will be a contribution to the closing of this gap. Mainly, I will show how choreomusical analysis can be used to uncover socio-political aspects present in ballet, such as the representation and role of masculinity. With this thesis in particular I will link Ashton's choreographic works to concepts of masculinity, showing how both are embodied within performance.

What is important to keep in mind while reading this thesis is that a work of this length will be unable to grasp the full complexity and nuances of Ashton's style. The main reason for this is the sheer size and versatility of Ashton's catalogue. As Royal Ballet *répétiteur* Christopher Carr has said about Ashton: 'all his ballets are different'.<sup>14</sup> This is exemplified by the fact that Ashton has choreographed ballets in every genre and style imaginable. His work ranges from abstract one-act ballets (*Symphonic Variations*, 1946), to Imperial-style full-length works (*Sylvia*, 1952), tragedy (*Marguerite and Armand*, 1963) to comedy (*La Fille mal gardée*, 1960). While there is a common thread running through most of Ashton's works, it is near impossible to capture the essence of his choreographies within the length of this thesis.

For this thesis I have chosen two of Ashton ballets as case studies: *La Fille mal gardée* (1960) and *The Dream* (1964), both of which are amongst the most recognisable of Ashton's repertoire. In their individual chapters I will be analysing how each of these two case studies

---

<sup>13</sup> Marian Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Stephanie Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' in *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, eds. Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 141-156.

<sup>14</sup> Royal Ballet and Opera, 'What makes choreographer Frederick Ashton a genius (The Royal Ballet).'

present masculinity through the music and choreography. I have chosen these two works in particular because they lend themselves well for an equally complementary and comparable analysis. On the one hand, these two works have many elements in common. Both ballets tell a distinct narrative (especially in comparison to an abstract ballet) and both works are comedies. Another commonality between the two works is that they are both set to nineteenth-century music. *La Fille mal gardée* is set to a pastiche score mostly consisting of early nineteenth-century composers such as Ferdinand Hérold, while *The Dream* is set to Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Despite the similarities between these two ballets, there are also a couple of significant points where they differ. First of all, *La Fille mal gardée* is a full-length ballet. It has more time to develop the characters, and more choreomusical material to explore. *The Dream* on the other hand is a one-act retelling of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and is much more concise in terms of plot and characterisation. Secondly, the main characters in these two ballets significantly differ. The characters from *La Fille mal gardée* are human, the plot containing no supernatural elements at all. Meanwhile, *The Dream* revolves around the marital troubles of the fairy king and queen. Their otherness heavily influences the choreography, and thus the interpretation of masculinity present in said choreography.

Ballet is an art form that is mostly performed live, and thrives best when it is being presented in such a context. This is mainly due to the notion of 'liveness' (Auslander), or the idea that no performance is alike.<sup>15</sup> In ballet, an added factor to the liveness of performances is the corporeality of the individual dancers performing the work.<sup>16</sup> As Melonie B. Murray implies in her article about the embodied cultural memory of ballet, this means that each dancer's interpretation of a role can be seen as a different version of that ballet.<sup>17</sup> As one can imagine, these two factors highly complicate the possibility of choreomusical research. Therefore, for this thesis I have chosen to analyse the choreomusical masculinity present in Ashton's works entirely from recordings. I am fully aware that in terms of liveness, this approach is not ideal as it removes a fundamental aspect of ballet performances. However, in order to be able to answer my research question in a clear and consistent manner, such concessions must be made. By choosing this approach I realise that my findings in this thesis

---

<sup>15</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203938133>.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Sanden, "Hearing Glenn Gould's Body: Corporeal Liveness in Recorded Music," in *Liveness in Modern Music: Musicians, Technology, and the Perception of Performance*, ed. Paul Sanden, (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Melonie B. Murray, 'Repetitions and Variations: The Embodied Cultural Memory of Ballet,' *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9, no. 1 (2021): 23.

are based on what is effectively a time capsule, and that other researchers might come to a different conclusion when analysing other recordings of these two case studies. I also have chosen to approach these case studies as interpreted by one specific dancer: Steven McRae (b.1985). A principal of the Royal Ballet, McRae is a well-known and acclaimed Ashton interpreter, being frequently cast in his ballets.<sup>18</sup> Although these roles were not created on McRae, there have been several commercially produced recordings of him dancing these roles, making the research materials easily accessible.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The aim of my first chapter will be twofold. First of all, I will give an overview of masculinity in dance, and the field of choreomusicology, as they are the building blocks of this thesis. I will do so in the form of a literature review, discussing prominent scholars that have tackled these subjects before. These scholars will include the likes of Ramsay Burt, Michael Gard, and Doug Risner for the topic of masculinity in dance,<sup>20</sup> and Stephanie Jordan, Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir and Melonie B. Murray for choreomusicology.<sup>21</sup> In the second half of this chapter, I will construct the methodology which will be applied for the analysis of my case of this thesis. My methodology will be constructed from a combination of theories, tools and methodologies stemming from (choreo)musicology, dance studies and film studies. For this section I will weave together ideas I introduced earlier in the chapter. These include *musique dansante* (Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir),<sup>22</sup> the masking exercise (Dmitri Tiomkin and Michel Chion),<sup>23</sup> synchresis (Michel Chion),<sup>24</sup> Nicholas Cook's three models of multimedia,<sup>25</sup> and the notion of the auditory and visual 'capture' (Stephanie Jordan).<sup>26</sup>

The second and third chapters will be dedicated to analysing the case studies. Chapter two will discuss Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée* (1960, recording 2015), a full-length ballet with a history harking back to the late eighteenth century. Of all of Ashton's works, *La Fille*

<sup>18</sup> 'Performance Database,' Royal Opera House Collections, accessed 15 July, 2024.

<https://www.rohcollections.org.uk/SearchResults.aspx?searchtype=performance&page=0&person=Steven%20McRae>.

<sup>19</sup> Ross MacGibbon, director, *La Fille mal gardée*, Royal Opera House, 2015, 1 hr., 50 min; Ross MacGibbon, director, *The Dream*, Royal Opera House, 2017, 59 min.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Gard, *Men Who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics and the Art of Masculinity*, (Complicated Conversation, New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Burt, *The Male Dancer*; Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*.

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir, 'Musical Expression in the Bournonville-Løvenskjold La Sylphide Variation,' in *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales, and Karen Eliot. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies.'; Melonie B. Murray, 'Repetitions and Variations.'

<sup>22</sup> Schwartz-Bishir, 'Musical Expression,' 342-343.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. Claudia Gorbman. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' 148.

*mal gardée* has become one of the most recognisable in the repertoire, which makes it a good case study to start and assess Ashton's relationship to choreomusical masculinity. This chapter will analyse the choreography of Colas, the main male character of the ballet.

Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée* stands in a long tradition of comical ballets, and the character of Colas is no exception to this. However, Colas's personality and masculinity are choreographically expressed in a different manner than that of his predecessors, such as Basilio from *Don Quixote* (1869). This chapter will assess Colas through the choreomusical setting of his leitmotiv, which appears four times in act one of the ballet. Colas's masculinity will also be compared to two other male characters; the aforementioned Basilio, who is an earlier version of Colas's character archetype, and Alain, Colas's naïve and juvenile love rival.

Chapter three will assess *The Dream* (1964, recording 2017), Ashton's one-act retelling of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. What makes *The Dream* an interesting case study to explore is that the ballet concerns itself with the supernatural, which also translates to the main characters. Oberon and Titania are the king and queen fairies, and it is this fact that highly influences the perception of Oberon's masculinity, which will be the subject for this chapter. First of all, Oberon is not human, and therefore his masculinity cannot be assessed as such. This is especially the case since his actions throughout the ballet can be considered morally questionable. Secondly, there has historically been a link between fairies and queerness, which also heavily influences Oberon's masculinity. In this chapter, I will further explore the link between fairies, queerness and (the apparent lack of) masculinity. Oberon's masculinity will be analysed through his relationship with his wife, Titania. Their tempestuous relationship expresses itself through two significant interactions, which will be at the forefront of my analysis. The first scene is their quarrel, which sets the rest of the plot in motion. The second is their reconciliation *pas de deux* at the end of the ballet.

By looking for traces of choreographic masculinity in Ashton's ballets, this thesis seeks to contribute to choreomusicological scholarship. It aims to do so by showing that an interdisciplinary, distinctly choreomusical approach is needed in order to fully exploit the possibilities of ballet scholarship. Moreover, with this thesis my goal is to provide a new approach to ballet research, showing that the unique combination of music and dance within these ballet performances not only elevates the experience of the art form itself, but can also be used to reveal other, socio-political aspects inherent in all of ballet. My aim is that in the future, choreomusicological research in ballet can be employed for these broader contexts.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review and Methodology

As I alluded to in the introduction of this thesis, the works of Frederick Ashton have great potential for choreomusical assessments of masculinity. However, before these works can be analysed properly, it is important to lay a ground work from which to construct the rest of the thesis, which I intend to do in this first chapter. Meant as a springboard for the rest of this thesis, the content of this chapter will be divided into two. The first half will encompass an extensive literature review that will cover the two fields that lie at the heart of this thesis. First, I will delve into the topic of masculinity in dance. Here I will look at the fluidity and performativity of gender, the inherent instability of masculinity as a monolith, and how these notions pertain to male ballet dancers. One academic work that will be discussed in-depth in this section is Ramay Burt's *The Male Dancer*, which is a seminal work in the field. Next to Burt I will also consult other works that discuss men and masculinity in dance. During the first half of this chapter I will also give an overview of the field of choreomusicology. I will highlight many of the authors, texts and concepts that were important in shaping the field, but I will also highlight many obstacles that occur in aiming for a choreomusical approach. The second half of this chapter will explain the extensive methodology that I developed for this thesis, using many of the authors and concepts that are discussed in the literature review.

### Masculinity and Men in Ballet

The topic of male dancers seems to be a highly contested and controversial one. One reason for this is that the image of the male dancer is riddled with stereotypes. Many of these stereotypes are related to the male dancer's masculinity, or assumed lack thereof. With 'masculinity' I especially mean the qualities, attributes and behaviours that are considered to be characteristic of men.<sup>1</sup> As ballet is often seen as a traditionally feminine activity, the masculinity of male dancers is compromised, as the act of dancing ballet is seen as effeminate. However, while masculinity and femininity are presented as an unchanging binary (you can only be one or the other), in reality gender and expressions of gender are much more complex. One obstacle is that gender, and therefore the notion of masculinity, is not a biological given. Instead, as Judith Butler famously argues, gender is a construct, its

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Masculinities,' Council of Europe, accessed 15 July, 2024, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/masculinities>.

acceptable expressions being prescribed by society.<sup>2</sup> While these gender norms are seen as rigid and unchanging, they are greatly influenced by current norms and values. In his seminal book *The Male Dancer*, Ramsay Burt argues that while the notion of gender (and masculinity) is portrayed as a steady monolith, it is in fact fluid and therefore inherently unstable.<sup>3</sup> This means that a conscious deviation from acceptable gender norms can threaten a collapse of these rigid forms of acceptable masculinity, exactly because of their instability. To keep these concerns about gender and gender identity in mind, for this thesis I will not treat masculinity as a monolith. Instead I will place expressions of masculinity in ballet on a spectrum.

According to Burt, because of their purposeful deviation from accepted expressions of masculinity, male dancers have the potential to destabilise the already unstable structures of masculinity even further.<sup>4</sup> However, a clear distinction must be made first, namely that not all male dancers are held under the same scrutiny that male ballet dancers are. There are plenty of dance genres that men can participate in without being judged, their masculinity kept intact. Most of these dance genres, such as folk dancing, tap dance, and hip hop, either had their origins or are still performed in a social environment.<sup>5</sup> Instead, ‘the trouble with the male dancer’ – as Ramsay Burt likes to call it – especially seems to be present within another category entirely.<sup>6</sup> Theatre dance, which encompasses such genres as ballet and modern dance, is dance that is specifically performed on a stage instead of a social environment.<sup>7</sup> Michael Gard adds to this definition that theatre dance is a category of dance which people buy tickets for to see.<sup>8</sup> But why do people feel so uncomfortable looking at male (ballet) dancers, especially if they specifically pay to see them dance? There seem to be two major components to the negative reputation of the male dancer: the male body as a sexualised object, and homophobia.

The main distinguishing factor of theatre dance is that it is performed on a stage. As both Burt and Gard examine, it is exactly this distinction that makes the male dancer such a contested figure.<sup>9</sup> Dance is an embodied art form, and as Butler theorises, gender is too. In fact, Butler states that gender is a performance, something that can be rehearsed.<sup>10</sup> In his book

---

<sup>2</sup> Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 7; 12.

<sup>4</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Gard, *Men Who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics and the Art of Masculinity*, (Complicated Conversation, New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Gard, *Men Who Dance*, 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 6; Gard, *Men Who Dance*, 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 16.

*Men Who Dance*, Michael Gard equally places the body as ‘the arena in which gendered identities are constructed’.<sup>11</sup> Because both dance and gender are embodied, the two are invariably linked, which Burt also argues in his book. By dancing on stage, the male dancer is purposefully presenting his body, therefore implicitly making a statement about his gender. This statement is that the male body can also be cast as an object to be looked at, to be desired. However, by dancing on stage, the male dancer also risks implicating their own masculinity.

As Burt writes, from 1830-1980 the male body was considered taboo.<sup>12</sup> One major reason for this taboo was how (male) performing bodies were perceived by the audience. Laura Mulvey theorises that in film, shots are generally catered towards the viewing pleasure of the male spectator. When looking at other men on screen, the shots are framed in such a way that the viewer can identify themselves with the character on screen. However, women are framed in a more detached and sexualised manner, as the looking has become a form of pleasure. This is the male gaze, where the female body has become an object. While Mulvey’s theory was originally constructed for film, the male gaze has since then been adapted for the stage by scholars such as Ann Daly,<sup>13</sup> which makes the notion also suitable to apply to the male ballet dancer. Traditionally, the male gaze is only applied to women, not other men. The man is traditionally cast as the spectator, not the object to be ogled. Or, as Steve Neale writes: ‘The male body could not be the erotic subject of another male look.’<sup>14</sup> However, by performing on stage, the male (ballet) dancer does exactly that. In that regard, Ann Daly cites the possible subversive power of the male dancer. As male dancers purposefully put themselves on display, they are also subjected to a male gaze, changing the dynamics between performer and spectator.

The fact that male dancers subject themselves to the male gaze in one way or another, is one of the major reasons why male dancers and their masculinity are so contested. In *The Male Dancer*, Ramsey Burt blames the negative attitudes towards male dancers on homophobia. Defined by Burt as ‘the social mechanism which prohibits, or makes fearful, the idea of intimate contact or communication with members of the same sex,’ homophobia strong-arms the reputation of the male dancer.<sup>15</sup> While Burt states that homophobia was not the originator of ‘the trouble with the male dancer’, as that trouble was already established

---

<sup>11</sup> Gard, *Men Who Dance*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Doug Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance: An Empirical Study of Male Identities in Western Theatrical Dance Training*, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>14</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 22.

when modern identity labels were introduced, it is one of the main instigators in how we view male dancers today.<sup>16</sup> As Burt emphasises, homophobia does not only determine behaviours against queer people, but all men.<sup>17</sup> Heterosexuality as unquestioned norm can only stand when it is contrasted with supposed undesirable traits, or homosexuality.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, queerness is inherently associated with masculinity, or the lack thereof. As a result, the fear of being considered queer (and therefore less masculine) has such a strong hold on society that men are afraid to form any homosocial bonds at all. Ballet and other forms of theatre dance present the male body as an object for sexual desire. This means that for a male spectator, the presence of the male dancer might blur the line between acceptable (homosocial) connections to other men, and unacceptable (homosexual) ones. Therefore, even though patriarchy has taught people to suppress their homosocial desires, the male dancer seems to have the power to reveal these desires, simply by performing on stage.<sup>19</sup>

Homophobia seems to have an even stronger hold on the reputation and marketability of ballet. In his book *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance* Doug Risner examines the experiences of young boys in dance education. One of his main observations is that ballet education has taken on a strictly heterosexist attitude in trying to market ballet as a valuable hobby for young boys.<sup>20</sup> Defined by Richard Friend, heterosexism is a societal attitude that systematically values heterosexuality more than homosexuality.<sup>21</sup> While related to homophobia, heterosexism is different in that it is systematic and inherently ingrained in our society, while homophobia is often seen as an individualised attitude one can outgrow. According to Risner, these heterosexist attitudes are especially prevalent in how ballet is marketed to young boys who want to pursue it. In ballet there is this ‘open secret’ that all male dancers must be gay or effeminate, even when this is not the case.<sup>22</sup> In order to market ballet as a valid hobby for boys and men, focus must be drifted away from this ‘open secret’. Instead, a heterosexist approach is used to draw boys and men to the art form. This can be done in a variety of ways. The first is by comparing ballet to traditional sports.<sup>23</sup> Male dancers are cast as athletes instead of artists. While there is of course an athletic counterpart to ballet, this approach minimises ballet’s artistry, which draws many people to the art form. Another approach is using the predominantly feminine space of the ballet studio to draw male

---

<sup>16</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 7.



participants. The idea is that straight men can use ballet as a dating pool. A final method is minimising the impact of gay dancers by casting straight ballet dancers as role models instead.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, as Risner also states, many male ballet dancers do identify as gay, or do not fit the standard norm of masculinity. This leaves these dancers in a strange position. In the ballet studio, queer dancers are valued for their skill and artistry.<sup>25</sup> However, outside the studio they are marginalised, and even thrown under the bus by heterosexist ballet marketing.

Jennifer Fisher also identified the urge of ballet schools, studios and companies to rebrand ballet as an activity appropriate for masculine boys and men. This attitude, which she dubs the ‘making it macho’-strategy, is inherently problematic, and might do more harm than good.<sup>26</sup> She notes that this attitude is more prominent in North America, where twentieth-century notions of masculinity were geared towards hypermasculine archetypes such as the cowboy, the self-made man, and the terminator.<sup>27</sup> As a result, many prominent male dancers from the mid- to late twentieth-century were branded as hypermasculine and macho role models. Some of these, such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, were indeed heterosexual, while others, such as Ted Shawn and Rudolf Nureyev, noticeably identified as gay.<sup>28</sup> However, as Risner also concludes, this focus on straight or straight passing individuals and macho culture in the dance world undermines the reality; a large percentage of male dancers are gay and do not fit in the traditional mould of masculinity. Moreover, Fisher concludes that the art form of ballet simply does not match its heterosexist marketing: “‘making it macho’ is not a strategy that will ever work, simply because ballet *isn't* conventionally macho and will never be.”<sup>29</sup>

Instead, Fisher proposes a rebranding of the ‘making it macho’-strategy: the male dancer as maverick. Fisher states that all men who are willing to pursue ballet professionally have one thing in common, regardless of their differing socio-economic background, upbringing, and motivations.<sup>30</sup> Male dancers all are independent thinkers, unconcerned with the status quo, and purposefully deviate from the norm exactly because they pursue this art form. In that regard, the maverick is not too dissimilar from the macho. Both archetypes have a sense of rebelliousness and independence about them. The main difference is that the macho perpetuates a one-sided expression of masculinity which is harmful if it is presented as the

---

<sup>24</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 79.

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Fisher, ‘Maverick Men in Ballet: Rethinking the “Making it Macho” Strategy,’ in *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders*, eds. Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>27</sup> Fisher, ‘Maverick Men in Ballet,’ 33.

<sup>28</sup> Fisher, ‘Maverick Men in Ballet,’ 34-35.

<sup>29</sup> Fisher, ‘Maverick Men in Ballet,’ 43.

<sup>30</sup> Fisher, ‘Maverick Men in Ballet,’ 44.

only acceptable option. The maverick offers the opportunity for many different expressions of masculinity in ballet and other forms of dance. As Fisher states: '[Ballet is] athletic, yes, manly, undoubtedly and of course, but Ballet Men will always be something the Terminator is not – light, precise, and more delicately attentive to the music and the muses than a strictly macho could ever hope to be.'

This finally leads me to sir Frederick Ashton, whose work will be the common thread running through this thesis. As I will show throughout this thesis, the way Ashton choreographs for male characters differs from the heterosexist norms of nineteenth-century performances. However, there is also a closer link between Ashton and his masculinity that we must keep in mind when discussing his choreographies. Ashton was not straight. While it is unclear how Ashton would have identified himself in this day and age, it is clear that he deviated from the acceptable norm in many ways. First and foremost, he had relationships with other men, creating many of his most remembered roles for them. These men included the likes of Michael Somes and Alexander Grant, the latter playing a recurring role in this thesis. Ashton was also always described as being more effeminate than his peers. As Julie Kavanagh writes in Ashton's biography, he was relentlessly teased for this.<sup>31</sup> He also showed great interest in crossdressing, which eventually even translated in his ballet roles as he created one of Cinderella's stepsisters for himself. Kavanagh even claims that his effeminate behaviours and tastes translate into his more gentle and lyrical choreography. When writing about the furnishings of Ashton's country house she states: 'Its fusion of femininity, elegance and rustic simplicity mirrored the 'Ashtonian' qualities in his work'.<sup>32</sup>

With Ashton's femininity as such a major component of his choreographic style, one could conclude that Ashton's homosexuality and inclination towards the effeminate would be held against him and his work. To some extent this is true. Ashton's homosexuality, like Shawn and Nureyev's, is often ignored. When it is mentioned, it is treated like a bug, not a feature. However, in *The Male Dancer* Burt argues that in the nineteenth century there was one major exception to the norm of rigid, unemotional masculinity: the male genius.<sup>33</sup> The male genius, often in the artistic sense, was allowed to express some traits that were associated with the feminine. Burt does emphasise that the courtesy towards the sensitive male artist generally does not extend to male dancers.<sup>34</sup> However, I argue that Ashton might have been the exception to this rule. While it is a loaded term, to some extent Ashton can be

---

<sup>31</sup> Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 24.

<sup>32</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 440-441.

<sup>33</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 18-19.

considered amongst these emotional, feminine, and artistic geniuses. His work has a gentler edge, was highly influential, and is still performed today. While Ashton does not fit in the ‘making it macho’-strategy, taking Fisher’s proposal into account, he absolutely fits her definition of maverick.

### **Choreomusicology**

This leads me to the main field through which these complicated notions of masculinity and male dancers in ballet are to be assessed. Choreomusicology is a relatively new field encompassing both musicology and dance studies, that advocates for analysing the music and choreography in dance works as a unit. The field of choreomusicology was formally defined in 1992, when Paul Hodgins first coined the term.<sup>35</sup> Because I will be unable to grasp the complexity of this field in a thesis of this length, I have decided to give a brief historical overview of the field, and highlight many of the complications that arise when trying to combine music and dance scholarship. Therefore many of my observations in the following sections will be taken from Stephanie Jordan’s chapter for the *Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, which is one of the most comprehensive introductions into the field of choreomusicology.<sup>36</sup>

Even before Hodgins defined the field of choreomusicology, there have been a couple of attempts to acknowledge the relationship between music and dance, and the status of ballet music within Western Art Music. In 1958, Roger Fiske already wrote in his book, simply called *Ballet Music*, that twentieth-century ballets were choreographed to already existing pieces of music.<sup>37</sup> He argues that this does not work as well as originally composed ballet scores, implying that ballet music is inherently different than other forms of Western Art Music.<sup>38</sup> In his seminal 1985 book *Tchaikovsky’s Ballets*, Roland John Wiley mostly focuses on the music, but he still makes some choreomusical observations.<sup>39</sup> First of all, like Fiske, Wiley identifies that ballet music is somehow differently structured than music composed for the concert hall.<sup>40</sup> Secondly and most famously, he remarks that ballet as an art form works best if there is a reciprocal relationship between music and choreography. This

---

<sup>35</sup> Stephanie Jordan, ‘Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,’ in *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, eds. Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 141.

<sup>36</sup> Jordan, ‘Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,’ 141-156.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Fiske, *Ballet Music*, (London: Harrap, 1958), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Fiske, *Ballet Music*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky’s Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

<sup>40</sup> Wiley, *Tchaikovsky’s Ballets*, 6.

means that ideally, when music takes the lead, the choreography stays to the background, and vice versa.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the growth of the choreomusical field, there has also been resistance to analyse ballet and ballet music in this manner. One prominent example of this are the works of Rodney Stenning Edgecombe. In his extensive writings on ballet scores, Edgecombe is quick to reject the merits of choreomusical research, solely focussing on musical analysis in his writing. In his article on *Giselle*'s score in particular, he actively pushes back against Marian Smith, whom with her book *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle* was an early advocate for the choreomusical method.<sup>42</sup> Ironically, Edgecombe's sheer rejection of the choreomusical method might actually be a great argument for choreomusical analysis. In his article on the ballet music of Cesare Pugni, Edgecombe makes the bold statement that ballet music sounds flat and uninteresting to outsiders, and that ballet fans only enjoy listening to ballet music because they imagine the choreography.<sup>43</sup> By stating this, Edgecombe inadvertently proves why a choreomusical approach is so necessary, as the combination of music and choreography clearly enhances a listener's experience.

One major obstacle for choreomusical analysis is that while it is recognised that interdisciplinary art forms such as ballet would benefit from an interdisciplinary methodology for analysis, this does not mean that collaboration between two separate fields of study always goes smoothly. On the contrary, as Jordan outlines, choreomusicology requires an interdisciplinary approach of two historically separated fields: musicology and dance studies. Jordan calls this separation the music-dance divide. Our world seems to be structured on a binary. There is the gender juxtaposition of male against female, but this binary way of thinking is also present in other aspects of our daily life, including culture-nature, mind-body, and music-dance. Because music and dance are seen as polar opposites, this complicates the language when discussing them as a unit. In her chapter in *Of Another World*, Inger Damsholt explores the music-dance divide through a gendered metaphor, stating that choreomusical relations are often referred to as a 'marriage' between music and dance. However, in describing this relationship as a negative, the connection between music and dance can be seen as unfavourable, as the term 'marriage' can perpetuate negative and patriarchal stereotypes. This gendered metaphor also impacted how new dance works were created. As

---

<sup>41</sup> Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, 'The Score of "Giselle",' *The Musical Times* 156, no. 1930 (2015): 27; Marian Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, 'Cesare Pugni, Marius Petipa and 19th-Century Ballet Music,' *The Musical Times* 147, no. 1895 (2006): 39.

Damsholt argues, in the second half of the twentieth century, music-dance relations mimicked the sexual revolution.<sup>44</sup> Just like the institution of marriage had been questioned, the same was true for choreomusical relations. This was especially prominent in modern dance, where there was an insistence that there should be a non-relationship between music and dance. However, as Damsholt also proves in her chapter, this gendered metaphor is inherently flawed. In *The Male Dancer*, Ramsay Burt problematizes this binary way of thinking as it reduces highly diverse qualities into narrowly defined boxes and cast them as polar opposites.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, for music and dance, this binary is somewhat muddled. As Damsholt argues, all the muses are female, which includes Euterpe (music) and Terpsichore (dance).<sup>46</sup> Therefore, if music and dance are placed on a strict binary, which one is male, and which one is female?<sup>47</sup>

The music-dance divide also complicates choreomusical research on a methodological level. One issue is that both fields are highly specialised and have their own methodology and terminologies. Unless a researcher has two degrees or is otherwise professionally trained in both disciplines, researchers will always be lacking some knowledge that might be inherent to someone who was trained in the field. To take myself as an example, I was trained as a musicologist, and while I took ballet classes as a little girl, my knowledge on ballet steps and choreography is mostly self-taught. An interesting phenomenon Jordan remarks upon, is that while choreomusicology is an interdisciplinary field, it is mostly musicologists that practice it; not dance scholars.<sup>48</sup> One possible reason for this is the discrepancy between music theory and dance theory. Music theory is considered to be one of the most specialised aspects of musicology. It can take many years to master, as it has very distinct rules and conventions. Jordan also describes a general feeling of annoyance amongst musicologists when researchers from outside the field attempt to use music theory analyses, but make small mistakes in doing so.<sup>49</sup> This also results in an uncertainty from researchers to step into unknown research territory.<sup>50</sup> In comparison, dance studies does not have an equivalent to music theory.<sup>51</sup> While each genre has their own particular dance steps and rules, these are not standardised to the same extent that music theory is. Moreover, dance does not have a standardised notation in the same way music has. Dance studies does use the term dance theory, but it is mostly used

---

<sup>44</sup> Monna Dithmer, ed, *Of Another World : Dancing Between Dream and Reality*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002), 242.

<sup>45</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 13-14.

<sup>46</sup> Dithmer, *Of Another World*, 240.

<sup>47</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 13-14.

<sup>48</sup> Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' 143.

<sup>49</sup> Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' 143.

<sup>50</sup> Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' 143.

<sup>51</sup> Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' 142.

to express socio-political aspects present in a given dance work.<sup>52</sup> In that regard, dance theory is more closely related to for instance queer theory.<sup>53</sup> Despite this divide between music and dance studies, there have been attempts to bring the fields closer together. In their article ‘From Pitch to Plié’, Ben Thomas and Juliet McMains have set up a comprehensive guide explaining the most important concepts in both musicology and dance studies, and highlighting they might overlap.<sup>54</sup>

There is great reason to assume that ballet music (and its relation to choreography) is different from other types of concert music and therefore should be analysed as such. The main assumption within choreomusicology is that music and choreography function not only as a unit, but that the combination of these two factors also adds something that does not occur when the two factors are presented separately. In the field of film music, film theorist and composer Michel Chion named this phenomenon ‘synchresis’, a portmanteau of the terms ‘synthesis’ and ‘synchronisation’.<sup>55</sup> I argue that ‘synchresis’ does not only occur in film and other screen media, but also in the live art form of dance. In her introductory chapter about choreomusicology, Stephanie Jordan describes the phenomenon of the auditory or visual ‘capture’, where certain choreographic elements can be observed in the music and vice versa, where this link would not be discovered when assessing the elements separately.<sup>56</sup> However, the question that then arises is; if there is really a ‘synchresis’ between music and choreography, how do you analyse such works?

As I already hinted at in the previous paragraph, one possible answer can be found in tools and methodologies created for other musical multimedia, especially film music. In the introduction to his book *Film/Music Analysis*, Emilio Audissino remarks that the interdisciplinary nature of film music causes a tension and disconnect between scholars from the two fields that aim to study it.<sup>57</sup> Audissino’s arguments are eerily similar to Stephanie Jordan’s remarks about the music-dance divide in choreomusical research.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that in one way or another, choreomusicology and film music studies are quite similar and choreomusical researchers can turn to film music and adapt some of their methodologies. One such tool, which will be applied in this thesis, is the masking exercise. First described by film

---

<sup>52</sup> Jordan, ‘Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,’ 142.

<sup>53</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> McMains, thomas

<sup>55</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision : Sound on Screen*, ed. Claudia Gorbman. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 188.

<sup>56</sup> Jordan, ‘Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,’ 148.

<sup>57</sup> Emilio Audissino, *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 3-6.

<sup>58</sup> Jordan, ‘Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,’ 143.

composer Dmitri Tiomkin and later fully developed by film theorist and composer Michel Chion, masking is a well-known exercise within film music studies.<sup>59</sup> In masking, film scenes are first analysed while on mute, before watching them with sound and marking down the differences. As I will explain further in the ‘methodology’ section of this chapter, I have adapted the masking exercise for choreomusical purposes, analysing music and choreography separately, before re-joining them in the final, choreomusical analysis.

A second tool which could be useful for choreomusical research is Nicholas Cook’s *Models of Multimedia*.<sup>60</sup> In his book *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, Cook introduces three models that determine the relationship between a given piece of music and its corresponding visual: conformance, complementation, and contest.<sup>61</sup> With conformance, the music and visuals match each other perfectly.<sup>62</sup> On the other side of the spectrum is contest. In this model, the music and visual heavily contrast each other, often to the point where they clash.<sup>63</sup> Complementation is an intermediate form of the other two models. Here the music and visuals overall match, but there are still points of contrast.<sup>64</sup> Of these three models, complementation is the most common, as it has become the standard of film scoring. This means that when one of the other two models is used instead, this is done deliberately. For instance, Mickey Mousing is an extreme form of conformance, best known for its use in Walt Disney cartoons. In chapter two of this thesis, I will give a more thorough example about how the deliberate choice of Mickey Mousing can interact with the perception of a character.

For this thesis, I argue that Cook’s model can be adapted to study dance works as well. However, in order to do so, one major difficulty must be addressed. The process of creating choreographies is quite different from creating film scores. In most other musical multimedia the score is usually created last, while in dance it is common for music to be created (or chosen) first. In the time of the Imperial ballets of Marius Petipa, it was common for composers to create musical pieces based on the strict instructions from the choreographer, meaning that the relationship between music and dance is much closer.<sup>65</sup> Keeping this closer relationship in mind, where does that leave Cook’s three models of multimedia, and especially conformance and complementation? As Cook himself states, the line between

---

<sup>59</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*.

<sup>60</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 98.

<sup>62</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 100-101.

<sup>63</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 103.

<sup>64</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 103-104.

<sup>65</sup> Edgecombe, ‘Cesare Pugni, Marius Petipa,’ 40.

conformance and complementation is already quite thin.<sup>66</sup> This is mainly because, according to Cook, ‘true’ conformance is virtually impossible to achieve.<sup>67</sup> Because ballet choreography is so tailored to the music and vice versa, one could argue that the line between conformance and complementation is gone, and that therefore only one of these models should be used. However, I argue that in choreomusical research a distinction between conformance and complementation can still be made. The strategic use of conformance or contrast in ballet can create a striking effect which differs from the model of complementation. The main difference in using the complementation model for choreomusical research, is that the relationship between the music and the visual (choreography) is much closer because of the conventions of the art form.

As the last paragraphs have shown, while it can be useful to look to film music studies for possible tools and methodologies to use for choreomusical research, there is one major difference between these two art forms that, if remained unaddressed, can make adapting these tools and methodologies problematic. Film is a mediated art form, while dance is mostly performed live. This means that much of a film’s meaning is constructed through a camera; a camera that is noticeably absent at most ballet performances. Many of the theories adapted for the choreomusical methodology of this thesis (such as the male gaze and masking) rely on this camera in one way or another. Apart from the fact that film relies on the camera, there is also an aspect that specifically impacts ballet: liveness. Originally conceived by Phillip Auslander, liveness is the factor that dictates that live performances are valued differently after the advent of recording.<sup>68</sup> One reason for this is that recordings preserve a moment in time, whereas live performances are temporal and everchanging; no performance is alike. For ballet, there is an added dimension of corporeal liveness, where part of the liveness emerges from the performing bodies on stage.<sup>69</sup> This means that in order to apply these tools and methodologies to ballet, ballet must be mediated in one way or another. For this thesis, I have made the decision to work from ballet recordings, which the Royal Opera House supplies for many of their ballets.<sup>70</sup> Later this chapter I will return to further implications of this decision.

---

<sup>66</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 104.

<sup>67</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 102.

<sup>68</sup> Phillip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203938133>.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Sanden, “Hearing Glenn Gould’s Body: Corporeal Liveness in Recorded Music,” in *Liveness in Modern Music : Musicians, Technology, and the Perception of Performance*, ed. Paul Sanden, (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> At the beginning of the 2024/2025 season, the Royal Opera House will adapt a new name: Royal Ballet & Opera. As this thesis was written before this change, I will use the old name throughout this thesis.



Because film and ballet are two different media, a more specialised approach is required. For ballet, I suggest that this approach is found in the rules and conventions of *musique dansante*. The term was coined by nineteenth-century Russian balletomanes (self-proclaimed ballet fans) who collectively decided what ballet music was considered appropriate to be danced to, or ‘*dansante*’. As Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir writes in her chapter from *Dance on Its Own Terms*, *musique dansante* is an extremely vague term primarily used to describe the relationship between music and choreography in the ballets of Marius Petipa.<sup>71</sup> There is no formal definition of *musique dansante*. This meant that ballet composers also did not know the rules, and therefore had to create their own. The ballet music during that time was created in strict concurrence with the choreographer, who had the ultimate say on the final form of a given piece of music. Together with the choreographer, nineteenth-century ballet composers created a musical and choreographic vocabulary that was easy to understand and emulate. Within the conventions of *musique dansante*, musical and choreographic movements are linked. For instance, jumps would be underscored by similar ‘jumping’ in the music, such as disjunct melodies, dotted notes and staccato. A turn on the other hand was accompanied by quick legato melodies and musical turns.<sup>72</sup> Another convention of *musique dansante* dictates that musical and choreographic phrases match.<sup>73</sup> As a result, music created with this formula at times can feel somewhat static and unoriginal. As Schwartz-Bishir argues, this style of composing and choreographing became highly influential, to the point that the rules and conventions of *musique dansante* are still used to this day, albeit in a slightly different manner.

In the case of the Ashton ballets, these definitions of ‘synchresis’ and ‘*musique dansante*’ are too narrow. In my earlier overview of the field, the assumptions of ballet music and dance as a coherent unit are mostly geared to music specifically composed for ballet productions. However, as Roger Fiske already noted in the 1950s, in the twentieth century choreographers stepped away from collaborating with composers and instead created choreographies to already existing pieces of concert music.<sup>74</sup> The works of Frederick Ashton are no exceptions to this. While Ashton’s choreographies for *Cinderella* (1948), *Sylvia* (1952), and *La Fille mal gardée* (1960) were all set to ballet scores composed by Sergei Prokofiev, Léo Delibes, and Ferdinand Hérold respectively, these musical works were all

---

<sup>71</sup> Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir, ‘Musical Expression in the Bournonville-Løvenskjold La Sylphide Variation,’ in *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales, and Karen Eliot. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 342-343.

<sup>72</sup> Schwartz-Bishir, ‘Musical Expression,’ 345-346.

<sup>73</sup> Schwartz-Bishir, ‘Musical Expression,’ 345.

<sup>74</sup> Fiske, *Ballet Music*, 7.

conceived for other choreographers. As for many of his other (mostly one-act) ballets, Ashton frequently chose pieces outside of the balletic realm. While some of them, such as Mendelssohn's music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*The Dream*, 1964), were meant for a theatrical setting, and therefore arguably more easily adaptable for ballet, others, such as Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* (*Rhapsody*, 1980) and Franck's *Variations Symphoniques* (*Symphonic Variations*, 1946), were meant for the concert hall instead. As Fiske states, the concert music used in many twentieth-century ballets was never composed to be danced to, hereby implying that analysis of these ballets should differ as the rules and conventions of *musique dansante* allegedly can only occur in pieces specifically composed for ballet, as these were the pieces first examined by the Russian balletomanes.

With this thesis I will argue that these pre-existing pieces of concert music can absolutely be analysed based on the rules and conventions of *musique dansante*. As Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir remarks, the conventions of *musique dansante* remained influential in the choreographies created in the twentieth century and had an everlasting impact on ballet.<sup>75</sup> Because certain combinations of music and movement became the norm in a time when choreographers worked closely with their composers, these combinations have become ingrained in the choreographic vocabulary of twentieth-century choreographers, even if they chose pre-existing works of music to choreograph to. However, one thing to keep in mind is that there still can be small discrepancies between music and choreography, even if a work follows *musique dansante*. Usually these pre-existing works were created in a different time period and musical style than the time period of the choreographer. Chapter three will discuss an example of such a discrepancy between source material, music, and choreography.

While the rules and conventions of *musique dansante* will be the backbone of the choreomusical analyses presented in this thesis, it is important to keep in mind that ballets are not created and perceived in this choreomusical vacuum. There are plenty of other factors that can influence one's perception of a ballet, and therefore alter one's interpretation of these pieces. The most important of these factors is that ballet, like any form of theatre, is a living, ever-changing entity, even if the repertoire itself is considered to be static. Even though the foundations of ballet are built on centuries of tradition, this does not mean that ballet has never evolved at all. In her article "Repetitions and Variations: The Embodied Cultural Memory of Ballet", Melonie B. Murray writes that evolution is an instrumental aspect of

---

<sup>75</sup> Schwartz-Bishir, 'Musical Expression,' 344.

ballet.<sup>76</sup> Ballet is not static, but is instead passed down through generations of dancers, each adding their own unique flair to the works presented.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, in the last two centuries ballet technique has developed significantly. Due to several factors such as specialised ballet training, better nutrition, and huge advancements in the pointe shoe making process, ballet nowadays is almost unrecognisable from the art form of even a century ago. This means that a modern ballet audience watching a work by Frederick Ashton are seeing something different than a ballet audience watching that same work at the premiere, even if the staging and choreography remains virtually unchanged. Therefore researchers interested in analysing ballet choreomusically at least need to acknowledge that what they are analysing will always be a time capsule, and that interpretations of the choreography might already have been changed the next time a work is performed.

Another factor to consider when analysing ballet in a choreomusical manner, is the dancer actually performing the work. As I will further illustrate in this thesis, *musique dansante* is not only a relationship between music and choreography, but is also greatly influenced by the dancer who performs the works. Murray discusses the impact that dancers have on the works they perform, many of these being staples of the traditional ballet repertory. Since ballet is an inherently physical art form, the unique corporality and physicality of a dancer greatly influence how they perform certain choreographies. For instance, a tall dancer might jump higher because of their long legs, but their long limbs might also get in the way when performing speedy passages. Each dancer has to figure out their own unique solutions to play to their strength and work around sections they find more difficult. As Murray implies, this means that each ballet dancer has their unique style of dancing, and that the same ballet performed by two different dancers can therefore be assessed as two different performances, each with their own context and implications.<sup>78</sup> For choreomusical analysis, this implies that how a dancer decides to perform the actual dance steps has an substantial impact on the eventual choreomusical analysis of a particular work. Adding to that the earlier discussed ballet techniques that have greatly evolved over the last century or so, and this makes comparing performances of the same ballet, but filmed in different decades, or performed by different dancers, an extremely confusing case of comparing apples with oranges. If these problems already become prevalent in comparing performances of the same

---

<sup>76</sup> Melonie B. Murray, 'Repetitions and Variations: The Embodied Cultural Memory of Ballet,' *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9, no. 1 (2021):15-16.

<sup>77</sup> Murray, 'Repetitions and Variations,' 23.

<sup>78</sup> Murray, 'Repetitions and Variations,' 23.

ballet, one can only imagine the problems that arise when comparing different ballets to each other, as I intend to do with this exact thesis.

This leads me to how I will be approaching my two case studies. Keeping in mind the challenges I mentioned in the above paragraph, I have chosen to approach the presented masculinity in Ashton's ballets as interpreted by one particular dancer: Steven McRae. McRae (b.1985) is an Australian-born ballet dancer who works in London as a principal dancer of the Royal Ballet. As a dancer, McRae is especially known for his high jumps, fast footwork and precise musicality. As these are all qualities which are also present in Ashton's vast catalogue of work, McRae is often considered to be a renowned interpreter of Ashton's choreography. This is evident as McRae is frequently cast in Ashton's ballets, many of which have been filmed and subsequently released to DVD. Two of these filmed performances will be the case studies central to this thesis: *La Fille mal gardée*, which was filmed in 2015 with McRae as Colas alongside Natalia Osipova as Lise, and *The Dream*, which was filmed in 2017 with McRae as Oberon alongside Akane Takada as Titania.

Of course, the choice for McRae can justifiably garner some criticism. One possible objection is that these roles were not created for him specifically. As Murray implies, dancers leave their own choreographic mark when performing certain works. This phenomenon not only happens when dancers learn already existing works, but especially when new works are created for them. Ashton was particularly known to cater the choreography of his ballets to the specific dancers he was working with. This is prevalent with the case studies for this thesis, with Colas in *La Fille mal gardée* being created for David Blair and Oberon in *The Dream* for Anthony Dowell, both highly-accomplished ballet stars in their time. As I will explain further in chapter three, Anthony Dowell especially has had a tremendous influence on how the choreography for Oberon was constructed.

However, this leads to an added layer of difficulty when assessing these works. Mainly, when comparing the choreomusical masculinity of two characters as portrayed by two different dancers, chances are that the results of such an analysis will be dissatisfying. There are too many factors that could explain the differences in presented masculinities from Ashton's work. Two dancers could perform the same role, but interpret them in a vastly different manner. As an example, in a review for Dance Tabs, Jann Perry compared three casts from a 2017 Ashton triple bill consisting of *The Dream*, *Symphonic Variations* and *Marguerite and Armand*. When discussing the portrayal of Oberon in *The Dream*, she called McRae an 'imperious sprite' and 'magical at speed', while Marcelino Sambé was 'proudly

feral' and Alexander Campbell was 'petulant rather than commanding'.<sup>79</sup> Keeping that in mind, when comparing two dancers in two different roles, one can easily make the argument that the differences are due to a dancer's interpretation; not differences in choreomusical content. By choosing McRae as my case study to analyse all these different masculinities presented in Ashton's ballets, the most prominent factor for possible discrepancies in the results is eliminated. The main idea is that since these two works are so vastly different in presenting masculinity, even when performed by McRae instead of the dancers who originated these works, one can conclude that these different presentations of masculinity must in part come from how these works are choreomusically structured.

A final reason for choosing McRae instead of the original dancers is to take these historical works and place them in a contemporary context. Not only were these ballets created with two different dancers in mind, they were created four years apart under different socio-political contexts. One socio-political context was the notion of masculinity, which was rapidly changing in the 1960s. McRae's recordings of these works were filmed within two years of each other, firmly placing them in the present. Secondly, ballet technique has been rapidly changing in the twentieth century. While the choreography for both *La Fille mal gardée* and *The Dream* are considered to be technical feats of their time, for a modern audience this nuance might be lost. Instead, when looking with a modern eye to the interpretations of Blair and Dowell, they look quite dated in comparison, which makes it challenging to assess its choreomusical merits at face value. As McRae is an active member of the Royal Ballet at the time of writing this, his contemporary interpretations of Ashton's work are more in line with the expectations of a modern audience.

### **A Methodology of Choreomusical Research**

In this chapter I have already discussed many of the complexities regarding choreomusical research. However, how to put all of these tools, methodologies and concerns into practice? For the next section of this chapter, I have developed a methodology which will be the basis for the choreomusical analyses as seen in chapters two (*La Fille mal gardée*) and three (*The Dream*). The first step with any kind of analysis is choosing the case studies. Ballet works, even the ones created by the same choreographer, can vary significantly. *La Fille mal gardée* and *The Dream* are two very different ballets. While they were both choreographed by

---

<sup>79</sup> Jann Parry, 'Royal Ballet – 3 casts in The Dream, Symphonic Variations, Marguerite and Armand – London,' *Dance Tabs*, 11 June, 2017, <https://dancetabs.com/2017/06/royal-ballet-3-casts-in-the-dream-symphonic-variations-marguerite-and-armand-london/>.

Frederick Ashton, they are inspired by two vastly different sources, are set to different music, and have vastly differing characters and settings. All these factors and more make for two stylistically different works, and that can also be noticed in how Ashton has choreographed these pieces. The characters and plot of *La Fille mal gardée* are rooted in naturalism. Apart from a couple of (mildly terrifying) human sized chickens, there are no magical or supernatural elements present in the ballet. In comparison to other comical ballets, the characters in this ballet are quite life-like and down-to-earth, which is reflected choreomusically. Ashton's choreography for *La Fille mal gardée* is almost always in synchrony with the music, with hardly any choreographic rubato. If the dancers do not perform their dance steps on the music, this is mostly due to the difficulty in controlling momentum and speed in challenging passages such as *manèges* and *fouettés*. As a result, the timing of the ballet steps in *La Fille mal gardée* adds to the simple and down-to-earth nature of the ballet.

*The Dream* on the contrary, is a ballet completely shrouded in magic and mystery. The main characters, Oberon and Titania, are fairies and the plot revolves around their magic manipulating the lives of innocent bystanders. Because Oberon and Titania are of another world, they operate on a different wavelength than the mortal characters. Add to that the setting of a warm and sultry midsummer night, where time seems to slow down, and the ballet is stylistically different from *La Fille mal gardée*. This is also present in Ashton's choreography. In comparison to *La Fille mal gardée*, the choreography of *The Dream* does not always strictly fall on the beat of the music. Instead, the choreography is much more rubato, resulting in a more free and flowing type of movement, which both fits within the lazy midsummer night setting and the supernatural nature of the characters. As I argue in chapters two and three, both ballets are clear examples of how choreomusical relations can shape notions of masculinity, even if the choreography does not necessarily correspond to the music in the same way. Ballet is a diverse genre, as can be seen by these vastly differing works by the same choreographer. Therefore it seems unhelpful to create a methodology and claim it as the ultimate, one-size-fits-all approach to choreographic research. Instead, for this thesis in particular I have developed my methodology in such a manner that it allows room to be adapted for these kinds of differences. The steps I outline in this methodology are mere building blocks which can be fine-tuned and adapted to fit the needs of individual case studies.

The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to the particular methodology developed for this thesis. One of the end goals of choreomusical analysis is to analyse how music and

choreography enhance each other, and how this relationship exposes a ballet's underlying themes and socio-political ideas. However, in order to do so, an important step in this methodology is first analysing the disciplines of music and dance separately, before re-joining them for choreomusical analysis. There are two main reasons for choosing this approach. The first is a methodological one. In order to observe the added value of music and choreography together, it is also important to observe the effect they have when they are separated from each other. As stated earlier in this chapter, this process is also known as a masking exercise.<sup>80</sup> By incorporating masking into the methodology for this thesis I will show that methods and exercises stemming from film music studies can be a beneficial tool for other interdisciplinary art forms. One downside to this approach is that such an exercise works best with mediated material, which is not ideal for an art form that partially depends on 'liveness' to appeal to an audience, as is the case with ballet. I have incorporated the masking exercise as part of my methodology, as I will be analysing recorded materials for this thesis.

The second reason is that it is more convenient to start with one discipline and build from there. A common struggle within choreomusicology (and other interdisciplinary research) is reconciling two entirely different disciplines within one analytical method, especially if a researcher is academically trained in one field, but self-taught in the other. As both Stephanie Jordan and Emilio Audissino have remarked about their respective fields of dance and film studies, this can cause annoyance within researchers who might feel that their field is taken over by outsiders.<sup>81</sup> Therefore it might be useful for a researcher to ease into choreomusical analysis by starting with the field they are more familiar with. As I am first and foremost trained as a musicologist, the methodology developed for this thesis will take the music as a starting point.

### **Musical Analysis**

When preparing the musical analysis for choreomusical research, the first step is finding the piece(s) of music the choreography is based on. In some cases this process is relatively easy, as these musical pieces are either specifically commissioned for the ballet in question (such as the music for Imperial ballets of the late nineteenth century), or are complete pieces of classical concert music (such as the music for George Balanchine's *Symphony in C*, Kenneth

---

<sup>80</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*.

<sup>81</sup> Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' 143; Audissino, *Film/Music Analysis*, 3-6.

MacMillan's *Concerto*, or Ashton's *Symphonic Variations*)<sup>82</sup>. However, there is also a lesser known practice where choreographers commission a composite score, usually based on pieces from a composer's entire repertoire. While this practice was already common in ballets from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is nowadays mostly associated with full-length narrative ballets from the second half of the twentieth century. Examples of ballets with these composite, or 'pastiche' scores, are Dauberval's original 1789 production of *La Fille mal gardée* (based on popular French dance music from that time), Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon* (based on themes by Jules Massenet), *Mayerling* (based on the oeuvre of Franz Liszt),<sup>83</sup> and Balanchine's and Ashton's adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (both with music derived from Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music for the play). Because the individual pieces are not always properly credited in these scores, figuring out what music is actually used will be a challenge.

After finding the pieces of music, there is another hurdle to take. Composite scores consist of a variety of separate, otherwise unrelated pieces of music. In order to turn these pieces of music into a coherent whole, they must be arranged in one way or another. Some pieces of music survive the process relatively unscathed, such as several of the *pas de deux*'s in *Mayerling*, which use some of Franz Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes*. However, other pieces of music seem close to unrecognisable after they were turned into ballet scores. A clear example of this is John Lanchbery's rearrangement of Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the ballet *The Dream*, which will be the main topic of chapter three of this thesis. Some of his edits are relatively mild and necessary, such as cutting out sections for length. Some rearrangements are more radical, such as Lanchbery's rearrangement of the 'Scherzo'. In the ballet, this piece has transformed into a *pas de six* for Oberon, Puck, and the fairies Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mustardseed and Moth. For this scene, Lanchbery has not only cut out sections of the scherzo, but also rearranged and shuffled the remaining sections of Mendelssohn's piece.

As one can imagine, it is important that the musical pieces are analysed as they appear within the ballet, and not how the original composer has written them down, which can be quite difficult without a score. Another step one can add here, if applicable, is figuring out exactly how a piece of music appears within the context of the ballet. For instance, how often

---

<sup>82</sup> All three of these ballets are abstract one-act ballets based on pieces of absolute concert music: George Bizet's *Symphony in C Major*, Dmitri Shostakovich's second piano concerto, and Cesar Franck's *Symphonic Variations*.

<sup>83</sup> While the music for MacMillan's *Manon* is derived from themes by Jules Massenet, it does not actually include any music from Massenet's opera *Manon Lescaut*, based on the same source material. It is actually quite common for twentieth-century ballet to base a work on an opera, but not actually use any of the opera's score. Another example is John Cranko's *Onegin*, based on themes by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.



is this piece used throughout the ballet? Does it function as a remembrance motif or leitmotiv, or is it only used in one scene? If it is a leitmotiv, and the ballet has a composite score, was it also a leitmotiv in the original work?

After collecting all pieces of music, it is time to start the musical analysis proper. This part of the process has to happen on an individual basis, and can be adapted to fit the need of the researcher in question. For this thesis in particular, I chose to analyse from music notation. Using conventional music notation, one can easily extract many of the basic musical analytical elements of a given piece. These include: metre, key, structure, length, musical range, and whether a melody is diatonic or chromatic, conjunct or disjunct. While music notation is a good starting point, not everything can be transcribed into a (heavily simplified) score. Therefore one must be aware that these elements are not excluded from the final analysis. These can include: timbre, notable instrumentations, differences in accompaniment, and noises not otherwise part of the music (such as the church bell heard in Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée*).

### **Choreographic Analysis**

Like the musical analysis described in the above paragraph, the choreographic analysis can be approached in a variety of ways, based on the researcher's experience, personal preference and the particular need of the case study. As Ashton's work is still rooted in the classical ballet tradition, and therefore contains mostly easily identifiable ballet steps, I start with identifying all these ballet steps, written down in the order they are performed. By doing so, it is easy to determine any repeating patterns. These repeating patterns could be individual ballet steps that appear a lot in a particular piece, or clusters of ballet steps that clearly form a choreographic phrase. For instance, when comparing Ali's variation from *Le Corsaire*, and Colas's variation in the Fanny Elssler *pas de deux* from *La Fille mal gardée*, it is noticeable that both start with a large *jeté* landing in the fourth position, then ending that section in *attitude*. This choreographic section is then repeated two more times, showing a clear choreographic pattern. Because both variations are musically different, this similarity is not as apparent at first glance. By assessing the choreography as a separate entity, one can easily identify such similarities or differences, without being too influenced by the music.

During this part of the analysis, one can also slowly take note of ideas of masculinity present within the piece. Ballet choreography in and of itself is already strictly gendered, with certain types of ballet steps usually being reserved for female dancers, while other ballet steps are strictly danced by male dancers. While choreography in and of itself is not enough to

determine the presented masculinity of a given piece of choreography, it is a good first step to see what ballet steps are used, and how these fall into the gender norms of ballet. For instance, large leaps are often considered to be masculine ballet steps, so if they are frequently used in a female variation (such as Myrtha's choreography in *Giselle*), it could be a sign that there is a deliberate deviation of gender norms. One can also note if there are particular ballet steps that are noticeably absent in a particular variation, such as a male variation without all the staple masculine ballet steps, such as barrel turns, *tours en l'air* and *cabrioles*.

Finally, I will also take in consideration if there is any ballet mime performed in the piece, and if so, what it translates to. Ballet mime is extremely simplified, with gestures usually only translating to verbs (love, sleep, die, curse, promise, listen, dance), (pro)nouns (you, I, king/queen, baby, swan), and questions (why, what, who). Moreover, ballet mime is derived from French grammar structures, meaning that translating mime can result into very broken sentences. For this thesis, I will use the convention of writing down ballet mime as seen in Monna Dithmer's interview with Nikolaj Hübbe in the book *Of Another World: Dancing Between Dream and Reality*.<sup>84</sup> In this writing style, the meaning of each individual mime gesture is separated by a dash. Context clues are presented in parentheses. For instance, when Colas arrives at the festival in Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée*, he mimes 'everybody gather round – I hear (the church bell) – work – is over'.

### **Putting it Together**

After both music and choreography are assessed separately, the final step is to link the music to the choreography and analyse them as a unit. There are still challenges in linking these two wildly different disciplines. The first challenge is that music and choreography do not share a notation system, which means that one medium must be transcribed into a notation system not originally meant for that particular medium. When transcribing temporal art forms such as music and dance, there are already aspects that will ultimately be lost in translation, such as timbre (music) and movement (choreography).

However, because there is now one medium that has to conform to a foreign notation system, these discrepancies between what is heard/seen and what is actually written down become even greater. Moreover, music has a standardised (Western) notation system, while dance has not. This means that most likely, it is choreography that has to conform to music notation if a researcher wants to place them in the same notation system. While there are

---

<sup>84</sup> Dithmer, *Of Another World*, 117—129.

different dance notations in circulation, such as Labanotation, Benesh notation, and Stepanov notation, they all widely differ and are notoriously difficult to learn and to read. Even if one has mastered to read one or more of these dance notations, there is no guarantee that a given case study will have a dance score available in that notation. As a result, many methodologies, including this one, will take Western music notation as their starting point, with the knowledge that it might not be the best medium to translate dance to.

As of yet, there is no common notation system developed for choreomusical research. However, there have been researchers that have developed their own choreomusical notations and use them consistently within their own work. One example is the system Kara Yoo Leaman developed for her research on Balanchine ballets. This particular notation system is developed specifically for choreomusical analysis and consists of musical notes with two stems, resembling the dancer's legs. These notes are then placed on a musical stave consisting of three lines, the placement resembling the position of the dancer relative to the floor: in a jump the note 'floats' above the stave, while a *demi-plié* is placed on the lowest line.<sup>85</sup> Leaman's notation is specifically developed for Balanchine's distinct style of choreographing, which is highly rhythmical and quick. As a result, it is not as suitable in its current form to use for Ashton's works, which are choreographed in a completely different style. While it is certainly a possibility that Leaman's system could be adapted to analyse Ashton's work in the future, with the limited scope of this thesis I am currently unable to do so. Therefore I have developed my own notation system, consisting of arrows, ballet step names and little stick figures relating the movements to the music.

The second challenge is that music and choreography cannot necessarily be placed on the same timeline. Both music and choreography consist of building blocks that, when strung together, become a coherent whole. For music, some of these building blocks are notes (for melody) and beats (for rhythm). In choreography, one important building block is the step, which can usually be divided into a couple of categories: steps, balances/poses, jumps, and turns. The main problem that emerges when trying to match the choreography to the music in notation, is that a ballet step does not necessarily equal a note. First of all, a ballet step usually takes longer to perform than the duration of a beat. Moreover, most ballet steps can be broken down into smaller components. For instance, take a *cabriole*, which is a jump that is characterised by the dancer beating their legs together while in the air. It is this element that

---

<sup>85</sup> For more information on this notation system, see Kara Yoo Leaman, 'George Balanchine's Art of Choreographic Musicality in Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux,' *Music Theory Spectrum* 44, no. 2 (2022): 340–369; Kara Yoo Leaman, 'Musical Techniques in Balanchine's Jazzy Bach Ballet,' *Journal of Music Theory* 65, no. 1 (2021): 139–169.

differentiates the *cabriole* from other types of jumps, such as the *tour en l'air* (dancer rotates while in the air) or *sissonne* (dancer jumps from two feet, landing on one). However, how does one place a *cabriole* within the music of a ballet variation? While the beating of the legs is the distinguishing factor of this complicated jump, it is not the only element that is important in performing this jump well.

As a result, not all these elements can be translated well to musical notation, as movement is fluid. Therefore I have decided to break down each type of ballet step into a couple of crucial components that can be matched to musical notation, instead of trying to match the ballet step as a whole. The first type of ballet step, simply known as steps, are quite easy to match one-to-one to the music.<sup>86</sup> Steps are simple movements of the legs and feet, mostly meant to link other movements. In most cases steps are quite quick and performed on the beats of the music. In the case that steps are more drawn-out or complex (such as the *grand battement* or *développé*), one can choose to break the ballet step down further, such as noting when a dancer stretches their leg in the air, and when they place their foot back on the floor.

Like steps, ballet poses (mostly seen in the form of balances such as *arabesque* and *attitude*) are relatively easy to match to music, as they are quite static compared to other types of steps. As ballet poses are often used at the end of a choreographic phrase in order to make a statement, they are usually performed on the music to emphasise the effect. This means that most poses can be matched directly in the notation system. Since poses are also mostly drawn out over a couple of beats or measures, one option is to write down when the pose ends, and the next ballet steps (such as a turn or a jump) begins.

For jumps, the distinction becomes slightly more complicated, as illustrated with the *cabriole* example. Since jumps take a bit more time to execute, this becomes the first type of ballet step that has to be properly and consistently broken down in order to be analysed choreomusically. Each jump can be at least broken down into two components: the take-off, and the landing, both usually timed to the music. However, most jumps add a third component, such as a full rotation in the air (*tour en l'air*), changing directions mid jump (*entrelacé*), or beating the legs or feet in the air (*cabriole*, *entrechat*). Timing these extra elements can be quite tricky, because unlike the take-off and landing, these components are not necessarily performed on the music, but rather depend on the momentum of the dancer.

---

<sup>86</sup> Because ballet/dance steps and steps have the same name, with no alternative terminology present ('movement' is too broad), I use the term 'ballet/dance step' as an overarching term to describe all named movements in a given dance tradition, while 'step' will refer to a specific subcategory of ballet/dance steps.

Momentum is a really important aspect of dance, and must therefore not be underrated within choreomusical research. Because of momentum in for instance jumps and turns, it is very hard for the dancer to always match their movements to the music. Therefore it is virtually impossible to perform, and therefore analyse, certain ballet steps (such as *manèges* and *fouettés*) perfectly on the beat of the music.

Speaking of turns, these types of ballet steps are arguably the most difficult movement to match to the music and therefore to put into notation. Turns are a series of continuous movements, and unlike the jump, cannot be easily broken down into smaller components. In turns, the take-off and landing are not as clearly defined as in the jump, as the preparation for a turn is usually a transition from another step, blurring the two together. Another aspect that makes the turn difficult to exactly pinpoint on the music is a dancer's spot. Spotting is a technique that prevents dancers from getting dizzy by only turning the head at the last possible second, while the rest of the body has already made an almost complete rotation. Because the body and head move at different speeds, spotting means that turns are very hard to count, especially in particularly fast turns such as *chaînes* and double or triple *pirouettes*. This means that unlike jumps, turns must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In most turns one can match either the preparation or the landing, but some turns need a specialised approach. An example of this is the *fouetté*, a ballet step where the dancer keeps spinning on one foot without the other foot ever touching the ground. As a dancer can perform up to 32 *fouettés* in one go, merely noting down the take-off and landing is not enough. However, in order to keep momentum in a *fouetté*, the dancer briefly stops after every turn, and these stops can be recorded into notation.

After having combined the music and choreographic analyses into one notation,

The main question one must keep in mind during this part of analysis is how do the music and choreography affect each other, and how does this create meaning? This question can be answered by a series of subquestions. Firstly, are there any examples of *musique dansante*? As discussed earlier in this chapter, examples of *musique dansante* can consist of the alignment of musical and choreographic phrases, disjunct melodies and rhythms in jumps, and small intervals in *terre-à-terre* choreography. After that, a second question asks the direct opposite. Are there any examples where the music and choreography deliberately differ from each other? If the music and choreography deliberately differ, sometimes to jarring effect, this creates an effect akin to Nicholas Cook's notion of 'contest'.<sup>87</sup> The third and final question to

---

<sup>87</sup> Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 103.

ask is, are there any moments where there is a visual or auditory capture present? In other words, are there any moments where the choreography highlights something in the music that has gone unnoticed and vice versa? With these questions, the choreomusical analysis really starts to take shape.

In the final step of this analysis, all the components discussed and analysed in the above steps are combined and are applied to plot and characters of the ballet, within the context of the ballet. This means asking the question ‘how does the music and choreography fit the character(s) of the ballet? What does the combination of the music and choreography say about this character? In asking these questions, one can finally slot in the notion of masculinity into the comparison. What are elements and representations in this piece that are often seen in a masculine light, and what are elements that deviate from this norm? What does this ultimately say about the character? One way to look at these differences in presentation and masculinity is through comparative analysis. Much can be said about a character’s choreomusical representation through how they hold up against other characters. These comparisons can be made between two characters from the same ballet, (such as comparing Oberon to Titania in *The Dream*, and comparing Colas and Alain in *La Fille mal gardée*), similar characters from different ballets (such as Colas from *La Fille mal gardée* and Basilio from *Don Quixote*), or even the same character seen in a different adaptation of the same source material (such as Oberon in Ashton’s *The Dream* and Balanchine’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*).

## Conclusion

As this first chapter has shown, there are many challenges at hand when wants to assess presentations of masculinity in ballet through choreomusical analysis. The first is that the concept of masculinity itself is not straightforward. Instead of being a monolith, the notion of masculinity is inherently unstable and constant on the verge of collapse. This is due to the ever changing nature of gender expression. As authors such as Ramsay Burt and Michael Gard have stated, ballet and especially male dancers complicate this notion even further. The male dancer purposefully defies gender norms, further threatening the collapse of an already unstable structure.<sup>88</sup> Homophobia is also a large factor in complicating the notion of masculinity in dance. In order to justify the existence of (gay) male ballet dancers, a heterosexist approach is taken.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 7; Gard, *Men Who Dance*, 7-8.

<sup>89</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 78-79.

A second challenge is the chosen method for this thesis, choreomusical research. Choreomusicology is a relative new field, and as authors such as Stephanie Jordan point out, it has been met with resistance.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, there is not one concrete method for choreomusical research. Much of the methodology is taken from other fields, such as film music studies, but adaptations and concessions must be made in order to make the methodology work for ballet analysis. Keeping these complications with masculinity and the method in mind, for this thesis I have developed my own methodology and notation. In the next two chapters of this thesis, this methodology will be applied to two case studies: *La Fille mal gardée* (1960) and *The Dream* (1964).

---

<sup>90</sup> Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' 143.

## Chapter 2: *La Fille mal gardée*.

In the second and third chapters of this thesis, I will illustrate the discussed theories and methodology from chapter one, by applying it to a case study. This second chapter will discuss Frederick Ashton's fifth and final full length ballet: *La Fille mal gardée*, which opened on 28 January 1960 at the Royal Opera House in London. The main focus of this chapter will be the choreographic masculinity of Colas, the male love interest. Throughout the ballet, Colas is assigned a musical leitmotiv that is played during scenes that are significant in establishing his character, and therefore his masculinity. The choreomusical analysis of this chapter will consist of an in-depth assessment of this leitmotiv, and all its occurrences. By doing so, I will establish how the combination of choreography and music can inform one's masculinity. Apart from the choreomusical analysis of Colas's leitmotiv, a large chunk of this chapter will encompass a comparative analysis as well. Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée* was adapted from a variety of ballets with the same name, the oldest of these even going back to the late eighteenth century. This means that the ballet, and therefore the character of Colas, stand in a long tradition of male ballet protagonists. However, while Ashton's Colas does stem from that tradition, there are many aspects of his masculinity that differ from these earlier works and characters. For this thesis I will be comparing Colas's masculinity to two other ballet characters: Basilio from *Don Quixote*, who is an earlier instance of Colas's archetype, and Alain, who is Colas's love rival in Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée*.

### The Wayward History of Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée*

In 1959, Ashton unexpectedly had plenty of free time, due to the fact that the Royal Ballet did not have a tour that summer.<sup>1</sup> During this free time, Ashton loved going to his vacation house in Suffolk. As Julie Kavanagh explains, the countryside had a nostalgic effect on him, saying that Ashton was 'swept away by a longing for the country of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century'.<sup>2</sup> Suffolk and Ashton's love for the countryside would ultimately inspire the setting of his version of *La Fille mal gardée*. A second inspiration came from Tamara Karsavina, a former Mariinsky ballerina who had performed the ballet in St. Petersburg. She encouraged Ashton to adapt *La Fille mal gardée*, telling him to take the source material 'and embroider it'.<sup>3</sup> This was exactly what Ashton did, turning *La Fille mal gardée* into one of his

---

<sup>1</sup> Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 441.

<sup>2</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 441.

<sup>3</sup> Zoë Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 209.



most recognisable works. However, even before Ashton's 1960 production, *La Fille mal gardée* had a long and tumultuous history, spanning over more than two centuries. As there are numerous productions of *La Fille mal gardée*, for this thesis I will briefly discuss the versions that were instrumental in helping shape Ashton's own production of the ballet.

The first production of *La Fille mal gardée* opened at the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux on July 1, 1789. The choreography was by Jean Dauberval and was set to a pastiche score of famous French *airs*. In 1928, Jean-Pierre Aumer choreographed a new version of *La Fille mal gardée*. While partially still set to the pastiche score of Dauberval's version, the score was now adapted by Ferdinand Hérold, who also composed a few original themes for the ballet. In 1864, Paul Taglioni's *Das schlecht bewachte Mädchen* premiered, this time set to a completely different new score composed by Peter Ludwig Hertel. Hertel's music became the basis for many Russian productions of the ballet, including works by choreographers such as Lev Ivanov, Marius Petipa, and Alexander Gorsky. It was Petipa's version that Tamara Karsavina had been so familiar with, and became the inspiration for many of the mimed passages in Ashton's production. Despite the major differences in score, choreography and even the time period these works premiered in, what all these different versions have in common is its basic plot. *La Fille mal gardée* tells the story of the spirited farm girl Lise, who loves Colas, a poor, but gentle and kind farmer.<sup>4</sup> Lise's overbearing mother has other plans and wants to marry her off to Alain, the juvenile son of a wealthy vineyard owner. Despite her mother's desperate attempts to keep the young lovers apart, Lise and Colas keep secretly (and not-so-secretly) meeting each other. In the end, Widow Simone realises that her daughter's happiness is more important than wealth, and she gives her blessing for the marriage.

Musically, the score for Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée* is a mishmash of the three ballet productions mentioned in the above paragraph, arranged and re-orchestrated by John Lanchbery, who was one of Ashton's frequent collaborators. The main 'body' of the score was derived from Hérold's 1928 score, who is also credited as the main composer for the ballet.<sup>5</sup> However, the score for Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée* is still a pastiche. This is partially due to Hérold's own adaptation of the original 1789 pastiche score, but Lanchbery also supplemented the score with a couple of original compositions, such as the exuberant finale of the ballet (which I will come back to later in this chapter). While it was Hertel's version of *La Fille mal gardée* that Tamara Karsavina had danced, Ashton famously did not

---

<sup>4</sup> Character names are taken from Ashton's production.

<sup>5</sup> 'La Fille mal gardée – 28 January, 1960,' Royal Opera House Collections, accessed 15 July, 2024.

like the score, hence why it so rarely features in his own production of the ballet.<sup>6</sup> Of Hertel's 1864 score Lanchbery only adapted one piece of music: Widow Simone's clog dance, which also serves as her leitmotiv throughout Ashton's ballet. A special addition to the score was the Fanny Elssler *pas de deux*. In 1837, the famous Austrian ballerina Fanny Elssler debuted in the role of Lise. To mark the special occasion, she commissioned a new *pas de deux* to be added into the ballet, a practice that was quite standard at the time.<sup>7</sup> The music for this *pas de deux* was adapted from themes from Geatano Donizetti's opera *L'elisir d'amore* and was long thought to be lost. However, John Lanchbery restored the music, and the Fanny Elssler *pas de deux*, now set to choreography by Ashton, became a dazzling showcase for the two principal dancers near the end of act one.

During Ashton's many vacations in Suffolk he would traditionally play Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony on the day of his arrival.<sup>8</sup> As Ashton himself said: '[a]t some time or another every artist pays his tribute to nature: my *Fille mal gardée* is my poor man's *Pastoral Symphony*'.<sup>9</sup> In the score for Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée* there are also references to the pastoral. Near the end of the first act a harvest festival is ruined by a thunderstorm, much like in Beethoven's sixth symphony. When the storm clears and Lise and Colas find each other and say a prayer, a piece of music plays that is reminiscent of the final movement of the Pastoral Symphony, although it is not a verbatim quotation. Nature is also present in other ways throughout the score. The ballet's overture, taken from Hérold's score is 'a musique concrete of farmland noises'.<sup>10</sup>

While Ashton's choreography was all his own – a subject he was known to be sensitive about if suggested otherwise – he took the mime verbatim from Karsavina's recollection of them from Marius Petipa's version of the ballet.<sup>11</sup> One of the most famous passages Ashton took was the mimed monologue 'when I'm married', where Lise tearfully fantasises about what married life would be like.<sup>12</sup> The musical theme that plays during this scene, an arrangement of the Rossini aria 'Bell'alme generose' also functions as a leitmotiv for Lise and Colas and is the subject of their first dance together as a married couple. There are also smaller mimed moments that are based on Karsavina's recollection of Petipa's

---

<sup>6</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 442.

<sup>7</sup> Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 441.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 212.

<sup>10</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 443.

<sup>11</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 444.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 212.

version. These include Colas finding a lover's knot and tying it to his staff, and Alain riding his umbrella like a hobby-horse.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of casting, Ashton created the roles of Lise and Colas for young Royal Ballet stars Nadia Nerina and David Blair. This new casting meant a slight change in Ashton's balletic style, which had been more lyrical in the times of Margot Fonteyn and Michael Somes.<sup>14</sup> With Nerina and Blair, Ashton's choreography for *La Fille mal gardée* became bravura and spectacular. Examples of this are Lise running on pointe across the stage and the 'bum lift' Lise and Colas perform during the coda of the Fanny Elssler *pas de deux*.<sup>15</sup> Despite the overall whimsical nature of the ballet, Lise and Colas are quite down-to-earth characters. Kavanagh especially cites their sexuality in comparison to other ballets, and even other leading roles that Ashton created a decade earlier. The sexuality of Lise and Colas is so prominent that they are 'leaving the audience in no doubt as to what they are up to when they are locked into a bedroom together', according to Kavanagh.<sup>16</sup> This sexuality is prevalent in the character of Colas, who, as Kavanagh describes him, is 'exuberantly heterosexual'.<sup>17</sup> This is an interesting observation, as the rest of the chapter will show that despite this exuberant heterosexuality, Colas's masculinity is gentler compared to other male leads from earlier ballets.

The role of Alain – Lise's dim-witted suitor – was created for Alexander Grant. Formerly lovers, Grant and Ashton remained lifelong friends and became frequent collaborators, with Grant originating 20 roles in Ashton's ballets. These roles include Alain, but also the Jester from *Cinderella* (1948), principal lead in the Neapolitan dance from *Swan Lake* (1952), and Bottom from *The Dream* (who will be discussed in the next chapter). While the character of Alain will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, the fact that the role was created for Grant already hints at how Ashton wants the audience to perceive Alain. Kavanagh even describes the role of Alain as Ashton's 'gift of love' to Grant.<sup>18</sup> While Alain is naïve and dim-witted, he is never vilified. Instead, he is the emotional heart of the ballet. This 'gift of love' also became prominent after Ashton's death, as he bequeathed all performance rights and royalties from *La Fille mal gardée* to Grant.

---

<sup>13</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 444.

<sup>14</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 445-446.

<sup>15</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 445-446.

<sup>16</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 448-449.

<sup>17</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 448-449.

<sup>18</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 448.

Under Ashton's creative control the originally French *La Fille mal gardée* became inherently and distinctly English.<sup>19</sup> One reason for this was the setting, which was directly inspired by Ashton's frequent trips to Suffolk.<sup>20</sup> Ashton's choreography for the ballet also helped establish the reputation of *La Fille mal gardée* as an English ballet. There is Ashton's typically 'English' style of choreography, which is lyrical and 'breath-driven', yet simultaneously extremely technically challenging.<sup>21</sup> While Ashton's style of choreography can overall be considered to be 'English', in *La Fille mal gardée* he takes it a step further by weaving a variety of English dance and theatre traditions through the work. While Dame Ninette de Valois insisted on teaching folk dancing at the Royal Ballet School, these dances were rarely performed on the Royal Opera House stage.<sup>22</sup> However, *La Fille mal gardée* is laden with folk dances, such as clog dancing, Morris dancing, Lancashire dancing, and even bringing out a maypole for the finale of act one.<sup>23</sup> Ashton was also influenced by English theatre traditions such as pantomime and music hall. Traditionally performed by a man in drag, Widow Simone stems from the tradition of the pantomime dame, while Alain's slapstick choreography is reminiscent of vaudeville and music hall traditions.

Colas - Entrance and mime

**Fig. 1:** excerpt of 'Colas's entrance'(L1) – notes Maria Schreurs

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 212.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 212.

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' in *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, eds. Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 150.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 212.

<sup>23</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 447.

### Analysis: Colas's Leitmotiv

The analysis of this chapter will assess Colas's choreomusical masculinity through his musical leitmotiv. The score of *La Fille mal gardée* is a mishmash of composers, musical numbers, and themes. Orchestrator and composer John Lanchbery manages to bring structure to the chaos by arranging the ballet's score in a leitmotivic manner. While there are still sections of *La Fille mal gardée*'s score that only appear once in the ballet, such as the Fanny Elssler *pas de deux*, nearly all other themes reappear at least once. Lanchbery takes these themes from all different sources. Some of them (such as the flute dance) are taken from the 1789 pastiche score, while others are taken from Hérold (Colas's theme), Hertel (Widow Simone's clog dance) and Rossini (Lise and Colas's wedding theme). One of the most recognisable of these leitmotifs is the theme representing Colas (Fig. 1). Of all musical themes, Colas's leitmotiv is by far the most heard. As his romantic interactions with Lise are underscored by a couple of different leitmotifs (such as the music for the *pas de ruban*, and the theme of their wedding *pas de deux*), Colas's leitmotiv is only played when he is alone, or when he is in a crowd without Lise present. It is in these solo moments that his character is thoroughly explored, and the audience gets a sense of what kind of character he is.

Colas's leitmotiv most prominently appears in act one, where it is heard a total of four times. The piece is introduced during Colas's first scene on stage (L1 – 'Colas's entrance'), immediately linking the theme to him and setting the tone for his character. This link is fortified when – after a brief interlude – Colas dances a variation to the same piece of music (L2 – 'Colas's variation'). The third time the piece is heard, Colas dances yet another solo, this time when he travels to the harvest festival (L3 – 'Colas on his way to the festival'). The final instance is when Colas arrives at the festival, greeting the other farmers (L3 – 'Colas arrives at the festival'). In act two the theme does not appear in full. This is because act two is focused on Lise, and her relationship with both her mother and Colas. As Colas does not have any solo moments in this act, a full statement of this theme is also absent. However, Colas's leitmotiv is briefly referenced in the coda of the ballet, while he is performing *fouettés* (L5 – 'Coda').

Colas's leitmotiv is in E-flat major, and has a 6/8 metre. The theme starts on an upbeat and has a distinct rhythmic pattern of a dotted quaver, semiquaver and quaver. Overall, these are elements that are associated with masculinity in one way or another. First of all, the 6/8 metre is a compound metre. Compound and triple metres are usually associated with men's variations, because large leaps fit well into three beats. One beat is reserved for the take-off, one beat for the dancer's *ballon*, and the final beat for the landing. The conventions of

*musique dansante* also dictate that jumps have a different musical vocabulary than other ballet steps. Common musical elements associated with jumps, and therefore mostly male dancers, are dotted notes and rests, and a staccato playing style. This is because these elements emphasise a ‘jumpy’ feel in the music. What is interesting to note, is that while Colas’s theme contains a prominent dotted quaver, there are no rests, nor is it played staccato. This means that on the one hand Colas’s theme pertains to certain standards of masculinity, while simultaneously rejecting others. Apart from their link with male variations, these musical elements also show Colas’s personality. The upbeat and dotted rhythms give an element of surprise to the piece, showing Colas’s more playful side. This playfulness is also emphasised melodically, as the theme has a distinct accidental (A-natural instead of A-flat).

While Colas’s leitmotiv is used as a variation throughout Ashton’s *La Fille mal gardée*, melodically the theme differs from many other men’s variations. Mainly, his theme starts on B-flat, or the dominant. Then the melody follows a generally ascending motion, remaining mostly in the upper half of the E-flat major scale, only returning to the tonic at the end of the musical sentence. Other male variations tend to begin on the third, such as Solor’s variation from *La Bayadère*, Basilio’s variation from *Don Quixote*, and Albrecht’s variation from *Giselle*. By starting on the fifth, Colas leitmotiv solidifies his status as a leader and merry-maker. The dominant sounds very open, meaning that Colas likes to invite people in; a prominent example of this can be seen during the ‘Colas arrives at the festival’-sequence. It is also significant that musical phrases in the main melody always return to the fifth, only ending on the tonic at the end of the musical sentence. This leads to another musical difference between Colas’s theme and other male variations; the melodic progression. Other male variations often work in melodic extremes, with soaring melodic leaps and scales. Examples include Ali’s variation from *Le Corsaire*, and Colas’s variation from Hertel’s *La Fille mal gardée*. In contrast, Colas’s theme in Ashton’s *La Fille mal gardée* is more grounded as it lingers around the dominant, with no sudden outbursts. A final distinctive element of Colas’ leitmotiv is the B-section, consisting of a series of ascending and descending scales (Fig. 2). While scales can be heard in other male variations, in Colas’s theme, they are played in a continuous up-and-down motion. There is barely any rhythmical variation, just one continuous stream of semiquavers, and the occasional quaver.

While Colas’s leitmotiv is melodically recognisable in all appearances, there are some slight musical changes each time the piece is heard. The most prominent of these changes occurs during the ‘Colas on his way to the festival’-sequence (L3). Here, the leitmotiv is played in B-flat major, and in a duple metre. Most of the changes during the three other



different from music composed for mime scenes.<sup>24</sup> However, for many of his ballets, Ashton seems to blur this line between dance and mime, the choreography for Colas being no exception. In fact, ‘Colas’s entrance’ (and therefore also the introduction to his leitmotiv) is a mime scene. He walks onstage with his friends when one of his friends mimes ‘you – (like) her?’, to which Colas responds ‘I – her – love’. His reply is timed perfectly with his leitmotiv, the jumping pattern between B-flat and E-flat emphasising Colas’s swaying while he places both hands on his heart (Fig. 5). Because of the distinct rhythm of this jumping pattern (quaver-crotchet), the music in combination with Colas’s swaying can also be interpreted as Colas’s beating heart. The slightly faster tempo, the jumping pattern at the end of the phrase, and the accompaniment of broken chords all emphasize the conversational tone of the scene.

Colas’s mime in this sequence also shows his masculinity. On the one hand, Colas



**Fig. 5:** Colas swaying with hands on his heart (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)



**Fig. 6:** Colas raises his fist (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)

performs his masculinity with his friends. When he declares his love for Lise, his friends jokingly respond by teasing and pushing him. As a response, Colas jokingly raises his fist at his friends (Fig. 6). Whereas sudden threats of violence are often associated with ‘toxic masculinity’, a type of masculinity which will be discussed further in the chapter about *The Dream*, Colas’s behaviour does not fit this type of masculinity. Instead, Colas jokingly performs his masculinity, not only here, but also in his variations, and when he is with Lise. Ashton sets Colas’s declaration of love: ‘I – her – love’ in time with his leitmotiv (Fig. 7). By doing so, Ashton associates the romantic and gentle aspect of his personality with Colas’s theme, not his played aggression to his friends. This also occurs throughout the ballet. Even

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir, ‘Musical Expression in the Bournonville-Løvenskjold La Sylphide Variation,’ in *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales, and Karen Eliot, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 345.



though Colas exaggerates his masculinity by raising a fist or showing off his strength in other ways, this is always alternated with a much gentler and more genuine side to his personality.

Apart from the fact that Ashton sets mime and variations to the same melody, sometimes he lets mime flow seamlessly into dance and vice versa. Occasionally, mime is

**Fig. 7:** excerpt of 'Colas's entrance' (L1) – notes Maria Schreurs

even incorporated into the dance steps, such as *La Fille mal gardée*'s dance of the harvesters, where the dancers mimic that they are harvesting grain with a sickle.<sup>25</sup> Another good example is the quarrel between Oberon and Titania in *The Dream*, which will be analysed in-depth in chapter 3. For Colas, the fourth instance of his leitmotiv (L4) also shows how Ashton mixes mime and choreography. Colas enters this scene in the same spectacular fashion that he left



**Fig. 8:** *cabriole* (McRae, 2015 – photo by Tristram Kenton)

the last one. He announces his presence on a triumphant B-flat 7 chord. When his leitmotiv starts playing, he performs his choreography tentatively, only consisting of a couple of strides and turns on two feet. Then, still set to his leitmotiv, the steps slowly become more physically demanding, ending with a combination of a *cabriole*, *chassé* and *entrelacé* (Fig. 8). During this final combination, the farmers (*corps de ballet*) join him in his dance, albeit with a different combination of steps. This section where Colas and the farmers dance together is set to the B-section of the leitmotiv, which contains the rapid runs of major scales. Because the scales are in major and the melody is played so quickly, this musical section, in combination with the choreography creates a

rousing effect. The fact that the farmers dance to Colas's leitmotiv, albeit with a different choreography, already indicates that Colas is regarded as a leader of some sorts. After that his leitmotiv repeats, and Colas performs a bit of mime. He places the wine bottles he was

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 212.

holding on the ground and mimes ‘Everybody gather round – I hear (the church bell) – work – is over’(Fig. 9). He then hands out the wine bottles before resuming his dance. A brief interlude occurs where Colas dances with Lise’s friends, assisting them in *entrelacés*. Then his theme appears a final time with Colas himself performing an (unassisted) *entrelacé*. He then mimes ‘let’s dance!’, before the farmers join him again in his dance, running across the stage in a pattern not unlike a whirlwind.

As illustrated in the above paragraph, what makes the ‘Colas arrives at the festival’-sequence so choreomusically fascinating is that in this sequence alone, Ashton sets Colas’s theme in two entirely different ways, while the music repeats verbatim. Colas constantly switches between choreography and mime, which are often seen as polar opposites on the choreographic spectrum. However, despite the seemingly odd alternation of ballet steps and mime in this sequence, they serve a choreomusical purpose and add to Colas’s character. It especially shows Colas’s personality as he interacts with a large crowd for the first time. Ashton’s choreographic setting of the leitmotiv in this scene shows Colas as a jovial merry maker. The farmers are happy to see him, and his choreography is so infectious that they merrily follow his lead. Then, in the mime sequence it is Colas who calls the end of the workday, and it is him handing out the wine. After his large leap, Colas mimes ‘let’s dance!’ and all farmers literally follow Colas’s lead.

Ashton’s choreography shows that Colas is jovial and a well-respected leader, both of which are considered desirable for a man. In the sections where Colas does perform choreography, he mostly performs large leaps (such as the *entrelacé*), which are considered to be men’s ballet steps. However, even though Colas presents these desirable masculine traits (such as leadership) in this sequence, his masculinity is softer than that of similar male characters, such as Basilio from *Don Quixote* (who will be discussed later). Colas is a merry maker, but he never provokes or draws negative attention to himself. The crowd follows him because they *want* to follow him; not because he is riling them up. One reason for these softer expressions of masculinity, is how the music and choreography are related. Choreographically, Colas performs many ballet steps that are considered to be men’s steps, such as the *cabrioles*. Musically, Ashton adheres to *musique dansante*, but the links between music and choreography are much more subtler. These include the dotted quaver and the



**Fig. 9:** Colas mimes hearing the churchbell (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)

perfect fourth at the end of the phrase. However, Ashton also forges new links. As a conjunct melody scales are often associated with pirouettes or *terre-à-terre* choreography. However, in the L4-section they are used to underscore jumps, musically simulating the take-off and landing. It is these subtler links that make Colas's masculinity softer and more subtle, but still unmistakably manly.

Theme variant	Colas's Entrance (L1)	Colas's Variation (L2)	Colas on his Way to the Festival (L3)	Colas Arrives at the Festival (L4)	Coda (L5)
Act	1	1	1	1	2
Type of scene	-Mime scene	-Variation	-Variation	-Mime scene -Choreography	-Coda
Noticeable choreographic elements	-Mime	- <i>Pirouette</i> - <i>Tour en l'air</i> - <i>Cabriole</i>	-Kicked <i>jeté</i> - <i>Brisé</i> - <i>Sauté</i> (with full split)	-Mime -Turns - <i>Cabriole</i> - <i>Jeté entrelacé</i>	- <i>Fouettés à la seconde</i>
Key	-E-flat major	-E-flat major	-B-flat major	-E-flat major	-E-flat major
Metre	-6/8	-6/8	-4/4	-6/8	-6/8
Other notable musical elements	-Broken chords -End of the phrase jumps between E-flat and B-flat	-Block chords -End of the phrase is a sustained B-flat	-Brass rhythmically emphasises the end of each phrase	-Broken chords -End of the phrase jumps between E-flat and B-flat	-Leitmotiv is not complete -Theme is quoted at the end

**Table 1:** every instance of Colas's leitmotiv

In both 'Colas's entrance' (L1) and 'Colas arrives at the festival' (L4), the leitmotiv accompanies mime sequences, with the music being adapted to fit this more conversational tone. Colas also dances two variations to this theme, for which the music is adapted accordingly. For Colas's first variation, the main change is the accompaniment, as the orchestra now emphasises the first and third beat of the measure, instead of the broken chords from the mime scenes. The second variation (L3), changes more musical elements, such as the key and metre. However, despite the significant differences between the two variations, both have a similar effect regarding the music and choreography, and therefore the perception of Colas's masculinity. During these two scenes, Colas is completely alone on stage. Much like Shakespeare soliloquys or operatic arias, ballet variations are not necessarily diegetic, but are instead internalised feelings expressed to an audience. An added bonus to this format is that the ballet variation (or soliloquys and arias) allow for the performer to show their artistry

and virtuosity. Because Colas is alone on stage during his two variations, I argue that these scenes express Colas's internalised masculinity.

What is striking is that Colas's internalised masculinity differs slightly from what is externalised to his friends, Lise, and the farmers. Throughout the ballet, Colas likes to play up his masculinity for comedy. As I will state later in this chapter, when being in the company of others, Colas's exaggerated masculinity very quickly melts as he turns into a gentle and nurturing version of himself, which is fully reflected in the music chosen for these moments. However, in these variations, his masculinity is even more exaggerated. One of the ways this masculinity is presented is through Colas's walk. Colas starts his first variation (L2) with his hands holding his lapels and keeping his shoulders broad (Fig.10). He then takes two highly exaggerated steps before performing a *tour en l'air*. This pattern repeats a couple of times. The walk in his second variation (L3) is even more exaggerated as Colas bursts onto the stage and performs a kicked *jeté*. These walks could be seen as an expression of masculinity. Not only is Colas taking up a space he knows he deserves to be in, emphasised by the fact that he broadens himself as much as possible. The opening walk from the first variation can also be seen as a highly stylised version of a John Wayne-esque strut, which especially in the 1960s was considered to be the pinnacle of masculinity.<sup>26</sup>



**Fig. 10:** Colas's walk in 'Colas's variation' (McRae, 2015 – screenshot DVD)

Colas also performs an array of other ballet steps that show of his strength, and therefore his masculinity. He ends his John Wayne impression in the first variation with a *tour en l'air* which ends on a triumphant chord. Choreographically this moment reminds of prince Desirée's variation from *The Sleeping Beauty*. In a quite famous section of that variation, the prince performs a series of *tours en l'air*, which is a more traditional way of showing off masculinity in ballet variations. Next to the *tours en l'air*, Colas also performs *cabrioles* and an array of other, smaller jumps in his first variation. For the second variation, Colas performs *brisés* and *sautés*. One of these *sautés* is quite spectacular, as Colas performs a full split in the air (Fig. 11), also a more traditional manner of showing of strength and masculinity.

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Fisher, 'Maverick Men in Ballet: Rethinking the "Making it Macho" Strategy,' in *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders*, eds. Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33; 42-44.



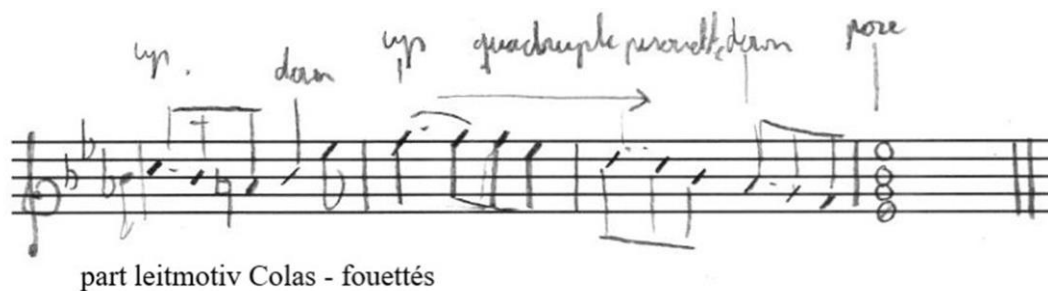
**Fig. 11:** Colas on his way to the festival, *sauté* with split (McRae, 2010 – photo by Tristram Kenton)

One could conclude that Colas's exaggerated masculinity in his two variations when he is alone on stage means that this is the real version of his personality, and that his interactions with other characters is insincere. However, while the choreography alone might absolutely support that conclusion, it is how Colas's choreography is set to music that suggests otherwise. As stated in the musical analysis, many of the

musical elements from Colas's theme point to him being a playful character. These include standard aspects from the leitmotiv itself, such as the upbeat, the dotted rhythm, the augmented fourth, and the B-section with the running scales. However, there are also musical elements that allude to this playfulness, that are only present in this scene, such as the accompaniment. When Colas performs his John Wayne walk, he is underscored by block chords and the clash of the cymbal. Because these three elements are all already quite exaggerated, their combination portrays Colas's hypermasculine behaviours as tongue-in-cheek.

This playfulness is even more emphasised by the musical choices made for the 'Colas on his way to the festival'-sequence (L3). Here, the theme is played in a duple metre. On the one hand, this change is a practical one, as Colas's solo is part of a series of vignettes, all of which are in duple metre. However, this new metre also adds to his played up masculinity. The duple metre now emphasises and exaggerates Colas's played up cocksureness. Much like the setting of Colas's first variation, his large jumps are accompanied by the orchestra, who emphasise the end of each musical phrase with an oom-pah. The exaggerated musical elements underscores the larger-life ballet steps from Colas's choreography, such as the kicked *jetés* and the *sauté* where Colas performs a full split in the air. However, instead of the music matching the choreography, the parallels are now taken to the extreme, to the point of ridicule. During this heavy accompaniment from the orchestra, Colas also performs *brisés*, which are light jumps. The overexaggeration of *musique dansante*, in combination with the deliberate mishmash of the delicate *brisés* show that Colas is not taking himself all too serious.

To end this section, I want to draw attention to Colas's leitmotiv as seen in act two of the ballet. Colas does not have any solo appearances in the second act of the ballet, as this act focuses on his relationship with Lise instead. Therefore, a full statement of his leitmotiv is also absent. However, while Colas's theme does not appear in full in act two, Lanchbery still references it in the finale of the ballet. In this finale, which was composed by Lanchbery himself, the corps de ballet and each main character get their moment in the spotlight. Characters that have specific leitmotifs (such as Colas and Widow Simone) have their themes repeated during their designated sections. For most of Colas's section, his leitmotiv is implied in several ways. This piece of music is in 6/8 metre, just like his variation, and both themes start their musical phrases with an upbeat and a pattern of a dotted quaver, semiquaver and quaver. The melody, while seemingly distinct from Colas's theme, is in certain places an inversion of it. However, in the very last phrase of Colas's section, the link to his leitmotiv becomes apparent, as Lanchbery quotes a full bar of his theme (Fig.12) as he finishes the challenging choreography.



**Fig. 12:** excerpt of 'coda' (L5) – notes Maria Schreurs

Speaking of which, during his section of the finale Colas performs a series of *fouettés á la seconde*; a notoriously difficult set of turns where the dancer 'whips' their working leg around while it never touches the ground, making the dancer resemble a spinning top. In this variant, mostly performed by male dancers, the dancer constantly keeps their leg in second position (to the side) or *á la seconde*. However, like many of Ashton's choreographies, he does not link certain steps to gender. While *fouettés á la seconde* are considered to be more of a men's step in classical ballet, Ashton has also assigned this *fouetté* variant to ballerinas. The most famous example of this is the series of *fouettés* performed in Ashton's *Les Patineurs*. In that ballet, a ballerina performs an extremely challenging series of *fouettés* where she constantly switches between the 'standard' *fouetté* where she pulls in her working leg after each turn, and the *á la seconde* variant.

Even more striking is that Colas is the only character that gets to do these *fouettés* in the finale of *La Fille mal gardée*. While the *fouetté* is considered to be a trick step for both male and female dancers, *fouettés* in a coda or finale are almost always associated with the ballerina, not the danseur. An example of this is the famous 32 *fouettés* Odile performs at the end of the third act of *Swan Lake*, and they have been a staple ballerina trick step ever since. Many ballet revivals after *Swan Lake* started the trend of adding *fouettés* for the ballerina, including *Don Quixote*, *La Bayadere*, *Paquita* and *Le Corsaire*. While danseurs still perform *fouettés* in these codas, they are often combined with other trick steps such as *tours en l'air*, *grand jeté* and barrel turns, and rarely are performed as a set of 32. This redistribution of *fouettés* to the male dancer is not only evident in *La Fille mal gardée*, but can be seen in quite a few Ashton ballets. Ashton turns the *fouetté*, normally a sign of feminine strength, and makes it masculine. In *Cinderella*, The Prince performs a series of *fouettés* as part of his opening variation, while Cinderella herself performs none throughout the entire ballet. In *Tales of Beatrix Potter*, Ashton reserves the *fouetté* for the brash and mischievous Squirrel Nutkin. Likewise, in *Rhapsody*, an abstract ballet modelled after the macho ballet persona of Mikhail Baryshnikov, the male lead performs *fouettés* with the added difficulty of jumps between every turn. As Ashton turned the *fouetté* into a men's step, Colas's *fouettés* can be seen as inherently masculine. However, unlike many of the above examples, the *fouettés* are not purely a show of strength and masculinity. For Colas, the *fouettés* are a final chance to show off his playful nature to the audience. The music (apart from the last couple of measures) melodically does not match Colas's leitmotiv, but it does so rhythmically. The pattern of a dotted quaver, semi quaver and quaver are not commonly associated with turns, but they still match. Here, the dotted pattern matches the rise and fall of momentum in a *fouetté*, because after each turn, the dancer briefly stands still. These more subtle links between music and choreography once again show a playful, and therefore softer side to Colas.

### **Colas, The Ideal Son-In-Law?**

As I have already argued with the choreomusical analysis of his leitmotiv, Ashton's Colas already differs from the male characters that preceded him. The main reason for that is Colas's expression of masculinity, which is much gentler in comparison to his male peers from nineteenth-century ballets. The fact that a male lead in a ballet is allowed to present an alternative and gentler masculinity is remarkable, because male dancers are rarely afforded that luxury. In nineteenth-century ballet, the versatility of the ballerina was considered to be

one of the most important aspects of her artistry. A good ballerina could become a chameleon and portray any role she was given, no matter how distinct they were. This resulted in a wide array of feminine expressions and characterisations within nineteenth-century ballet, ranging from the gentle Giselle (*Giselle*), to the rambunctious Kitri (*Don Quixote*), to the regal princess Aurora (*The Sleeping Beauty*). In fact, versatility was (and still is) so important for ballerinas that they were expected to show these wildly different characterisations within the same ballet. Zoë Anderson dubs this phenomenon “the dual heroine.”<sup>27</sup> Some of these roles were actual double roles, such as the juxtaposition between Odette and Odile in *Swan Lake*. Other ballets showed these juxtapositions within the same character, such as the contrast between the frail, but alive Giselle in act 1, and the supernatural spirit version of herself in act two.

As versatile as female roles in nineteenth-century ballet were, the male roles were less inspiring and sometimes even dull. In the nineteenth century an attitude emerged which Ramsay Burt dubbed ‘the trouble with the male dancer’.<sup>28</sup> In stark contrast with the versatility of ballerina roles, male roles often only seem to perpetuate one type of masculinity. As a result, roles for male dancers became less virtuoso and bravura, and more stereotypical and one note. To put it crudely, male dancers played two broad character archetypes: commoners and princes, both the love interest of the female character. Colas as a character stands in a long tradition of these male character archetypes, especially that of the poor commoner. In ballet, the commoner as a character works well for more comedic plots because, unlike characters of nobility who are regal, serious and emotionally stunted, male commoners in ballet are jovial and carefree. Moreover, they are usually quite simple minded, which easily leads to comedic situations and (romantic) conflict within the plots of these comedic ballets, but they will also assure that these ballets end happily. While Colas shares similarities with the characters that came before him, at crucial points in the ballet he differs in terms of music, mime and choreography. Therefore, the choreomusical choices Ashton made to represent Colas’s character could be seen as a reaction to earlier instances of the archetype.

Colas is very much shaped after the commoner love interests in comedic ballets that came before him, such as Franz from *Coppélia*, Gennaro from *Napoli*, and Basilio from *Don Quixote*, of which the latter will be a prominent object of comparison in this chapter. In terms of plot, *La Fille mal gardée* especially bears a striking resemblance to *Don Quixote*. Both

---

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover’s Companion*, 213.

<sup>28</sup> Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 9.



ballets revolve around a spirited young woman who is in love with a kind, but poor man. However, the woman's overbearing parent has plans to marry her off to a wealthy, but dim-witted suitor, much to the woman's protests. Due to what can only be described as convoluted plot reasons (which involve a fake suicide in *Don Quixote*, and the lovers being locked in a room together in *La Fille mal gardée*), the parent eventually relents, and the woman and her true love are finally married. However, despite the similarities between the two ballets, there is also a difference between how these stories are presented, one of the most striking being the love interest. Basilio and Colas are two fascinating characters to compare, because while they share many traits, the execution of both characters is very different. Both are kind and confident young men, they are hard workers with established jobs (Basilio as a barber, Colas as a farmer), are generally liked by the townsfolk, and they both are in a relationship with the most popular girl in town. But in many ways, Basilio is everything Colas is not, and vice versa.

The main difference between these two characters is their expression of masculinity. One major plot point for both of their stories is the disapproval of their significant other's parent. However, when looking at these two characters one could make the bold statement that Lorenzo (Kitri's father in *Don Quixote*) has good reason to reject his daughter's suitor, whereas Widow Simone has not. While he proves himself to be a good husband for Kitri at the end of the ballet, Basilio can be quite brash and reckless. For instance, to win Lorenzo's blessing, Basilio fakes his own suicide. Earlier in the ballet, when Lorenzo demands that Basilio pay him for his daughter's hand, he steals one of Lorenzo's gold pouches. In comparison, Colas seems to be the ideal son-in-law. He is hardworking, respectful, and loyal to Lise even despite Widow Simone's disapproval of him. Lise and Colas's reconciliation and eventual marriage stems from a misunderstanding instead of a reckless plot. These are some surface level differences between the personalities (and therefore the masculinities) of these two characters. The two ballets also differ in how they present the main relationship. Basilio and Kitri's relationship can best be described as fickle. Sometimes known as a slap-slap-kiss dynamic,<sup>29</sup> the couple constantly switches between antagonism and romance. Moreover, both characters are constantly flirting with other characters, all the while being jealous of each other when they do the same. Basilio especially is guilty of this, feeling possessive over Kitri when she flirts with Gamache and Don Quixote.

---

<sup>29</sup> 'Slap-Slap-Kiss,' TV Tropes, accessed 15 July, 2024.  
<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SlapSlapKiss>.

Colas's relationship with Lise seems to be a heel-turn from Basilio's relationship with Kitri. Many choreographic moments in *La Fille mal gardée* are just between the main couple and are there to convey to the audience how genuine, deep, and full of love their relationship is. During their alone time, Colas frequently but jokingly performs his masculinity, especially in scenes where Lise is sad and he wants to cheer her up. For instance, in act two, Lise has been locked in the house while waiting for her impending wedding with Alain. This sparks



**Fig. 13:** Colas kisses Lise (McRae and Osipova, 2015 – photo by Alice Pennefather)

the 'when I'm married'-monologue where she imagines Colas instead. Colas, who was sneaked into the house a couple of scenes earlier, makes his presence known to her, rising from behind a hay bale in a superhero pose, placing his hands on his hips. He is accompanied by a triumphant chord, as if to say 'ta-da! I've come to your rescue!'. However, when Lise acts embarrassed over the fact that he must have overheard her monologue, Colas's played masculinity melts away, instinctively reaching out to comfort her. The scene that follows shows a tender moment between the lovers, where Colas gently kisses up her arm and pulls her into an embrace (Fig. 13). This softness is especially emphasised by

the music, as the scene is underscored with Rossini's 'Bell'alme generose', which also functions as their wedding leitmotiv.

Another example where exaggerated masculinity and gentleness interchange is in the act one scene where Widow Simone tasks Lise to churn butter. When Lise sadly drapes herself over the butter churn, Colas barges in with a large and spectacular leap. Lise asks Colas to help her, and he complies; exaggeratedly spitting in his hands and churning the butter while *relevé*ing his feet, flexing his calf muscles. Soon after, the butter churn is forgotten and the couple dance a *pas de deux* with a pink ribbon (Fig. 14). At first their *pas de deux* is playful, but soon it



**Fig. 14:** *pas de deux* with pink ribbon (McRae and Osipova, 2015 – screenshot DVD)

evolves into one of the most romantic scenes of the ballet, where both Lise and Colas quite literally wrap themselves in pink ribbon, once again showing his gentler side. While their relationship is very gentle and mutually supportive, there is still a subtle male-female divide

in the relationship between Colas and Lise. Mainly, Lise is presented as sentimental and romantic, whereas Colas can be quite pragmatic and down-to-earth.

Colas and Basilio do not only differ in how they treat their significant other, but also in how they treat other possible suitors, especially their love rivals. Basilio is actively hostile to both Gamache, who is betrothed to Kitri, and Don Quixote, who thinks Kitri to be the fabled princess Dulcinea. When Kitri shows her interest in Don Quixote, Basilio downright mocks him, miming ‘He – crazy – why?’. Basilio’s hostility even goes so far that he physically tugs at her to get her attention. While the other two suitors express similar behaviours towards Kitri, the fact that Basilio engages in such behaviour shows that his behaviour is considered to be the standard. Colas on the other hand is never outwardly hostile to Alain, nor does he mock him. For Lise and Colas, Alain is not as much an obstacle in their relationship, while Basilio clearly considers Gamache and Don Quixote to be threats. A scene from *La Fille mal gardée* that clearly shows this lighter relationship between Lise, Colas and Alain, is their comical *pas de trois* halfway through act one (Fig. 15). During this scene, Lise



**Fig. 15:** *pas de trois* (McRae, Kay and Osipova, 2015 – photo by Dave Morgan)

and Alain are forced to dance together by their respective parents. Throughout the piece, Colas comically interjects, stealing Lise’s attention, something she fully consents to. What makes this scene so comical is that Colas performs his little joke without it being at Alain’s expense. Another important factor is that Lise is fully in on the joke as she happily responds to Colas’s advances.

Moreover, the pair never wish any active harm upon Alain. In fact, when Colas and Lise eventually marry, Alain is hurt in the process. When they find out, they react horrified that they caused him so much pain.

While I have compared Colas favourably to Basilio in terms of masculinity, this does not necessarily mean that Basilio’s expression of masculinity is a negative. There are many aspects of Basilio’s masculinity that can be seen as a positive. Basilio is a coveted role for male dancers, mainly due to the challenging choreography. Because Basilio is brash and a show-off, his choreography is bravura and therefore associated with many bravura male dancers. Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and Carlos Acosta all created productions of *Don Quixote* where they themselves starred in. Basilio is also more expressive than many other male ballet characters. Basilio’s faked suicide in act three is often considered the true

test of a male dancer's acting ability, because comedy is so difficult to pull off. So, even if Basilio's expressions of masculinity are inclined towards the stereotypical, this does not mean that he is better or worse than a character such as Colas.

### **Colas, Alain, and the Relativity of Masculinity**

As I have shown in the previous sections, Colas presents a gentler type of masculinity than the brash Basilio from *Don Quixote*. Colas's masculinity is also implicitly compared to Alain in *La Fille mal gardée*. Lise is betrothed to Alain, but she wants to marry Colas instead. Alain is much wealthier than Colas, so in that regard he is a viable love rival. However, it must become clear to the audience that despite Alain's wealth Colas is still the more suitable option for Lise to marry. One way Ashton does this is by giving the two men two opposing expressions of masculinity, showing that Colas is more compatible and desirable for Lise. What makes the comparison between Colas and Alain so remarkable, is that while Alain is presented as a polar opposite from Colas, this is not necessarily a negative.

In most traditional ballets where the male lead has a love rival of some sort, the masculinity (and therefore the desirability) of the male lead is increased by effeminising the love rival. This is especially prominent in the foppish Gamache from *Don Quixote*, who is treated like a joke because of the negative feminine traits ascribed to him, such as vanity. In some productions, Gamache even adapts mannerisms (such as the 'limp wrist') often negatively associated with queer people, especially gay men. This process, known as 'queer coding' was prominent within Hollywood films subjected to the Motion Picture Production Code, which was implemented from the 1930s to the late 1960s.<sup>30</sup> With queer coding, certain character behaviours and mannerisms are linked to homosexuality without having to explicitly state a character's sexual orientation in the text. Often, these mannerisms are presented as negative and immoral. As a result, queer coding is mostly implemented on characters that are supposed to be perceived negatively, such as villains.<sup>31</sup> While mostly associated with Hays code era films, queer coding is also an oft seen trope within ballet, especially in unsuitable suitors such as Gamache. While Alain is an unsuitable suitor, the way he is presented in *La Fille mal gardée* is much more nuanced. This is not to say that Alain is not effeminate or queer coded. On the contrary, Alain presents many of these traits, such as his sensitivity and naiveté. Moreover, where Lise and Colas are characterised by their

---

<sup>30</sup> Adelia Brown, 'Hook, Ursula, and Elsa: Disney and Queer-coding from the 1950s to the 2010s,' *The Macksey Journal* 2, no.1 (2021).

<sup>31</sup> 'Ambiguously Gay,' TV Tropes, accessed 15 July, 2024, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/AmbiguouslyGay>.

inherent sexuality and lust for each other, Alain is completely sexless by comparison.<sup>32</sup> He is not romantically interested in Lise or other female characters. When he finds Lise and Colas in a compromising position in her bedroom, he does not understand the implications of this, instead being upset that his wedding is cancelled. What makes Alain different from other queer coded characters is that his queer coded mannerisms are not cited as the main reason he is unsuited to marry Lise.

Instead, Ashton characterises Alain as innocent and juvenile, clearly too naïve to understand the real world, let alone get married. Alain's movements all signal that this young man still needs some growing up to do, as they are very childlike, playful and inexperienced. For instance, Alain has a choreographic leitmotiv rather than a musical one. In most of his



**Fig. 16:** Alain riding his umbrella (Paul Kay, 2015 – photo by Tristram Kenton)

scenes, Alain carries a prop umbrella, which he frequently rides like a hobby-horse while skipping around the stage, showing his childlike mind-set (Fig. 16). His overall stance also reads more as that of a young child rather than a man. Alain frequently makes himself look smaller than he is, slouching. When his wedding with Lise falls through, he shows his sadness by keeping his head and shoulders down.

During the village festival, the farmers join him in a dance where they frolic in circles around him and Alain happily skips in place, waving his arms like an overenthusiastic child. Choreographically, Alain's ballet steps look inexperienced and awkward, as if he has only started learning them recently. This is especially prominent in his *assemblés*, which he lands with one foot following the other, which makes him seem uncoordinated and clunky. Alain's choreography is also laden with 'Mickey Mousing', an extreme form of conformance where the music and choreography match perfectly.<sup>33</sup> In *La Fille mal gardée*, Mickey Mousing is used for comedic effect, especially when Alain sneaks into Lise's house at the end of the ballet to fetch his umbrella. As Inger Damsholt writes in her chapter on the gendered metaphor in choreomusicology, Mickey Mousing is often considered to be a juvenile way of linking music and choreography,

<sup>32</sup> While queer people of course experience sexual attraction, in queer coded characters, all references to sex were usually removed.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100-102.

as it is on-the-nose.<sup>34</sup> However, it works for Alain because of his juvenile and innocent nature. Also, because Mickey Mousing is mostly associated with cartoons (especially the naïve Mickey Mouse), the inclusion of the effect in Ashton's ballet also paints Alain like a cartoon character.

While these aspects about Alain's character make him an inherently unsuitable husband for Lise, these traits are not necessarily seen as a negative, nor are they there to mock him. Moreover, the fact that Alain is presented as a child can also explain the more queer coded aspects of his personality, as children are generally considered to be more sensitive, naïve and innocent than grown-ups. As Kavanagh cites in her biography of Ashton: 'Fred [Ashton] didn't want [Alain] to be an idiot. He's not trying to be silly, it's just his nature.'<sup>35</sup> Alain was created for Alexander Grant, who had a close romantic and later platonic relationship with Ashton. One can feel Ashton's fondness for Grant through the character of Alain, which Kavanagh described as a 'gift of love'.<sup>36</sup> While Alain might be juvenile and is frequently teased for it, there is no real animosity between Alain and the rest of the characters. This is in stark contrast to a character like Gamache, who is actively disliked by most characters in *Don Quixote*, including Basilio and Kitri. Instead, the characters of *La Fille mal gardée* care deeply about Alain and his feelings. When Alain is ultimately left at the altar, he performs a tearful mime showing how hurt he is, which receives horrified and pitiful looks from Lise and Colas. It is also telling that it is Alain – not the leading couple – that has the privilege to close out each act of the ballet. This is significant, because it allows for Alain to have a happy ending.

## Conclusion

In her biography of Frederick Ashton, Julie Kavanagh describes Colas from Ashton's 1964 ballet *La Fille mal gardée* as 'exuberantly heterosexual'.<sup>37</sup> At a first glance, this statement does not seem to be out of the ordinary. Colas, like many of the male comedy protagonists before him presents many traits that are masculine, and therefore desirable and 'exuberantly heterosexual'.<sup>38</sup> Colas is strong and hardworking, jovial and extraverted, and is in a loyal and loving relationship with Lise, whom he marries at the end of the ballet. However, while Colas shares these traits with many nineteenth-century protagonists, especially Basilio from *Don*

<sup>34</sup> Monna Dithmer ed, *Of Another World : Dancing Between Dream and Reality*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002), 242-243.

<sup>35</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 448.

<sup>36</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 448.

<sup>37</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 448-449.

<sup>38</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 448-449.

*Quixote*, his personality and masculinity is in many ways much softer. Much of Colas's perceived softer masculinity stems from the narrative, especially if you compare his actions to characters such as Basilio. However, much of Colas's masculinity is also embedded choreomusically.

In Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée*, Colas is assigned a leitmotiv that appears in four prominent scenes in act one, and is briefly referenced in act two. Colas's leitmotiv, in combination with his mime and ballet steps shapes much of his personality, and therefore his masculinity. Choreographically, Colas likes to exaggerate and play up his masculinity. Examples of this are him threatening to throw a punch when he is teased by his friends and him 'rescuing' Lise when her mother keeps them apart. Whereas normally such traits can be interpreted as negative, Colas's elegant and playful leitmotiv softens these traits, instead presenting them as tongue-in-cheek. This softer masculinity is also confirmed by scenes where Colas's leitmotiv is set purely in a positive light, such as him arriving at the festival (L4). What is also striking, is that while Colas is much softer in his masculinity in comparison to his male peers, in his own ballet, he is still presented as the more desirable suitor. However, and perhaps even more remarkable, Colas's status as desirable suitor is not at the detriment of Alain's masculinity or dignity.

### **Chapter 3: *The Dream* (1964).**

The final case study of this thesis is Ashton's *The Dream* (1964). Adapted from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-1596), *The Dream* contrasts greatly with *La Fille mal gardée*. The most prominent difference between the two works is the supernatural presence in *The Dream*. Although *La Fille mal gardée* is whimsical, it refrains from the supernatural altogether. Oberon, who will be the focus of this chapter, is a fairy. This might seem like a trivial difference, but actually has tremendous consequences for the presented choreomusical masculinity of his character. Moreover, unlike Lise and Colas from *La Fille mal gardée*, the relationship between the main couple of *The Dream*, Oberon and Titania, is strained to say the least. The main objective of this chapter is to analyse Oberon's masculinity through a choreomusical lens. In this chapter, his masculinity will especially be assessed through his relationship with Titania, and the two scenes that relationship prominently features in: their original quarrel, and the reconciliation *pas de deux*. In order to put these analyses into context, I will first look at Ashton's *The Dream* and other balletic adaptations of Shakespeare's comedy. As masculinity is such an important concept of this thesis, I will also bring attention to the complicated history between fairies and its link with queerness and (a perceived lack of) masculinity.

#### **A Midsummer Night's Dream**

Shakespeare's play depicts three totally different worlds colliding during the preparation of the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, for which Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, have travelled to Athens. However, they are having a quarrel that will severely impact the lives of those that stumble upon the fairies that midsummer night. Oberon, who is mad because Titania refuses to give him a changeling child, thinks up a cruel plan in order to humiliate her. Using the fabled love-in-idleness, a flower that makes anyone fall in love with the first person they see, Oberon intends to make Titania fall in love with a monster. Puck, Oberon's attendant, turns Bottom, a weaver who has come to the woods with his theatre troupe to rehearse a play intended to be performed at the wedding, into a donkey. As soon as Titania sees Bottom, she falls madly in love with him.

Also caught in the crossfire are four Athenian lovers. Hermia, who is betrothed to Demetrius, is really in love with Lysander, while Helena, Hermia's best friend, is secretly pining for Demetrius. After her father refuses to break the engagement, Hermia and Lysander



flee to the woods, pursued by Demetrius, who in turn is pursued by Helena. Oberon orders Puck to enchant Demetrius with the flower, so that he falls in love with Helena. However, Puck accidentally enchants Lysander instead. When Oberon rectifies the mistake by enchanting Demetrius as well, chaos ensues. Poor Hermia is left alone in the woods, while the two men are physically fighting each other for Helena's hand, who in turn thinks that the men are playing a very cruel trick on her.

Before the chaos truly gets out of hand, Oberon summons a mist that distracts the four lovers before they ultimately fall asleep. Puck removes the enchantment from Lysander, but not from Demetrius, so that when the four lovers awake order is restored. Oberon also removes the enchantments from Bottom and Titania, deciding that his prank has gone on long enough. Titania, embarrassed by her actions, gives Oberon the child. Bottom, who vaguely recalls the weird circumstances he found himself in the night before, shrugs and declares that it all must have been a dream. The play ends at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, where the fairies bless the beds of the three couples.

Like many of Shakespeare's plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* became an increasingly popular object for adaptation across an array of different media. These works include nearly two dozen film adaptations, television, opera and other musical works, musical theatre, paintings, video games, and most importantly for this thesis: ballet. Over the years, there have been many different ballet adaptations, most of them set to Mendelssohn's incidental music. A selection of these adaptations include works by Christopher Wheeldon, John Neumeier, Heinz Spoerli, Liam Scarlett, and Ethan Stiefel. However, most relevant for this thesis – apart from Ashton's own adaptation of the work – is George Balanchine's full-length ballet adaptation.<sup>1</sup> Premiering in 1962, a mere two years before *The Dream*, Balanchine's version is arguably the most well-known ballet adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy. Of all Balanchine's works, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to be the most strongly rooted in the Russian Imperial ballet traditions of the late nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The ballet's second act, which is completely set during Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding, consists of a series of plotless divertissements. As Zoë Anderson remarks in *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, the goings-on in the Athenian Woods are reminiscent of nineteenth-century white acts and dream scenes, making *A Midsummer Night's Dream* one of Balanchine's more

---

<sup>1</sup> 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' New York City Ballet, accessed 15 July, 2024, <https://www.nycballet.com/discover/ballet-repertory/a-midsummer-nights-dream/>.

<sup>2</sup> Zoë Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 215.

‘Russian’ ballets.<sup>3</sup> While not the focus of this thesis, Balanchine’s adaptation can serve as an object of comparison for Ashton’s ballet. Not only are Ashton and Balanchine considered to be founders of the English and American national ballet styles respectively, they are usually pitted against each other in one way or another.<sup>4</sup> Their respective adaptations of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* therefore can serve as an interesting case study, not only regarding their differences, but especially their similarities.

### **Frederick Ashton’s *The Dream***

Frederick Ashton was commissioned to create his version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* sometime in early 1964.<sup>5</sup> The ballet was part of a triple bill to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth. The other two ballets performed during that program were a revival of Robert Helpmann’s *Hamlet* (1946), and the newly commissioned *Images of Love* (1964), choreographed by Kenneth MacMillan.<sup>6</sup> *The Dream* was also the first ballet Ashton created after his appointment as artistic director of the Royal Ballet in 1963.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Balanchine’s adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Ashton turned the source material into a one-act ballet, running around fifty minutes. In order to do so the play had to be significantly condensed. One drastic measure was that librettists Michael Somes and John Lanchbery completely cut the first and final act of the play, omitting the wedding of Theseus and Hippolytha, and thus removing the reason why these three distinct groups (the Athenian lovers, the theatre troupe and the fairies) find themselves in the same woods.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the ballet now centers on the (strained) relationship between Oberon and Titania and the mayhem that their quarrel causes. Opinions have been mixed whether these changes were for the better, as a common complaint is that the story was reduced too much to make sense at a narrative level.<sup>9</sup> However, as Julie Kavanagh points out in her biography of Ashton, he also added to Shakespeare’s play, especially when it came to the relationship between Oberon and Titania.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the ballet, Oberon and Titania set aside their differences and they perform a moving *pas de deux* signifying their reconciliation. This *pas de deux*, which will be

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover’s Companion*, 216-217.

<sup>4</sup> Alistair Macaulay, ‘Dueling Troupes (and Choreographers),’ *The New York Times*, accessed 15 July, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/02/arts/dance/02dancers.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton*, London: Faber & Faber, 1996., 479

<sup>6</sup> ‘Performance Database,’ Royal Opera House Collections, accessed 15 July, 2024.

<https://www.rohcollections.org.uk/SearchResults.aspx?searchtype=performance&page=2&yearfrom=1964&year to=1964&company=The%20Royal%20Ballet>.

<sup>7</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 480.

<sup>8</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 480.

<sup>9</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 481.

<sup>10</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 481.

the main subject of the choreographic analysis presented in this chapter, gives a nuance to their relationship absent in Shakespeare's original text.

In terms of casting, Ashton created the role of Titania for Royal Ballet principal Antoinette Sibley. There was an expectation that Ashton would model Oberon after ballet superstar Rudolf Nureyev, but Ashton refused for various reasons, including the fact that Nureyev was already performing two of the three scheduled ballets in the triple bill.<sup>11</sup> Instead, Ashton plucked a young and then-unknown Anthony Dowell from the *corps de ballet*. It was partially due to *The Dream*'s success that Dowell and Sibley became one of the most successful pairings in Royal Ballet history.<sup>12</sup> In terms of choreography, Ashton liked playing to his dancer's strengths. For instance, one of Dowell's signatures was his ability to seamlessly transition from a *pirouette* into an *arabesque penchée*, which became one of Oberon's signature steps.<sup>13</sup> Also remarkable was Dowell's flexibility, as his *penchées* had the same height as those of the ballerinas with whom he worked.<sup>14</sup> This element is seen in the reconciliation *pas de deux*, where Oberon and Titania simultaneously perform an *arabesque penchée*, while holding on to each other for support (Fig. 17). These elements specifically catering to Dowell is one of the reasons why Oberon is still considered to be one of the hardest male roles in the repertoire. As Dowell himself gleefully stated in a behind-the-scenes video for the 2017 production (which is the production I am analysing for this chapter): 'What's lovely for me, is they [dancers performing Oberon] still find it bloody hard.'<sup>15</sup> After Ashton's death, the rights and royalties of his ballets were bequeathed to a handful of his dear friends and collaborators. It was Anthony Dowell who received the full rights and royalties of *The Dream*, showing how important Ashton deemed the role of Oberon, and the dancer who originated him.



**Fig. 17:** double supported *arabesque penchée* (Dowell and Sibley, 1964 – photo by Houston Rogers)

<sup>11</sup> To read more about Ashton's strained relationship with Nureyev, and the reasons behind not casting Nureyev as Oberon see Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 479-480; 'Performance Database,' Royal Opera House Collections.

<sup>12</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 482.

<sup>13</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 482.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 225.

<sup>15</sup> Royal Ballet and Opera, 'What makes choreographer Frederick Ashton a genius (The Royal Ballet),' 20 June, 2017, YouTube Video, 4:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkpICgXfQNO>.

As with many of his ballets, Ashton also created a role for Alexander Grant, who was one of Ashton's former lovers and closest friend.<sup>16</sup> In *The Dream*, Grant originated the role of Bottom, a weaver who is turned into a donkey by Puck. One of the most striking aspects of the choreography is that Bottom dances on pointe after he is turned into a donkey. This makes Bottom one of the only cis male ballet characters who dances on pointe in the classic ballet repertoire. While male dancers in pointe shoes are nothing new, it is exceedingly rare for men to portray cisgender male characters while performing on pointe. Male pointe work is almost always associated with women impersonations and drag performances. These performances are mostly humorous in nature, and some even go as far as to mock femininity. Usually when a man goes on pointe, it is to emphasise the masculine and ungraceful aspects of a female character, thus portraying her as undesirable. Examples of this are the *pas de deux* from the second act of Alexei Ratmansky's *The Bright Stream* (2003), and the choreography for the ugly stepsisters throughout the various productions of Prokofiev's *Cinderella*. Another interesting example is Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, also known as the Trockaderoes or the Trocks, a comedic ballet company only employing male dancers who all perform classical ballet repertory in drag and on pointe.

The use of pointework in *The Dream* is different. Not only is Bottom a male character, but he does not perform on pointe when he is human. He only dances in pointe shoes when he is a donkey, with the pointe shoes mimicking his hooves. Bottom's pointe choreography is quite clunky and thus mimics many other male roles on pointe. However, in Ashton's ballet, the pointe shoes also have another function. As Bottom has just been turned into an animal by Puck, he is struggling to find balance on his newly acquired hooves, thus making him look ungraceful.<sup>17</sup> *The Dream* was not the only time where Ashton repurposed pointe work in this manner. In the film *Tales of Beatrix Potter* (1971) and its subsequent stage adaptation (1992), Pigling Bland (who was also danced by Grant in the original film) dances a romantic *pas de deux* with his love Pig-Wig, with both of them performing on pointe.

Apart from these examples of men portraying hooved animals, Ashton does not use male pointe work in the 'traditional' sense. However, while Ashton has choreographed a couple of famous comedic drag roles, even creating one of Cinderella's stepsisters for himself, these characters dance in character shoes; not on pointe. The main reason for this is that Ashton modelled these types of characters after the tradition of the pantomime dame, a

---

<sup>16</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 480.

<sup>17</sup> Royal Ballet and Opera, 'Men on pointe? First Soloist Bennet Gartside shares his tips (The Royal Ballet),' 18 June, 2017, YouTube Video, 2:53, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cpAfkIVQmI>.

man in drag usually functioning as the host of a pantomime (or ‘panto’) and making raunchy jokes. One can clearly see this tradition in Widow Simone from *La Fille mal gardée*, and the stepsisters from *Cinderella*, who are the source of comedic relief in both works.

These pantomime-esque characters in Ashton’s work show that Ashton does not shy away from the crass humour provided by drag performances in ballet. Similarly, Ashton clearly is not above using pointe shoes on male dancers to provide a touch of humour in his ballets. What is striking, is that Ashton does not combine these two elements in his works, while its combination seems to be an unspoken norm in other ballet works. Instead, Ashton utilises the pointe shoe as a visual metaphor. Bottom’s choreography is not funny because he is a man pretending to be a woman, but because Bottom wears something on his foot that is ballet’s closest equivalent to a hoof. As a result, Ashton attempted to strip away the feminine aspect of the pointe shoe when employing it in male-centric choreography, showing that the pointe shoe can be utilised separately from hyper-feminine associations. I will be returning to Bottom, and the implications the pointe shoe has on his masculinity later. Strikingly, this subversive approach towards choreography is also present in the choreography of Oberon, the king of the fairies.

### **Fairies, Queerness, and the Complex Masculinity of the Fairy King**

One of the choices Ashton and his librettists made when condensing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to a one-act ballet, was turning Oberon and Titania into the main characters. When only looking at the role of Titania this choice seems rather logical, as fairies and other supernatural spirits in ballet are nothing new. Filippo Taglioni’s *La Sylphide* (1832), commonly considered to be the first stand-alone ballet to be danced in pointe shoes, revolves around the tragic tale of a forest spirit seducing a mortal man.<sup>18</sup> From then on, the supernatural female character became a staple in ballet, especially for white acts and dream sequences. In these scenes the (almost always male) character finds themselves in a magical realm of some sorts, surrounded by a *corps de ballet* full of women portraying supernatural beings. Sometimes the main female character themselves is a supernatural being, such as the titular sylph in *La Sylphide*. However, even if a female lead is mortal, plot reasons determine that she becomes a supernatural being in one way or another. For instance, Giselle from the eponymous ballet (1841) and Nikiya from *La Bayadère* (1877) die and become ghosts, while

---

<sup>18</sup> The first ballet to be danced in pointe shoes is generally considered to be “The Ballet of the Damned Nuns” from the opera *Robert le diable* (1831). The role of mother superior was danced by Marie Taglioni, who also originated the sylph in *La Sylphide*, choreographed by her father. To read more, consult Anderson, *The Ballet Lover’s Companion*, 8-9.

princess Aurora from *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) and Odette from *Swan Lake* (1895) are cursed.

Where supernatural characters are a common archetype for ballerinas, for danseurs such a role is much rarer. In the scarce occurrence that male fairies and supernatural spirits appear in ballet, they are almost always reduced to supporting characters. Sometimes these characters function as aids to help the main characters on their quest, like The Spirit of the Nile from *The Pharaoh's Daughter* (1862) and Eros from *Sylvia* (1876). More often than not these characters are placed within a villainous light, showing their supernatural powers as something to be feared. Examples of these villains are Von Rothbart in *Swan Lake* and Golfo in *Napoli* (1842). In that regard, Ashton's Oberon does not deviate from the norm that much. On the one hand Oberon is a devious spirit in his own right, with his prank on Titania being a particularly egregious example. However, he also has a gentler side, especially when he is interacting with the four lovers. His reasoning to enchant Demetrius seems to come from a genuine desire to help Helena in her pursuits.

The factor here that makes Oberon a unique character is not only that he is a male fairy, but that he is the main character of the whole piece, even more so than Titania. This change impacts the perception of his masculinity severely. Fairies have a peculiar reputation, never mind a fairy who identifies as male. As queer historian Sasha Coward explains in his video series for the Museum of London, fairies have always been subversive beings.<sup>19</sup> Nowadays, fairies are associated with dainty, cute and hyperfeminine magical creatures. The roots of the fairy, as Coward explains, are actually much darker. Not unlike witchcraft, fairies were associated with the magical feminine, which has deeply negative connotations.<sup>20</sup> Fairies were to be feared, as they could cause mayhem and chaos. If you crossed a fairy, they could even steal your children. In the nineteenth century a shift occurred in favour of the image of the fairy. The Victorians, intrigued by the idea of the fairy but afraid of its pagan roots, softened the idea of the fairy so that it would be more palatable for contemporary audiences.<sup>21</sup> This new version of the fairy was a magical creature, still rooted in nature and still mischievous, but much sweeter and overall benevolent. This revised version has stuck ever since.

---

<sup>19</sup> Sacha Coward, 'Queer as Folklore | Faeries,' Museum of London, accessed 20 May, 2024, <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/lgbtq-history-month/whats-folklore-lgbtq-history-month/whats-folklore-faeries>.

<sup>20</sup> Coward, 'Queer as Folklore | Faeries,' 0:44-1:05.

<sup>21</sup> Coward, 'Queer as Folklore | Faeries,' 1:53-2:17.

When it comes to ballet adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and especially Ashton's *The Dream*, both sides of the fairy archetype become muddled. Shakespeare wrote his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* still very much in the tradition of the dark and malevolent fairy. Oberon and Puck ultimately cause chaos for everyone crossing their path, even if it results in a happy ending. Fairies were also known to steal children, which is the root of the conflict between Oberon and Titania, as the couple fight about the ownership of a changeling child. However, as Coward highlights, the reputation regarding the fairy started to shift in the nineteenth century, roughly around the same time that Mendelssohn was composing his incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>22</sup> While the original play is set in ancient Athens, for *The Dream* the setting is moved to the 1830s, presumably England, to match Mendelssohn's music. Moreover, Ashton refers choreographically to the works of Marie Taglioni, whose portrayal of the sylph in *La Sylphide* laid the ground work for the image of the modern fairy. It was known that Mendelssohn was a great admirer of Taglioni, and that his incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* could very well have been inspired by Taglioni's ballets.<sup>23</sup> As a result, choreographers choosing to adapt *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into a ballet and to set the choreography to Mendelssohn's incidental music, are confronted with two conflicting images of the fairy. On the one hand there are the evil and chaotic tricksters from Shakespeare's play, on the other the dainty and feminine fairies as presented in ballet and Mendelssohn's composition.



**Fig. 18:** Oberon in Balanchine's *A Midsummernight's Dream* (Anthony Huxley, 2019 – photo by Erin Baiano)



**Fig. 19:** Oberon in Ashton's *The Dream* (Steven McRae, 2017, photo by Tristram Kenton)

For his version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Ashton chose a radical approach to address the discrepancies between Shakespeare's original play, Mendelssohn's music, and the choreographic traditions. Ashton's fairies fall in line with the image of the modern fairy, both in choreography and design, with the (female) choreography hinting at Marie Taglioni and the romantic ballets of the 1830s and 1840s. The set and costume designs, which were inspired by the works of Lila de Nobili, also conform

<sup>22</sup> Coward, 'Queer as Folklore | Faeries.' 1:53-2:18.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 225; Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 481.

to the modern image of the fairy, using motifs of cobwebs, flower petals, dewdrops, vines and other natural elements. This is in stark contrast to other productions of the ballet.<sup>24</sup> Take for instance Balanchine's version. While Balanchine also sets his work to Mendelssohn's incidental music (and a couple of other additions from the composer's oeuvre),<sup>25</sup> the designs are completely different. Balanchine honoured the original setting; ancient Athens. Therefore, Balanchine's Oberon and Titania wear Grecian inspired clothing, albeit with a more fantasy-inspired edge. Balanchine's Oberon is completely adorned in gold, which is commonly associated with artifice (Fig. 18). This is in stark contrast with Oberon from *The Dream*, who wears a costume seemingly fashioned from materials found in nature, such as vines, ivy and cobwebs (Fig. 19). While *The Dream*'s nature inspired designs are more in line with the modern idea of the fairy, they still work well with the darker roots of Shakespeare's story, especially the design and choreography of Oberon. If the stealing of children and toying with mortals are any indication, fairies have a different sense of morality. Oberon especially seems to have a sense of darkness about him, so it must become evidently clear from context clues that he is not human. One such context clue is Ashton's choreography for him, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The nature-inspired costumes are striking, beautiful, and everything one would expect from a modern fairy, but they are also otherworldly. For Oberon especially these costumes give him a sense of otherness. Ballerinas are used to dressing up as fairies, but men are not. Oberon, who is adorned in heavy makeup, a tiara, and a costume with cape that is adorned with glitters, seems to be outside the norm, which also comprises the presentation of his masculinity. This leads me to another aspect of fairies that layers the interpretation of Oberon's masculinity: the link between fairies and inherent queerness.

As Coward has stated in his video, the fairy as seen in both their light and dark counterparts, are heavily associated with the magical feminine. While this was already present in the dark fairies of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the reputation of fairies as hyperfeminine beings was solidified in the nineteenth century. From then on, the image of the fairy was steered to them being dainty, sweet and inherently feminine creatures. Coward even uses ballet as one of the inspirations for this image,<sup>26</sup> as Tchaikovsky's 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' from *The Nutcracker* is playing in the background.<sup>27</sup> Because of this association

---

<sup>24</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 481.

<sup>25</sup> 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' New York City Ballet.

<sup>26</sup> While the modern and dainty version of the fairy became a well-known archetype in nineteenth-century ballet, there are of course exceptions, such as the Wilis from *Giselle*. Usually, these darker fairies can be found in early nineteenth-century romantic ballets, which were created before or during changing image of the fairy.

<sup>27</sup> Coward, 'Queer as Folklore | Faeries,' 2:42-2:50.



between fairies and the hyperfeminine, ‘fairy’ soon became a slur for gay men.<sup>28</sup> This slur was effective, because patriarchy determines that being associated with the hyperfeminine, and essentially being called a woman, was the worst possible insult for a man.<sup>29</sup> However, as Richard Vytنيorgu writes in his article, the slur ‘fairy’ was used in an even more specific context. Feminine slurs such as ‘fairy’ and ‘queen’ were used to identify ‘bottoms’,<sup>30</sup> gay men who enjoy being the receiving partner during anal sex.<sup>31</sup> While being gay or otherwise not aligning with the gender norms in other manners already was enough to be scrutinised, especially in the early twentieth century, bottoms received even more flack as they cast themselves (and might as well prefer to be) in the traditionally ‘feminine’ role. However, as with many gay slurs, the slur ‘fairy’ was ultimately reclaimed. The Radical Faeries (sic) were a group founded in the 1970s, consisting of gay and bisexual men who used nature, spirituality and pagan ritual to feel closer to their queer roots.<sup>32</sup>

As established in the first chapter of this thesis, queer panic and homophobia have also been detrimental to the reputation of the male dancer; especially the queer male dancer.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore interesting to see *The Dream* and especially the character of Oberon through this queer lens. Oberon’s masculinity is deeply layered. On the one hand, the perception of him is coloured by the fact that he is a male fairy; which is an anomaly in and of itself because of its link to queerness. Combined with the already loaded subject of male (ballet) dancing, Oberon’s otherworldliness becomes even more abundantly clear. An added complexity regarding Oberon’s presented masculinity is that he was created by two gay men; Ashton and Dowell. While Ashton is the choreographer of *The Dream*, Dowell’s abilities as a dancer truly shaped Oberon’s choreographic language. Dowell possessed abilities that were considered desirable for male dancers, such as strength and large leaps, but other abilities were completely unheard of in male choreography, as they are associated with the feminine vocabulary of steps. Examples of these are Oberon’s fast *chaînes* and the aforementioned extreme flexibility when going into *arabesque penchée*. However, despite Oberon’s clear association with femininity and queerness, in *The Dream* he is mostly presented as a hypermasculine and borderline toxic character.

---

<sup>28</sup> Coward, ‘Queer as Folklore | Faeries,’ 2:51-3:08.

<sup>29</sup> Doug Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance: An Empirical Study of Male Identities in Western Theatrical Dance Training*, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 45-47; 50.

<sup>30</sup> As the term only emerged in the twentieth century, there is no indication that ‘bottom’ in this specific context is related to Bottom, the character from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Vytنيorgu, ‘Twinks, Fairies, and Queens: A Historical Inquiry into Effeminate Gay Bottom Identity,’ *Journal of Homosexuality* 71, no. 7 (2024): 1615-1617.

<sup>32</sup> Coward, ‘Queer as Folklore | Faeries,’ 3:31-4:20.

<sup>33</sup> Risner, *Stigma and Perseverance*, 47-49; 78.

Over the years it has become increasingly popular to analyse Shakespeare's works through the lens of queer theory, for instance finding traces of transgender identities and polyamorous relationships in *Twelfth Night*, or tackling the issues of ableism, identity and reputation in *Richard III*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with its fairies, romantic misunderstandings and interspecies romance therefore fits right into discussions of Shakespeare and queerness. Interestingly, even though there has been plenty written about the inherent queerness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, these kinds of analysis rarely involve the inherent queerness of fairies, or the character of Oberon. Instead, the main focus of queer readings is the relationship between Titania and Bottom. Their relationship is marked as a love that transcends all sorts of borders. Not only because Titania is a fairy and Bottom a human, but especially because of Bottom's transformation into a donkey.<sup>34</sup>

For Ashton's *The Dream*, there is also a link to be found between queerness, sexuality, and the relationship between Titania and Bottom (Fig. 20).

First of all, Bottom was created for Alexander Grant, who famously had a close romantic and platonic bond with Ashton. Much like Alain in *La Fille mal gardée* (also created for Grant), Bottom's endearing naiveté is at the comedic centre of *The Dream*, even though the comedy is never at his expense. Bottom's dance in pointe shoes also has potential for a variety of queer readings. Even though Ashton does not use male pointe work in the traditional sense, Bottom's pointe work in *The Dream* still emphasises his transformation, and therefore his queerness and otherness. For Titania, her encounter with Bottom has a permanent effect on her sexuality. For the choreography of the fairies Ashton alludes to the 'sylph' archetype, and especially the ballets of Marie Taglioni.<sup>35</sup> However, despite this clear allusion, Titania does not behave like a stereotypical sylph.<sup>36</sup> Instead she is strong-willed and – after her encounter with Bottom – sensual. In a review of



**Fig. 20:** Bottom with pointe shoes and Titania in *The Dream* (Bennet Gartside and Akane Takada, 2017 – photo by Tristram Kenton)

<sup>34</sup> To read more about queer interpretations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, please refer to: Madhavi Menon, *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2011); Jennifer Drouin, ed, *Shakespeare/Sex: Contemporary Readings in Gender and Sexuality*, (London, UK: The Arden Shakespeare, 2020); Valerie Traub, ed, *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 225; Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 481.

<sup>36</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 481.

the 2017 production of *The Dream*, Jann Parry of *Dance Tabs* remarked that Akane Takada's performance as Titania alongside McRae's Oberon especially emphasises her sexual liberation. '[Titania is] erotically fascinated by Bottom as an obliging ass – so much so that in her reconciliation *pas de deux* with Oberon, she revels in her husband's interest in her renewed sensuality.'<sup>37</sup> This dynamic between Oberon and Titania becomes clear in a small moment in their reconciliation *pas de deux* where Oberon sensually touches her wings, and Titania shudders in ecstasy.

### **Quarrels, Fairies, and Toxic Masculinity**

The final part of this chapter consists of a choreomusical analysis of Ashton's ballet. *The Dream* is filled with choreomusical relations. Mendelssohn's music in and of itself is programmatic in nature, and Ashton adheres to many of the leitmotifs Mendelssohn created. He also matches the choreography to the mood of the music. Take for instance his choreographic setting of Mendelssohn's Scherzo, which is performed after Oberon conjures the mist to tame the four lovers. In this section, which is a *pas de six* for Oberon, Puck, and the four fairies Peaseblossom, Mustardseed, Cobweb, and Moth, the choreography, consisting of dazzling jumps and turns, mimicks the frantic music and the storm Oberon just conjured. In her review of a 2015 double bill featuring Ashton's *The Dream* and Kenneth MacMillan's *Song of the Earth*, Marina Harss wrote about Ashton's choreographic setting of the Scherzo that '[t]he music at that moment evokes a gathering storm, another example of Ashton's knack for finding the right visual counterpart for a musical idea.'<sup>38</sup> Harss's review shows that despite the fact that Mendelssohn's incidental music was not composed for ballet, Ashton applies the conventions of *musique dansante* to his choreography. This analysis will particularly focus on how choreomusical relationships and notions of gender can develop and emphasise individual character arcs, which will be explored through the strained relationship between Oberon and Titania. This will be done through the analysis of two contrasting, yet eerily similar scenes: the quarrel and the reconciliation *pas de deux*.

---

<sup>37</sup> Jann Parry, 'Royal Ballet – 3 casts in The Dream, Symphonic Variations, Marguerite and Armand – London,' *Dance Tabs*, 11 June, 2017, <https://dancetabs.com/2017/06/royal-ballet-3-casts-in-the-dream-symphonic-variations-marguerite-and-armand-london/>.

<sup>38</sup> Marina Harss, 'The Royal Ballet – The Dream, Song of the Earth – New York,' *Dance Tabs*, 25 June, 2015, <https://dancetabs.com/2015/06/the-royal-ballet-the-dream-song-of-the-earth-new-york/>.

The first hint regarding the nature of Oberon and Titania's relationship can be found in the music that underscores their scenes. The scene of their quarrel, at the very beginning of the ballet, is underscored by Mendelssohn's Fairy March, while the *pas de deux* marking their reconciliation at the end of the ballet is set to the Nocturne. It is notable that Mendelssohn's composition was significantly rearranged during the creation of *The Dream's* score. Certain pieces from Mendelssohn's original score appear in a slightly different narrative context. In both versions of the story, Oberon and Titania's quarrel is underscored by the Fairy March. However, in Mendelssohn's original score the Nocturne is played when the four lovers are sleeping after the enchantments have been lifted, whereas in *The Dream* the piece underscores Oberon and Titania's reconciliation. I argue that the changed context does not alter the analysis of this piece of music too much, as both scenes depict a happy ending after a tumultuous disruption.

**Fairy March**  
Quarrel Oberon and Titania

**Fig. 21:** excerpt of the Fairy March (Quarrel Oberon and Titania) – Notes Maria Schreurs

Musically, the two pieces are in stark contrast to one another, conveying the two vastly different phases of Oberon and Titania's relationship. The scene of the quarrel starts with four distinct chords (Fig. 21), all derived from the key of E major (E major, B major, a minor, and E major). Mendelssohn uses these four chords to bookend his overture for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and refers to these chords from time to time in the incidental music; the most notable occurrence being at the end of the play. In *The Dream*, the four chords have a similar function, and they appear at roughly the same spots in both versions of the story. These four chords can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In *The Dream*, these chords are distinctly linked to Oberon (and to some extent Titania), and they represent order. Apart from the overture and the ending, the chords appear in two scenes where the order is threatened to be

(and ultimately is) disturbed. The first time is before Oberon and Titania's quarrel. The second time is right before Oberon realises Puck's mistake in mixing up Demetrius and Lysander.

After these four chords, the Fairy March starts playing and the mood changes significantly, indicating the beginning of the quarrel. The key switches to G major, and the long stretched out chords make way for quick patterns of quavers and semiquavers. The Fairy March is a fast march in duple metre, giving a sense of urgency. This is even more emphasised with Mendelssohn's instrumentation for this piece, which has remained relatively unchanged for the music in *The Dream*. The first two musical phrases of the Fairy March start with a French horn playing a perfect fourth. Brass instruments are associated with the hunt, this interval can be interpreted as a call to action. Added to the French horn are woodwinds and pizzicato strings. While this instrumentation is often associated with woods, fields and the pastoral, in this context the instruments produce an almost frantic sound, especially in combination with the tremolos heard in this piece. The music is also arranged in a call-and-response pattern, sounding like a musical argument with the horns in attack and the woodwinds responding.

The Nocturne seems to be on the complete opposite side of the spectrum, musically conveying that the quarrel between Oberon and Titania is finally resolved. This is mostly due to the musical characteristics of the Nocturne, which depict the serenity of nightfall.<sup>39</sup> The Nocturne is also in a triple metre, whereas the Fairy March is in duple metre, giving two distinct feelings to the scene. The Nocturne is played in a lower tempo, and has longer note values, with the main melody mostly consisting of crochets and quavers. Placed in the context of the Nocturne, the instrumentation also conveys a slower, dreamlike atmosphere. The French horn is the most prominent, but the woodwinds and strings are also present. This time the instruments are used in a more romantic capacity, playing long legato melodies. Quite significantly, the Nocturne is written in the key of E major, which is the same key as the overture and the four chords that precede the Fairy March and the quarrel. As observed earlier in this section, the four chords, and therefore the key of E major, can be interpreted as the perceived order of things. Oberon and Titania's quarrel is a threat to this order, disturbing the peace and determining the events of the rest of the play. By choosing the Nocturne as the

---

<sup>39</sup> Maurice J.E. Brown, and Kenneth L. Hamilton, 'Nocturne (i),' *Grove Music Online*, accessed 15 July 2024, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000020012>

piece underscoring Oberon and Titania's long overdue reconciliation, the audience is given a musical cue that order is finally restored.

Despite these two musical pieces signifying two entirely different relationship dynamics between Oberon and Titania, both pieces share roughly the same instrumentation of woodwinds, French horn and strings. The similar instrumentation, but the vastly differing moods of the two scenes reveal a striking link between instrumentation and choreography. While there are exceptions, roughly speaking, Ashton has assigned each instrument group to one character. Oberon is associated with the strings, Titania with the woodwinds, while the French horn is allocated to them as a pair. In the Scherzo, Ashton also divides the instrumentation in this manner. Puck and the four fairies are accompanied by the woodwinds, whereas Oberon dances to the sections dominated by the strings. For the quarrel and reconciliation specifically, the instrumentation helps to create two distinctive moods. During their quarrel, the instruments are working against each other, while Oberon and Titania each desperately try to get the upper hand in their quarrel. The French horn sparks a response in winds at the same time that Oberon tries to grab the child and Titania defiantly walks away (Fig. 22), During the first section of their argument the woodwinds dominate, while choreographically Titania rebuffs her husband's anger. She does this in one of two ways. The first is by simply walking away and taking the child with her, performing a signature strut where she stands on pointe on one foot, while kicking the other. This strut is a choreographic leitmotiv and is sometimes interspersed with *pas de bourrée*, little steps performed on pointe.

When deflecting does not seem to work, she starts repeating Oberon's aggressive ballet steps. This is most prominent in a section where Oberon and Titania perform *arabesques*, alternating who has the upper hand in the argument (Fig. 23 and 24). Musically,



**Fig. 22:** Titania defiantly walks away (Akada and McRae, 2017 – screenshot DVD)

**Fig. 23 and 24:** Oberon and Titania perform *arabesques* (Akada and McRae, 2017 – screenshots DVD)

this section is underscored both by the woodwinds and the strings, signifying both Oberon and Titania, but the strings are played pizzicato. As pizzicato is a gentler and softer sound

than arco strings, its use here could indicate that Oberon is losing the fight, his aggression having no effect on his wife. After a combination of woodwinds and pizzicato strings accompany Titania strutting away with the child, Oberon tries to intimidate her once again. For the first time in this piece, arco strings dominate, while Oberon performs a combination of a kicked *pirouette* and *saut de chat*, both ballet steps making him seem larger in stature. However, his triumph is short-lived as the pizzicato strings and woodwinds return and Titania once again leaves with the child. The arco strings return, and Oberon repeats his choreographic combination, now with an extra *saut de chat* for emphasis. The arco strings remain when Oberon grabs the child. To the sound of a growing crescendo, Oberon and Titania start playing a twisted version of tug-of-war, each pulling at the child. At this point, the French horn is added to Oberon's strings, once again emphasising the battle between the two fairies. The music comes to a sudden halt when the child falls to the ground and starts crying. The woodwinds return when Titania comforts the child. Then she takes him with her, performing her signature strut. To add insult to injury, Titania's fairy attendants follow her also performing the strut, indicating that she has won the argument for now.

For the reconciliation *pas de deux*, Ashton assigns the three instrument groups in the same manner: strings for Oberon, woodwinds for Titania, and French horn for them as a couple. The most dominant instrument in Mendelssohn's Nocturne is the French horn, its calm and soothing tone a complete contrast to the same instrument's appearance in the Fairy March. Fascinatingly, in both pieces the melody starts with a perfect fourth played by the French horn. However, due to the other musical and choreographic parameters, the presented mood is much different. The beginning of the *pas de deux*, underscored by the French horn, marks their reconciliation. Oberon comes on first and walks across the stage. When Titania appears behind him, he turns around, runs towards her and offers his hand, which she gladly takes. For the rest of the section, they rarely let go of each other. The French horn is also heard in the final section of the *pas de deux*. In this section, the couple perform their ballet steps in close synchrony. Once again, they rarely let go of each other, which is once again underscored by the French horn. The outer two sections of the *pas de deux* are contrasted in the middle with a B-section where Oberon and Titania perform short ballet solos. During this section, Oberon dances his solo to the strings, while the woodwinds underscore Titania. The reconciliation *pas de deux* will be analysed thoroughly further in this chapter, but the choreomusical link between characters and instrumentation already shows how choreomusical structures can shape a narrative.



**Fig. 25:** *saut de chat* (McRae, 2017 – photo by Tristram Kenton)

Also significant is that the quarrel is a combination of mime and choreographed dance steps, which is an Ashtonian staple also seen in *La Fille mal gardée*. Oberon gestures to the child and insists to Titania that ‘he’s – mine’, musically emphasised with dotted quavers. To this, Titania repeatedly and defiantly answers ‘no’ and keeps the child out of Oberon’s reach, the shaking of her head

equally emphasised by the rhythmic patterns in the music. Oberon and Titania do not only show their animosity through mime. When mere words do not seem to convince her, Oberon tries to physically intimidate Titania into giving him the child. He makes himself seem threatening through choreography, making himself seem physically larger than he actually is. He does this by using larger-than-life arm gestures, and quickly and repeatedly striking an *arabesque*. He also shows off his strength to Titania, not merely walking to the child to grab him, but performing a combination of a *pirouette* and a *saut de chat* (Fig. 25). As a *saut de chat* is essentially a dancer performing a split in the air, the leg placement gives the illusion that the dancer is broader, and farther off the ground than in reality. However, Titania remains unfazed by the whole ordeal. She is having none of this, showing this either by walking away from him, or even rebuffing him by repeating his threatening stance.

In the quarrel, both music and choreography clearly point to the fact that Oberon and Titania are fighting. However, when the music and choreography are laid on top of each other an underlying choreomusical structure is revealed that is not as noticeable when analysing these elements of music and dance separately. As Stephanie Jordan writes in her chapter on choreomusical research, this phenomenon is known as a visual or auditory capture.<sup>40</sup> In the case of Oberon and Titania’s quarrel, a visual capture is present as the choreography reveals something about the musical structure which would otherwise have gone unnoticed. Ashton’s choreography for the quarrel is reactionary. Either one of the pair (though mostly Oberon) does something, while the other reacts. The choreography here reveals a similar structure in the music. The back-and-forth choreography reveals a pattern in Mendelssohn’s music that closely resembles a call-and-response structure. In the case of the opening phrase of the piece,

<sup>40</sup> Stephanie Jordan, ‘Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,’ in *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, eds. Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 148.



this is indeed a call-and-response, which is emphasised by the alternating choreography between Oberon and Titania (Fig. 26). However, despite the fact that the back-and-forth choreography makes it seem so, other parts of the Fairy March are not a true call-and-response (Fig. 27). Instead the musical piece consists of many repeats, which choreomusically adds to the story. The music stays the same, but Oberon and Titania keep alternating their choreography, showing that they are still arguing. This conveys to the audience that their argument has gone circular. At this point in the scene, there is no new musical and choreographic material added, making it unlikely that their conflict will be resolved soon.

**Fairy March**  
Quarrel Oberon and Titania

The image shows a musical score for the 'Fairy March' scene. It consists of two staves: Oberon (top) and Titania (bottom). The Oberon staff has a blue underline and includes handwritten notes: 'x+ ahead', 'reach to kid', 'middle', 'reach', and 'call: reaches for kid'. The Titania staff has a red underline and includes handwritten notes: 'walk', 'stop', 'hand', 'middle', 'reach', 'response: takes kid away', 'take kid away', and 'steps on beat'. The music is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature.

**Fig. 26:** excerpt of the Fairy March (Quarrel Oberon and Titania) – notes Maria Schreurs

The image shows a musical score for the 'Fairy March' scene. It consists of two staves: Oberon (top) and Titania (bottom). The Oberon staff has a blue underline and includes handwritten notes: 'He's mine', 'mine (one hand)', 'mine (two hands)', 'call: he's mine', 'shake feet and swing hand', and 'turn'. The Titania staff has a red underline and includes handwritten notes: 'response: no', 'step step', 'no (shake head)', 'no (shake head)', and '(basic not obvious)'. The music is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature.

**Fig. 27:** excerpt of the Fairy March (Quarrel Oberon and Titania) – notes Maria Schreurs

The differences in movements show a difference between the characters, and especially their perceived masculinity/femininity. For the two sides of the quarrel, Ashton uses stereotypical gendered ballet steps. Oberon, who perceives himself to be the authority over everyone, including his wife, choreographically presents himself in a stereotypical masculine manner, like his tendency to solve his problems with intimidation. His first course

of action is grabbing the child. When that does not work, he demands – not asks – Titania to hand him over. His assigned ballet steps also give hints of this masculinity. While *pirouettes* and *arabesques* are not necessarily gendered, the aggressive manner in which he performs them is. The *saut de chat* is more traditionally masculine as it is a large leap, which is commonly associated with strength. In this context, Oberon's movements perpetuate a specific form of masculinity, known as toxic masculinity. First named by psychologist Shepherd Bliss, toxic masculinity determines one's 'true manliness' only when perpetuating aggressive, dominant, discriminatory and otherwise harmful behaviours, especially towards women.<sup>41</sup>

Titania on the other hand seems to be the pinnacle of femininity, although she is never demure or submissive. At first she seems non-confrontational, simply walking away every time Oberon comes near her. Moreover, her ballet steps consist mostly of *pas de bourrée* performed on pointe. As men do commonly not perform on pointe, the *pas de bourrée* is inherently associated with women. Moreover, the *pas de bourrée* is one of the means to make the ballerina look light, dainty and inherently feminine, as pointe work combined with light tutus give the illusion of floating.<sup>42</sup> There are a couple of moments where Titania blurs the strict gender binary laid out by Ashton, much to Oberon's chagrin. Oberon's aggressive, and therefore more toxic masculine ballet steps are clearly meant to intimidate her, even though it does not have the desired effect on her. Titania continues to rebuff him by mirroring his aggressive stance.

Despite the gendered choreographic language in Oberon and Titania's quarrel, there are also elements that differ from traditional ballet choreography. Oberon's toxic and traditionally masculine attitude towards his wife does not seem to have any effect on her at all. This poses a question: why do Oberon's threats fall flat? One possible answer can be found in the choreomusical relationships presented in this scene. Choreographically, Oberon presents himself as the pinnacle of balletic masculinity. He performs large jumps signifying his strength, and makes himself seem physically larger by stretching his arms. However, Oberon's choreographic power is impacted and diminished by the music that accompanies his movements. For Oberon's segments in the quarrel, Ashton does not follow the conventions of *musique dansante*. During the quarrel, there is a section, underscored by arco strings, where Oberon performs a *pirouette* followed by a *saut de chat*, which is then repeated. While the

---

<sup>41</sup> Veronika Tait, 'What is Toxic Masculinity? Lessons from Shepherd Bliss and Other Gender Researchers,' Psych Daily with Dr Tait, 14 February, 2019, <https://veronikatait.com/posts/2019-02-14-toxic-masculinity.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 6-14.

strings here sound more intimidating than the pizzicato strings earlier in the piece, in combination with the choreography they still do not have the desired effect. This is due to the fact that Oberon's large leaps are underscored with legato semiquavers. Moreover, the melody is conjunct, with no melodic leaps at all. Balletic leaps are traditionally underscored by melodic leaps, a staccato playing style, and dotted notes. Traditional male ballet variations often contain large jumps, meaning that the rules and conventions of *musique dansante* dictate that the musical elements with jumps are considered masculine as well.<sup>43</sup> Oberon's music is more feminine-coded because of the absence of these traditionally masculine elements. As a result, his impressive choreography does not have its intended impact. I will return to the consequences and implications of this choreomusical setting at the end of this chapter.

### The Reconciliation *Pas de Deux*, Trust, and Equality

This leads me to the choreomusical representation of masculinity in the reconciliation *pas de deux*. Before I go to the analysis proper I want to point out a possible influence on the perception of masculinity in this *pas de deux*: the division of movement between Oberon and Titania. Traditionally, even though it means 'dance for two', the *pas de deux* is mostly meant



**Fig. 28:** Oberon supports Titania in *arabesque*, dips her, and then twists her around while she ducks under her own leg (McRae and Takada, 2017 - screenshot DVD)

as a showcase for the ballerina, with the danseur only functioning as her literal and figurative support. Male dancers would often assist the ballerina in lifts, supported *pirouettes* and balances, while rarely performing solo choreography on their own. However, in *The Dream*, Oberon and Titania have an equal share of the choreography, an element suggested by Rudolf Nureyev.<sup>44</sup> While Oberon still supports Titania in the more traditional ballet lifts and other supported ballet steps, there are also moments where Ashton adds specific choreographic flourishes that place Oberon in the spotlight, such as an *arabesque* at the end of a supported *pas de bourrée* on pointe. Another example is a highly complex movement in the first A-section

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir, 'Musical Expression in the Bournonville-Løvenskjold La Sylphide Variation,' in *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales, and Karen Eliot, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 345-346.

<sup>44</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 482-483.

where Oberon supports Titania in *arabesque*, dips her, and then twists her around while she ducks under her own leg (Fig. 28). The movement had reportedly come to Ashton in a dream, and when he suggested it to Dowell and Sibley, they declared it to be impossible.<sup>45</sup> Allegedly, after hours of painstaking practice, Sibley and Dowell were able to perform the ballet step exactly as Ashton envisioned it.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from these choreographic flourishes for Oberon, Ashton also uses other choreographic methods to bring Oberon to the foreground. The first is the middle section of the *pas de deux*, where the couple alternate ballet solos. As will be discussed in the further analysis, Oberon's solo consists of many spectacular, masculine-coded steps. These steps especially allow Oberon (and therefore the dancer performing as him) to show off. Anthony Dowell's flexibility – which matched that of the ballerinas he worked with – allowed Ashton to experiment with symmetry. As shown at the end of the B-section where the couple perform their respective choreographies together, Oberon and Titania perform a good chunk of the choreography in perfect unison. This focus on symmetry becomes even more emphasised in the third and final section of the *pas de deux*, where Oberon and Titania perform highly synchronised choreography, not once letting go of each other. Arguably the most well-known of these moments is an *arabesque penchée* performed by both dancers, repeated on each side (Fig. 29), which has become a signature image for the ballet as a whole.



**Fig. 29:** double supported *arabesque penchée* (McRae and Takada, 2017 – photo by Andrej Uspenski)

Dividing the choreography for Oberon and Titania in this manner does have some repercussions for the perception of Oberon's masculinity. On the one hand these repercussions are positive: Ashton's choreography allows the male dancer to show off his ability. During this *pas de deux*, Oberon shows his masculinity by performing ballet steps that signifying strength, such as *enterlacés* and *saut de chats*, but he also shows his agility as a dancer through smaller, fast paced footwork. Moreover, by centring on Oberon, the choreography allows for the potentiality of the return of the bravura male dancer. This ultimately came to pass, as the 1960s through to the 1980s experienced a boom in male ballet

<sup>45</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 483.

<sup>46</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 483.



mirroring each other, while (almost) never letting go of each other's hands. The partnering here demands complete trust from either partner, showing true acceptance and forgiveness.

Choreomusically, the two A-sections tell a story about mutual trust and reconciliation. At the beginning of the piece, the couple stands on opposite sides of the room before meeting in the middle. Both A-sections are marked by partnering where the main couple hardly separate from each other. In the first A-section, the partnering is more tentative, but there are already sections where the couple gain more trust in each other. This is evident by ballet steps that require highly skilled partnering. These include the supported *pas de bourrée* where Oberon stands in *arabesque*, the twisted *penchée* into *arabesque* that Ashton dreamed up one night, and ballet steps that Oberon partners one-handed. Their choreographic reconciliation in the A-sections is also emphasised musically. The dominating instrument in Mendelssohn's Nocturne is the French horn, which is played during these sections of intense partnering where Oberon and Titania rarely let go of each other. The main melody of the Nocturne starts on an upbeat and prominently features an ascending perfect fourth moving from the dominant to the tonic. Because the melody starts on an upbeat, the tonic is played on the first beat of the measure. This emphasis on the tonic has a grounding effect. Even though it occurs at the very start of the piece, this ascending perfect fourth gives a sense of closure; the conflict between Oberon and Titania is over, and the couple have reconciled.

After their solos in the contrasting B-section, Oberon and Titania run towards each other, and grab each other's hands, marking the beginning of the third and final A'-section of the *pas de deux*. In ballet, it is common for both partners to face the audience, the danseur standing behind the ballerina. However, in the last section of the reconciliation *pas de deux*, Oberon and Titania mostly face each other, as is more common in other forms of partnering, such as ballroom dancing. The pair also keeps clinging on to each other, only letting go when strictly necessary. For much of the partnering in this section the couple mirrors each other, culminating in the double supported *penchée*. The choreomusical setting of both A-sections conveys that, both musically and choreographically, Oberon and Titania's relationship has developed. The partnering in the first A-section already contains many demanding elements, but in the A'-section Oberon and Titania's movements are even more challenging and experimental. This development from the A-section to the A'-section is also present musically. Both sections have a main melody played by the French Horn, showing the two fairies coming together as a couple. For the A'-section, the melody played by the French Horn has its tone colour enhanced by adding strings and woodwinds; the instruments associated with Oberon and Titania.

The B-section of the *pas de deux* offers a striking contrast both musically and choreographically from the A-sections. Musically, there is not only a contrast with the two outer sections of the *pas de deux*, which are dominated by the French horn, but this section itself consists of two contrasting themes. The first theme is played in the strings, and accompanies a ballet solo for Oberon each time this melody occurs. This solo shows off Oberon's strength and agility and consists of a combination of petit allegro jumps, such as *temps levé*, and leaps such as *jeté enterlacé* and *saut de chat*. Then a second theme occurs, played in woodwinds. Now it is Titania's turn dancing her solo, which consists of more feminine-coded ballet steps such as *arabesques*, steps, *pas de bourrée*, and her signature strut. During this section, Oberon and Titania dance several solos each, alternating between the first theme (Oberon/strings) and the second theme (Titania/woodwinds). The alternating melody, mirrored by the respective choreographies of Oberon and Titania almost plays out like a conversation. What is significant is that over the course of the B-section, both the music and choreography develop and change slightly. This means that this *pas de deux*, unlike the quarrel where both music and choreography went in circles, conveys a developing conversation between the pair. This conversation ends in a mutual understanding between the two, as Oberon and Titania start performing their respective solos in perfect unison, first Oberon mighty jumps set to the strings, which is then contrasted by Titania's dainty strut underscored by the woodwinds.

The choreomusical relations present in both the quarrel and the reconciliation reveal much about gender presentation, especially Oberon's masculinity. Much like the quarrel, the choreography for the reconciliation *pas de deux* contains traditionally gendered elements. Roughly speaking, jumps signify Oberon's strength, while pointe work signifies Titania's lightness, which can especially be seen in the B-section. What is striking, is that Ashton uses this distinct gendered choreography to convey that these two characters are fairies. One of the distinctive features of fairies is that they can fly. Because humans unfortunately do not have this ability, choreographic conventions have been developed to convey flight through dance. Like much of classical ballet, these conventions are gendered. For male characters flight is choreographically simulated through jumps. As Oberon demonstrates in *The Dream*, these jumps can be both large leaps, garnering momentum and height, but also *petit allegro*-esque jumps showing off his speed and agility. There are also individual jumps that are associated with flight. One of these is the *brisé volé* which is most famously used to depict the male bluebird in *The Sleeping Beauty*. Oberon also performs a jump reminiscent of the *brisé volé*, emphasising the link between choreography and flight even further. Titania performs most of

her section on pointe, which has its own connotations with fairies. When pointe work was first developed, it was mostly used to depict the supernatural, such as the ghostly nuns in *Robert le Diable*, the sylphs in *La Sylphide* and the wilis from *Giselle*.<sup>48</sup> The ballerina standing on the tips of her toes, in combination with the romantic tutus of the time (which Titania also wears in *The Dream*), gives the illusion that she is floating.

Despite the fact that these solos start out as being gendered, Ashton once again starts blurring the lines for these gendered expressions. The first clear deviation comes at the end of the B-section. As stated before, after performing their respective (and mostly gendered) solos, Oberon and Titania start performing the choreography simultaneously. They start with Oberon's masculine large leaps set to strings, before seamlessly transitioning into the woodwinds accompanying Titania's dainty steps and quick *arabesques*. The fact that Oberon and Titania so easily adapt to each other's choreography and music, shows that choreomusically the gender boundaries are not as strict as they first seem. Moreover, even before Oberon and Titania dance together in the B-section, there are already hints regarding the blurring of the gender norms.

Also striking is that Ashton does not strictly adhere to the rules and conventions of *musique dansante*. This is especially evident in Oberon and Titania's solos in the reconciliation *pas de deux*. Like the music for the quarrel, this results in Oberon's music being more fluid than is the standard for male variations. Even though his choreography is laden with leaps, Oberon's solo is played legato and does not contain any rests. However, there are also musical elements present in the Nocturne that do link to the choreography, albeit more subtle. For instance, the musical phrase starting Oberon's solo contains a dotted note, which is a figure often associated with jumps. Also, while the piece is played legato, the melody is disjunct and follows an ascending motion, which alludes to jumps. At a first glance, the choreomusical setting of Titania's solo falls more in line with the rules and conventions of *musique dansante*. One such example is the up-down pattern in both the music and the choreography where Titania raises her leg on the upper note of an alternating minor third, and lowers it again on the bottom note (Fig. 31). However, like Oberon, there are purposeful deviations from the conventions of *musique dansante* present in Titania's choreography. Right before the section with the alternating minor third, a descending melody is played. Here, Titania performs an *arabesque*, thus raising her leg to the sound of a descending minor third.

---

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, 6-14.





links with queerness and effeminacy. However, Ashton embraces this fact by creating a choreomusical language that blurs the lines of gender expression by combining lighter and feminine-coded music with hypermasculine ballet steps. Oberon's choreomusical material also has a narrative function. At the beginning of the ballet, there is a discrepancy between Oberon's idealised masculinity (marked by his choreographic actions) and how this masculinity is perceived. This queerness intrinsically embedded in Oberon's choreomusical material explains why his hypermasculine expressions during the quarrel do not have the desired effect, and why he resorts to a petty trick to get his way. However, at the end of the ballet, Oberon reconciles with his wife, leaning more into fluidity. He still retains much of his masculine choreographic language, but now it is softened. In the reconciliation *pas de deux*, Oberon's floor patterns and *épaulement* are not straight and rigid, but bent and fluid, showing this change. Oberon's more fluid masculinity is also present in his relationship with Titania. During their reconciliation, Titania does not only repeat Oberon's masculine jumps, but Oberon returns the gesture, performing her dainty steps with her. This is an improvement from the quarrel, where Oberon could only stand in disbelief as his wife strutted away.

### **Titania, The Subdued Wife?**

To end my choreomusical analysis of Oberon and Titania's relationship, I will discuss a different reading of this *pas de deux*, as it is a complete heel-turn from my own conclusions. In her biography of Ashton, Julie Kavanagh also briefly analyses the reconciliation *pas de deux*. Her reading is much more sceptical, her main point being that the conflict between Oberon and Titania is not resolved at all. According to Kavanagh's interpretation, Titania has lost her agency and sense of self. Instead, she completely succumbs to her husband, who dominates her and has triumphed in his quest to put her in her place.<sup>50</sup> This is, according to Kavanagh, especially prominent in the ending of the reconciliation *pas de deux*. Titania swoons into Oberon's arms, who then carries her like a baby, and cradles her to sleep.<sup>51</sup> The final pose of the *pas de deux* is Titania draping herself over Oberon's knee, while Oberon triumphantly raises his right arm above his head (Fig. 32).



**Fig. 32:** Titania draping herself over Oberon's knee, while Oberon triumphantly raises his right arm above his head (McRae and Takada - screenshot DVD)

<sup>50</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 483.

<sup>51</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 483.

Despite the fact that I disagree with Kavanagh's reading of this *pas de deux*, she does raise some good questions and points of contention I want to address here. First of all, the placement of the *pas de deux* itself. The *pas de deux* occurs after Oberon has released Titania from her spell. Embarrassed, she gives up the child without a fight. This can be seen as Titania submitting herself to her husband, or Oberon having 'won' by dominating her. While I agree that this is a reading that could arguably be applied to Shakespeare's original text, it does not apply to *The Dream*. On the contrary, the reconciliation *pas de deux*, which Kavanagh herself cites as a worthwhile addition to Shakespeare's text,<sup>52</sup> dissuades from a stereotypical reading, especially when looking at the ballet choreomusically. The encounter with Bottom certainly changed something in Titania. This is partly embarrassment, but also a sexual awakening. However, the situation with Bottom and the four lovers has also changed Oberon's perspective. When he is given the child, he eagerly takes him from Titania, before turning around, extending his arm towards her, nearly caressing her face, and inviting her by his side. The couple then wake the four Athenian lovers, which is underscored by Mendelssohn's famous Wedding March. I argue that the placement of this March does not only refer to the four lovers, but is also a comment on Oberon and Titania's rekindling relationship. While the fate of the child is still unknown at the end of *The Dream*, there are hints that Oberon and Titania might raise him together. During the Wedding March the four lovers still try to make sense of the goings-on from the night before, while Oberon and Titania walk away together with the child in tow. As the reconciliation *pas de deux* happens right after this scene, this gesture of the three of them walking away can be interpreted as Oberon and Titania finally setting aside their differences.

Another argument Kavanagh makes is that Ashton heavily genders the steps that Oberon and Titania perform, showing an inequality between them. As argued before, this observation is true to some extent. Ashton presents Oberon in a mostly masculine light, with impressive leaps and other shows of strength. Titania on the other hand expresses herself through inherently feminine ballet steps. However, while Ashton has created two distinct choreographic languages for each character, the gender boundaries are also blurred. Where I disagree with Kavanagh is that these gendered steps inherently mean that Titania is below, or somehow less than Oberon. In fact, Kavanagh's reading seems to perpetuate gender stereotypes by implying that difference is a negative. Instead, I see the section of the *pas de deux* where Oberon and Titania dance their solos as them embracing their differences. After

---

<sup>52</sup> Kavanagh, *Secret Muses*, 481.

they have danced their respective solos, the pair repeat the choreography again, this time dancing in perfect unison. Not only does Titania perform Oberon's impressive leaps, he performs her dainty and therefore feminine steps as well. I interpret this section as them finally coming to a mutual understanding. This is also exemplified by the final section of the *pas de deux*, where Oberon and Titania keep holding on to each other, only letting go when strictly necessary. Instead of fighting each other, they are finding their literal support in each other.

The final problem Kavanagh has with this *pas de deux* is its ending. At the end, Titania swoons into Oberon's arms, and he cradles her to sleep like a baby. Admittedly, this section is more difficult to defend. Ashton's choreography in combination with Mendelssohn's Nocturne indeed suggests that Titania has become fully submissive to Oberon. However, there are some choreomusical moments in the *pas de deux* especially that may suggest an alternative reading. The partnered moments from the first A-section are mostly instigated by Oberon, such as the pulled *bourrées* and the twisted *penchée* into *arabesque*, while the swooning movements from the ending are initiated by Titania. This is after the section where Oberon and Titania dance together, while facing each other and never letting go of their grip on one another. From then on, Titania's movements are much more daring. She initiates many of the lifts in this section, including a thrown twist lift, and a lift where she jumps into Oberon's arms. These increasingly daring lifts are also subtly mirrored in the music as the music crescendos and roughly follows an ascending motion. One of the most spectacular lifts is an angel lift. Oberon presses up Titania to the sound of a perfect fourth; a clear example of *musique dansante*. Strikingly, while the French horn dominates throughout the A'-section, it is noticeably absent during these more daring lifts. The angel lift especially is musically underscored by the strings, the instrument associated with Oberon. At this stage in the *pas de deux*, and therefore their relationship, Titania trusts Oberon so fully that she is willing to quite literally throw herself at him. Therefore, I argue that Titania swooning into Oberon's arms is very much intentional on Ashton's part. Ultimately, Titania is *allowing* herself to swoon into Oberon's arms, allowing herself to be safely cradled to sleep; an option that was not possible at the beginning of the ballet.

## Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, the choreomusical masculinity of Ashton's Oberon is inherently complex. One of the main reasons for this is that in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon is the king of the fairies. However, Shakespeare's fairies were much

different creatures than the fairies seen in many Romantic and Imperial ballets of the nineteenth century, which is the tradition that Ashton would be familiar with. Originating as dark and mischievous creatures not to be crossed, in the Victorian era fairies transformed into cute, hyperfeminine beings. This hyperfemininity also turns male fairies such as Oberon into controversial figures. Mainly, fairies are associated with a lack of masculinity, which is in turn linked to queerness. This means that there is ultimately a clash between the actions of the Shakespearian characters, especially Oberon's cruel prank on Titania, and the hyperfeminine and queer image of the fairy ingrained in ballet.

Ashton addresses this discrepancy by making these two images of the fairy clash choreomusically as well. In the beginning of the ballet, Oberon's choreographically presents himself as hypermasculine. He performs many ballet steps that are associated with this masculinity; most prominently large leaps signifying strength. His actions in the beginning of the ballet also border on toxic masculinity. However, the gentler and more feminine nature of fairies is already present in Oberon's music, as it lacks the musically masculine topics of *musique dansante*, such as staccato, rests and melodic leaps. One result of this is that Oberon's toxic stance does not seem to have any effect on Titania. Striking is that Oberon performs his more masculine-coded steps throughout the ballet, but the clash dissipates over time. While much was cut from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ashton enhanced the play in one significant way. He added a reconciliation for Oberon and Titania in the form of a *pas de deux*. In this *pas de deux*, gender boundaries are truly blurred. Where there are still moments of clearly defined gender expressions, such as their respective solos or the lifts, Ashton blurs the line in one significant way. Now Oberon and Titania dance much of their choreography together and in unison. In short, Oberon still retains much of his choreographic masculinity, but now he also opens himself up for other perspectives.

## Conclusion

With this Master's thesis in Musicology, my main aim was to uncover how masculinity is expressed in the ballets of Sir Frederick Ashton (1904-1988). As I have examined in chapter 1 of this thesis, the notion of masculinity is already a complex and inherently unstable one, which becomes even more complicated when discussing male ballet dancers. Even though ballet is not seen as masculine, within the art form itself there are still binary (and therefore gendered) structures present. For ballet, this binary can mostly be found in the choreography. While ballerinas and danseurs share a large chunk of the choreographic vocabulary, there are some ballet steps that are associated with one particular gender especially. Because of these gendered ballet steps, this binary can also be found in ballet music. *Musique dansante* is a nineteenth-century composing technique that links musical structures to choreographic ones. Because some ballet steps are gendered, the musical structures underscoring them therefore become gendered too. However, then there are the works of Frederick Ashton. Unlike many ballets from the nineteenth century that relied on a single archetype for male protagonists, Ashton's characters express a wide range of masculinity. My hypothesis for this project was that the wide range of masculinities in Ashton's ballets was due to the choreomusical structures present in his work. In order to fully test this hypothesis, I developed a choreomusical methodology in chapter 1 that I applied to two case studies: *La Fille mal gardée* (1960) and *The Dream* (1964). By doing so, my aim was to answer the following research question: **how do choreomusical structures interact with the perceived masculinities present in Sir Frederick Ashton's ballets?**

The first case study, *La Fille mal gardée*, gives a good first impression about how Ashton shapes the masculinity of his characters through the choreomusical relations present. As productions of the basic *La Fille mal gardée* plot go as far back as the late eighteenth century, Colas, the main character of the ballet stems from a long tradition of male ballet protagonists. While Ashton has taken many elements from his version of the ballet from earlier productions, the way Ashton choreomusically shapes the character of Colas is quite modern. In comparison to similar characters from earlier ballets, Colas's choreomusical masculinity is softer and more tongue-in-cheek. One possible reason for this is that while Ashton overall conforms to *musique dansante*, these choreomusical relations are more subtle. As a result, Colas masculine and sometimes aggressive choreography is softened by the

music. While these choreomusical relations are subtle, overall they still match, resulting in a complex and inherently masculine character.

As shown in the chapter about Ashton's *The Dream*, notions of masculinity can become even more complex. This is mainly due to the nature of the ballet's male character, Oberon, who is the king of the fairies. The fact that Oberon is a fairy has many implications for his character and the perception of his masculinity. The main problem is a clash between two distinct ideas of the fairy. For Oberon, Ashton has taken this clash and made it a part of the plot. At the beginning of the ballet, Oberon represents the dark, vengeful, children-stealing version of the fairy. This is reflected choreographically by an aggressive stance and large leaps which signify his strength. However, when he is quarrelling with his wife Titania, the music does not follow *musique dansante*. At the end of the ballet, when Oberon and Titania have reconciled, the gap between music and choreography has become smaller, but there are still purposeful deviations of *musique dansante* present. This suggests that some choreomusical contradiction is inherent in the nature of fairies.

In conclusion, One of the main factors that makes Ashton's ballets so intriguing is how he plays with choreomusical relations in his work. Ashton's musicality is an oft-cited virtue of his work, with his choreographies often being described as 'breath-driven' and a 'fusion of femininity, elegance and rustic simplicity'.<sup>53</sup> However, as these two case studies show, he also frequently goes against expectations. One of these expectations are the rules and conventions of *musique dansante*. By forging much subtler links between music and choreography, or foregoing them altogether, Ashton adds a layer of narrative complexity to his works. Essentially, by changing the dynamic between music and choreography in these case studies, Ashton also changes the perception of their masculinity. Finally, Ashton's purposeful deviations from *musique dansante* also show how inherent its conventions are in the ballet repertoire, reiterating Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir's argument that *musique dansante* was extremely influential and should not be ignored when discussing ballet music.<sup>54</sup>

So where should this research be taken next? Should I revisit this project in the future, I see a couple of areas where this thesis could possibly be expanded. The first is that I exclusively focused on narrative ballets in this thesis. While narrative ballets form a large chunk of the classical ballet repertoire, it does not represent the art form as a whole. Especially in the

---

<sup>53</sup> Stephanie Jordan, 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies,' in *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, eds. Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 150; Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 440-441.

<sup>54</sup> Rebecca Schwartz-Bishir, 'Musical Expression in the Bournonville-Løvenskjold La Sylphide Variation,' in *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales, and Karen Eliot, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 344.

twentieth century, abstract ballets became increasingly popular. During his long career, Frederick Ashton choreographed many plotless ballets which encompass a range of styles such as *Les Rendezvous* (1936), *Symphonic Variations* (1946), *Monotones* (1965), and *Rhapsody* (1980). Therefore, by focusing on Ashton's narrative works only, I am aware that I have cast aside a vast portion of Ashton's repertoire. While this was a conscious decision made to match the scope of this project, in the future I am interested in expanding the methodology to include abstract works as well.

A second area where my research could be expanded is by integrating the influence of the choreographers and dancers in my research. For this thesis I purely focused on the masculinity of Frederick Ashton's male ballet protagonists. However, as I already hinted at in the first chapter of this thesis, ballet characters are not perceived in a vacuum, with the choreomusical and narrative contest as the only important elements to be analysed. There are many layered masculinities found within Ashton's works. One such masculinity is that of Ashton himself, and especially the interaction between his queerness and choreographies. Another masculinity that could benefit from further research is that of the dancer analysed in the case studies, which for this thesis was Royal Ballet principal dancer Steven McRae. As I argued in chapter one, each dancer adds his own personal flourishes to the choreography, essentially making each performance of a given ballet a new version of said ballet. Next to a dancer's physical strengths and weaknesses, these personal flourishes can emerge from a given dancer's gender expression. As a male ballet dancer, Steven McRae (and many others) has been directly subjected to these harmful attitudes and stereotypes that have been outlined by authors such as Burt, Gard and Risner. In the future, it could be insightful to research how these attitudes and stereotypes impact the male dancers themselves and how this interacts with their performances.

Apart from my own research on this particular topic, I hope that with this thesis I also made a contribution to the field as a whole. As I expressed in the introduction, my hope and aim is to contribute to the field of choreomusicology by showing that an interdisciplinary, choreomusical approach is essential in order to fully unlock the potential of ballet research. As is also seen in other disciplines such as film, music and a visual (in this case choreography) create a syncretic relationship that is absent when the two disciplines are separated. Therefore, I argue that without choreomusical analysis, these unique and multifaceted aspects of ballet will remain uncovered. Moreover, with this thesis I hoped to have shown how choreomusical analysis can be used to unveil hidden socio-political aspects in ballet. For this thesis I have decided to focus on masculinity, but there are other topics as



well, such as queerness, which I already hinted at in the chapter about *The Dream*. One could potentially use choreomusical research to also unveil a historical context in which a work was created. These could include the influence of the sexual revolution on choreomusical relations,<sup>55</sup> or how the Soviet regime shaped Russian ballets from that time period, such as *The Flames of Paris* (1932), *Laurencia* (1939), and *Spartacus* (1968).<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, choreomusical relations lie at the heart of what makes ballet compelling as an art form, and, as I aimed to have shown in this thesis, it can tell something about our society too.

---

<sup>55</sup> Monna Dithmer, ed, *Of Another World : Dancing Between Dream and Reality*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 242.

<sup>56</sup> Zoë Anderson, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 175-183.

## Bibliography

### Literature

- Anderson, Zoë. *The Ballet Lover's Companion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.
- Audissino, Emilio. *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach*. Palgrave Studies in Audio-Visual Culture. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge, 2008.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203938133>.
- Brown, Adelia. 'Hook, Ursula, and Elsa: Disney and Queer-coding from the 1950s to the 2010s.' *The Macksey Journal* 2, no.1 (2021).
- Brown, Maurice J.E., and Kenneth L. Hamilton. 'Nocturne (i).' *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 15 Jul. 2024. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/om-o-9781561592630-e-0000020012>.
- Burt, Ramsay. *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*. Seconded. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.
- Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Edited by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.
- Craine, Debra, and Judith Mackrell. *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/view/10.1093/acref/9780199563449.001.0001/acref-9780199563449>.
- Cook, Nicholas. *Analysing Musical Multimedia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Dithmer, Monna, ed. *Of Another World : Dancing Between Dream and Reality*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002.
- Dominic, Zoë, and John Selwyn Gilbert. *Frederick Ashton : A Choreographer and His Ballets*. London: Harrap, 1971.
- Drouin, Jennifer, ed. *Shakespeare/Sex: Contemporary Readings in Gender and Sexuality*. London, UK: The Arden Shakespeare, 2020.  
[https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350108585?locatt=label:secondary\\_bloomsburyCollections](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350108585?locatt=label:secondary_bloomsburyCollections).
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. 'Cesare Pugni, Marius Petipa and 19th-Century Ballet Music.' *The Musical Times* 147, no. 1895 (2006): 39–48.

- Edegecombe, Rodney Stenning. "The Score of 'Giselle.'" *The Musical Times* 156, no. 1930 (2015): 27–46.
- Fisher, Jennifer. 'Maverick Men in Ballet: Rethinking the "Making it Macho" Strategy.' In *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders*. Edited by Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Fiske, Roger. *Ballet Music*. London: Harrap, 1958.
- Franchi, Cristina, and Royal Opera House (London, England). *Frederick Ashton: Founder Choreographer of the Royal Ballet*. Royal Opera House Heritage Series. London: Oberon, 2004.
- Gard, Michael. *Men Who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics and the Art of Masculinity*. Complicated Conversation, New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- Halsema, Annemie, Katja Kwastek, and Roel van den Oever, eds. *Bodies That Still Matter: Resonances of the Work of Judith Butler*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021.
- Homans, Jennifer. *Apollos Angels: A History of Ballet*. London: Granta, 2011.
- Garafola, Lynn. *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*. Studies in Dance History. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan, 1997.
- Grant, Gail. *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*. New York: Dover Publications, 1982.
- Jordan, Stephanie. 'Choreomusicology and Dance Studies.' In *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*. Edited by Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett, 141-156. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020.
- Kant, Marion, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Kavanagh, Julie. *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton*. London: Faber & Faber, 1996.
- Leaman, Kara Yoo. 'George Balanchine's Art of Choreographic Musicality in Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux.' *Music Theory Spectrum* 44, no. 2 (2022): 340–69.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtac007>.
- Leaman, Kara Yoo. 'Musical Techniques in Balanchine's Jazzy Bach Ballet.' *Journal of Music Theory* 65, no. 1 (2021): 139–69. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00222909-9124762>.
- Letellier, Robert Ignatius. *The Ballets of Ludwig Minkus*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

- McMains, Juliet, and Ben Thomas. 'Translating from Pitch to Plié: Music Theory for Dance Scholars and Close Movement Analysis for Music Scholars.' *Dance Chronicle* 36, no. 2 (2013): 196–217.
- Menon, Madhavi. *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2011. <http://0-dx.doi.org.oasis.unisa.ac.za/10.1215/9780822393337>.
- Murray, Melonie B. 'Repetitions and Variations: The Embodied Cultural Memory of Ballet.' *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9, no. 1 (2021): 15–26. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.8-1-1>.
- Risner, Doug. *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance: An Empirical Study of Male Identities in Western Theatrical Dance Training*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009.
- Sanden, Paul. "Hearing Glenn Gould's Body: Corporeal Liveness in Recorded Music." In *Liveness in Modern Music : Musicians, Technology, and the Perception of Performance*, edited by Paul Sanden, 44-64. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Schwartz-Bishir, Rebecca. 'Musical Expression in the Bournonville-Løvenskjold La Sylphide Variation.' In *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*. Edited by Melanie Bales, and Karen Eliot, 341-358. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199939985.003.0017.
- Siegmund, Gerald. (2010). 'Turning into Subjects: The Male Dancer in Romantic Ballet'. In *Performing Masculinity*. Edited by Rainer Emig and Antony Rowland. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010. [https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1057/9780230276086\\_3](https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1057/9780230276086_3)
- Smith, Marian. *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Traub, Valerie, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment : Gender, Sexuality, and Race*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199663408.001.0001>.
- Vytنيorgu, Richard. 'Twinks, Fairies, and Queens: A Historical Inquiry into Effeminate Gay Bottom Identity.' *Journal of Homosexuality* 71, no. 7 (2024): 1605–25. doi:10.1080/00918369.2023.2186760.
- Wiley, Roland John. *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker*. Oxford Monographs on Music. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

## Audio-Visual Materials

MacGibbon, Ross. Director. *La Fille mal gardée*. Royal Opera House, 2015. 1 hr., 50 min.

MacGibbon, Ross. Director. *The Dream*. Royal Opera House, 2017. 59 min.

## Musical Scores

Donizetti, Gaetano. *L'elisir d'amore*. 1832. International Music Score Library Project.

Arranged by Maria Schreurs. Accessed 14 May, 2024.

[https://imslp.org/wiki/L'elisir\\_d'amore\\_\(Donizetti%2C\\_Gaetano\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/L'elisir_d'amore_(Donizetti%2C_Gaetano))

Hérold, Ferdinand. *La Fille mal gardée*. 1828. International Music Score Library Project.

Arranged by Maria Schreurs. Accessed 14 May, 2024.

[https://imslp.org/wiki/La\\_fille\\_mal\\_gard%C3%A9e\\_\(H%C3%A9rold%2C\\_Ferdinand\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/La_fille_mal_gard%C3%A9e_(H%C3%A9rold%2C_Ferdinand))

Mendelssohn, Felix. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 1842-1843. International Music Score Library Project. Arranged by Maria Schreurs. Accessed 14 May, 2024.

[https://imslp.org/wiki/A\\_Midsummer\\_Night's\\_Dream%2C\\_incidental\\_music%2C\\_Op.61\\_\(Mendelssohn%2C\\_Felix\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/A_Midsummer_Night's_Dream%2C_incidental_music%2C_Op.61_(Mendelssohn%2C_Felix))

## Website Content

'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' New York City Ballet. Accessed 15 July, 2024.

<https://www.nycballet.com/discover/ballet-repitory/a-midsummer-nights-dream/>.

'Ballet Dictionary'. American Ballet Theatre. Accessed 14 May, 2024,

<https://www.abt.org/explore/learn/ballet-dictionary/>.

'Ballet | Step-by-step | Barrel Turns'. *BBC Arts*. Accessed 26 May, 2024,

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02qy75s>.

Coward, Sacha. 'Queer as Folklore | Faeries.' Museum of London, accessed 20 May, 2024.

<https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/lgbtq-history-month/whats-folklore-lgbtq-history-month/whats-folklore-faeries>.

'Frederick Ashton.' Royal Ballet and Opera. Accessed 15 July, 2024.

<https://www.rbo.org.uk/people/frederick-ashton>.

Harss, Marina. 'The Royal Ballet – The Dream, Song of the Earth – New York.' *Dance Tabs*.

25 June, 2015. <https://dancetabs.com/2015/06/the-royal-ballet-the-dream-song-of-the-earth-new-york/>.

Macaulay, Alistair. 'Dueling Troupes (and Choreographers).' *The New York Times*. 1 July,

2010. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/02/arts/dance/02dancers>.

- ‘Masculinities.’ Council of Europe. Accessed 15 July, 2024.  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/masculinities>.
- Parry, Jann. ‘Royal Ballet – 3 casts in The Dream, Symphonic Variations, Marguerite and Armand – London.’ *Dance Tabs*, 11 June, 2017. <https://dancetabs.com/2017/06/royal-ballet-3-casts-in-the-dream-symphonic-variations-marguerite-and-armand-london/>.
- ‘Performance Database’. Royal Opera House Collections. Accessed 14 May, 2024.  
<https://www.rohcollections.org.uk/performances.aspx>.
- Richard M. Sherman – Topic. ‘The Sherman Brothers Reminisce About Their Work On Mary Poppins.’ 26 October, 2018. YouTube Video. 16:09.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wUf4U4z-as>.
- Royal Ballet and Opera. ‘Men on pointe? First Soloist Bennet Gartside shares his tips (The Royal Ballet).’ 18 June, 2017. YouTube Video. 2:53.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cpAfkIVQmI>.
- Royal Ballet and Opera. ‘What makes choreographer Frederick Ashton a genius (The Royal Ballet).’ 20 June, 2017. YouTube Video. 4:15.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkpICgXfQN0>.
- Royal Ballet and Opera. ‘Why The Royal Ballet love performing Enigma Variations.’ 8 November, 2019. YouTube Video. 4:35. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNjg-zLPzZY>.
- Tait, Veronika. ‘What is Toxic Masculinity? Lessons from Shepherd Bliss and Other Gender Researchers.’ *Psych Daily with Dr Tait*. 14 February, 2019.  
<https://veronikatait.com/posts/2019-02-14-toxic-masculinity.html>.
- Various Articles. TV Tropes. Accessed 15 July, 2024. <https://tvtropes.org/>.

## Appendix 1: Glossary of Ballet Terms

Unless otherwise specified, definitions are my own or taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* and American Ballet Theatre's *Ballet Dictionary*.<sup>1</sup>

*Arabesque*: One of the basic positions of ballet. The dancer stands on one leg (either bent or straight), with the other extended behind with a straight knee and pointed foot. The arms are held in various positions that harmoniously extend the line of the *arabesque*.

*Arabesque penchée*: An *arabesque* where the dancer inclines their torso forward and the working leg is lifted behind the body to full height.

*Attitude*: Position in which the dancer stands on one leg with the other lifted in front or behind with the knee bent.

*Ballon*: A term commonly used to describe a dancer's proficiency in jumping. In strict classical usage, however, it designates a dancer's ability seemingly to hang suspended in the air during a jump.

Barrel turn: Also known as *Tour de Reins*. A jump where the dancer turns in the air, with extended forward leg leading the movement and the other leg pulls into *attitude*.<sup>2</sup>

*Brisé*: A travelling leap in which the legs are beaten rapidly in the air.

*Brisé vole*: Flying *brisé*. In this *brisé* the dancer finishes on one foot after the beat, the other leg crossed either front or back.

*Cabriole*: A leaping step, usually performed by male dancers, in which stretched legs are beaten together in the air.

---

<sup>1</sup> Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell, *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/view/10.1093/acref/9780199563449.001.0001/acref-9780199563449>; 'Ballet Dictionary', American Ballet Theatre, accessed 14 May, 2024, <https://www.abt.org/explore/learn/ballet-dictionary/>.

<sup>2</sup> 'Ballet | Step-by-step | Barrel Turns', BBC Arts, accessed 26 May, 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02qy75s>.

*Chaînés*: Chains, links. A series of rapid turns on the pointes or demi-pointes done in a straight line or in a circle.

*Chassé*: Chased. A step in which one foot literally chases the other foot out of its position.

*Demi plié*: A bending of the knee or knees.

*Développé*: A movement in which the working leg is drawn up to the knee of the supporting leg and slowly extended to an open position *en l'air* and held there with perfect control.

*Entrechat*: A jump in which the dancer's legs cross rapidly in front and behind each other while still in the air.

*Entrelacé*: Also known as *jeté en tournant*. A *jeté* where the dancer changes direction while in the air.

*Épaulement*: A term used to indicate a movement of the torso from the waist upward, bringing one shoulder forward and the other back with the head turned or inclined over the forward shoulder.

*Fouetté*: A turn in which the dancer throws the working leg out to the side and whips the foot in as she turns.

*Grand battement*: Large *battement*. An exercise in which the working leg is raised from the hip into the air and brought down again, the accent being on the downward movement, both knees straight.

*Grand jeté*: A *jeté* where the dancer *battements* their leg while in the air.

*Jeté*: A jump where the dancer takes off from one foot and lands on the other.

*Manège*: Circular. A term applied to steps or *enchaînements* executed in a circle.



*Pas de bourrée*: A progression on the pointes or demi-pointes by a series of small, even steps with the feet close together.

*Pas de chat*: Cat's step. The step owes its name to the likeness of the movement to a cat's leap.

*Petit allegro*: A series of steps or small jumps performed in quick succession. Contrast *grand allegro*, which is more drawn-out.

*Piqué*: Pricked, pricking. Executed by stepping directly on the pointe or demi-pointe of the working foot in any desired direction or position with the other foot raised in the air.

*Pirouette*: A complete turn of the body on one foot, on pointe or demi-pointe.

Positions of the feet: There are five basic positions of the feet in classical ballet, and every step or movement is begun and ended in one or another of these positions. In the first position the feet form one line, heels touching one another. In second position, the feet are on the same line but with a distance of about one foot between the heels. In the third position one foot is in front of the other, heels touching the middle of the other foot. In the fourth position the placement of the feet is similar to that in the third position, the feet being parallel and separated by the length of one foot. In the fifth position, Cecchetti method, the feet are crossed so that the first joint of the big toe shows beyond either heel. In the French and Russian Schools the feet are completely crossed so that the heel of the front foot touches the toe of the back foot and vice versa.

*Retiré*: Withdrawn. A position in which the thigh is raised to the second position *en l'air* with the knee bent so that the pointed toe rests in front of, behind or to the side of the supporting knee.

*Saut de chat*: A *jeté* where the dancers throw their legs in *developpé* while in the air. In movement quite similar to a *grand jeté*.

*Sauté*: A jump where the dancer takes off and lands on both feet.

**Supporting leg:** The leg bearing weight and supporting the body.

*Temps levé:* A jump where the dancer takes off and lands on the same foot.

*Tour en l'air:* Turn in the air. It is a turn in the air in which the dancer rises straight into the air from a *demi-plié*, makes a complete turn and lands in the fifth position with the feet reversed. The turn may be single, double or triple according to the ability of the dancer.

**Working leg:** The leg that is executing a given movement or position.



La Fille mal gardée

Colas's variation

Music: F. Hérold  
Choreography: F. Ashton

The image displays a handwritten musical score for the 'Colas's variation' from the ballet 'La Fille mal gardée'. The score is written on ten systems of staves, each consisting of a musical staff and a corresponding line of dance notation. The notation includes various steps, jumps, and poses, with labels such as 'down', 'stretch', 'step', 'jump', 'pose', 'triple pirouette', 'crouche', 'jeté', 'sauté', 'pas de bourrée', 'pas de chat', 'pas de basque', 'pas de fouetté', 'pas de deux', 'pas de trois', 'pas de quatre', 'pas de cinq', 'pas de six', 'pas de sept', 'pas de huit', 'pas de neuf', 'pas de dix', 'pas de onze', 'pas de douze', 'pas de treize', 'pas de quatorze', 'pas de quinze', 'pas de seize', 'pas de dix-sept', 'pas de dix-huit', 'pas de dix-neuf', 'pas de vingt', 'pas de vingt-et-un', 'pas de vingt-deux', 'pas de vingt-trois', 'pas de vingt-quatre', 'pas de vingt-cinq', 'pas de vingt-six', 'pas de vingt-sept', 'pas de vingt-huit', 'pas de vingt-neuf', 'pas de trente', 'pas de trente-et-un', 'pas de trente-deux', 'pas de trente-trois', 'pas de trente-quatre', 'pas de trente-cinq', 'pas de trente-six', 'pas de trente-sept', 'pas de trente-huit', 'pas de trente-neuf', 'pas de quarante', 'pas de quarante-et-un', 'pas de quarante-deux', 'pas de quarante-trois', 'pas de quarante-quatre', 'pas de quarante-cinq', 'pas de quarante-six', 'pas de quarante-sept', 'pas de quarante-huit', 'pas de quarante-neuf', 'pas de cinquante', 'pas de cinquante-et-un', 'pas de cinquante-deux', 'pas de cinquante-trois', 'pas de cinquante-quatre', 'pas de cinquante-cinq', 'pas de cinquante-six', 'pas de cinquante-sept', 'pas de cinquante-huit', 'pas de cinquante-neuf', 'pas de soixante', 'pas de soixante-et-un', 'pas de soixante-deux', 'pas de soixante-trois', 'pas de soixante-quatre', 'pas de soixante-cinq', 'pas de soixante-six', 'pas de soixante-sept', 'pas de soixante-huit', 'pas de soixante-neuf', 'pas de septante', 'pas de septante-et-un', 'pas de septante-deux', 'pas de septante-trois', 'pas de septante-quatre', 'pas de septante-cinq', 'pas de septante-six', 'pas de septante-sept', 'pas de septante-huit', 'pas de septante-neuf', 'pas de quatre-vingt', 'pas de quatre-vingt-et-un', 'pas de quatre-vingt-deux', 'pas de quatre-vingt-trois', 'pas de quatre-vingt-quatre', 'pas de quatre-vingt-cinq', 'pas de quatre-vingt-six', 'pas de quatre-vingt-sept', 'pas de quatre-vingt-huit', 'pas de quatre-vingt-neuf', 'pas de cinquante', 'pas de cinquante-et-un', 'pas de cinquante-deux', 'pas de cinquante-trois', 'pas de cinquante-quatre', 'pas de cinquante-cinq', 'pas de cinquante-six', 'pas de cinquante-sept', 'pas de cinquante-huit', 'pas de cinquante-neuf', 'pas de soixante', 'pas de soixante-et-un', 'pas de soixante-deux', 'pas de soixante-trois', 'pas de soixante-quatre', 'pas de soixante-cinq', 'pas de soixante-six', 'pas de soixante-sept', 'pas de soixante-huit', 'pas de soixante-neuf', 'pas de septante', 'pas de septante-et-un', 'pas de septante-deux', 'pas de septante-trois', 'pas de septante-quatre', 'pas de septante-cinq', 'pas de septante-six', 'pas de septante-sept', 'pas de septante-huit', 'pas de septante-neuf', 'pas de quatre-vingt', 'pas de quatre-vingt-et-un', 'pas de quatre-vingt-deux', 'pas de quatre-vingt-trois', 'pas de quatre-vingt-quatre', 'pas de quatre-vingt-cinq', 'pas de quatre-vingt-six', 'pas de quatre-vingt-sept', 'pas de quatre-vingt-huit', 'pas de quatre-vingt-neuf'. The notation is highly detailed, with many notes and rests, and is accompanied by a variety of dance instructions. The score is written in a clear, legible hand, and the overall layout is well-organized.

Maria Schreurs











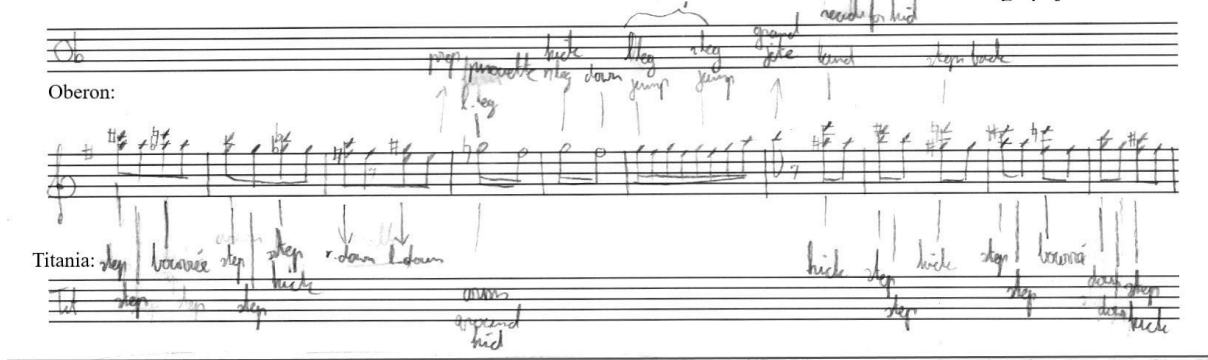
The Dream

Fairy March  
Quarrel Oberon and Titania

2  
Music: F. Mendelssohn  
Choreography: F. Ashton

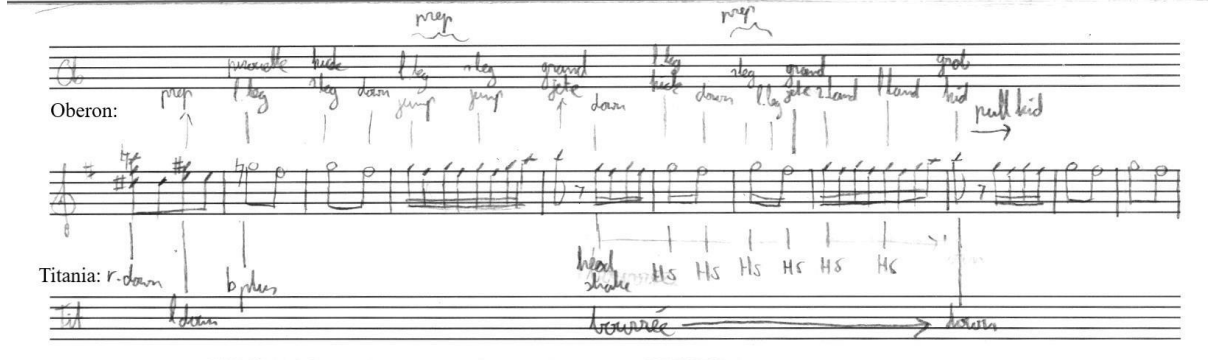
Ob Oberon: pop, pounce, kick, leg, leg, grand, needs for hid, steps back

Titania: step, bowée, step, step, r. down, l. down, hick, step, hick, step, bowée, step, step, down, step, hick



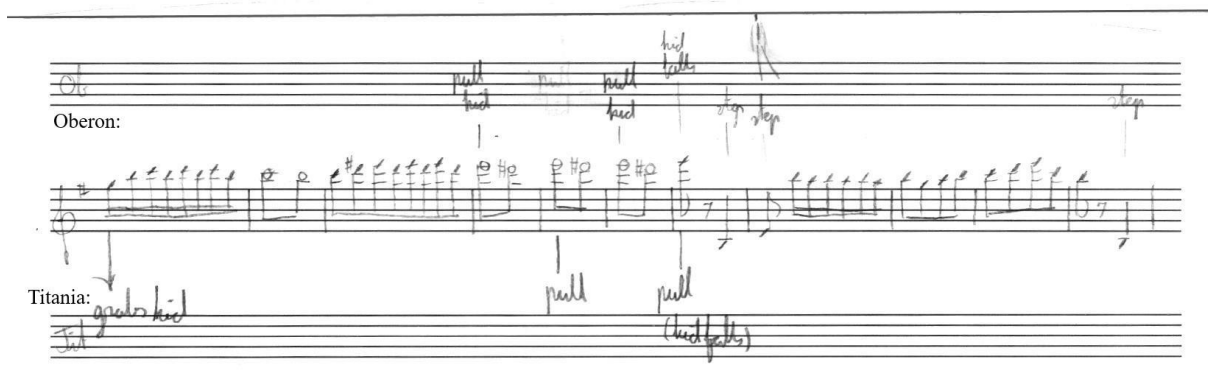
Ob Oberon: prep, pounce, kick, leg, leg, grand, leg, leg, grand, grab, pull hid

Titania: r. down, b. plus, head shake, HS HS HS HS HS HS, bowée, down



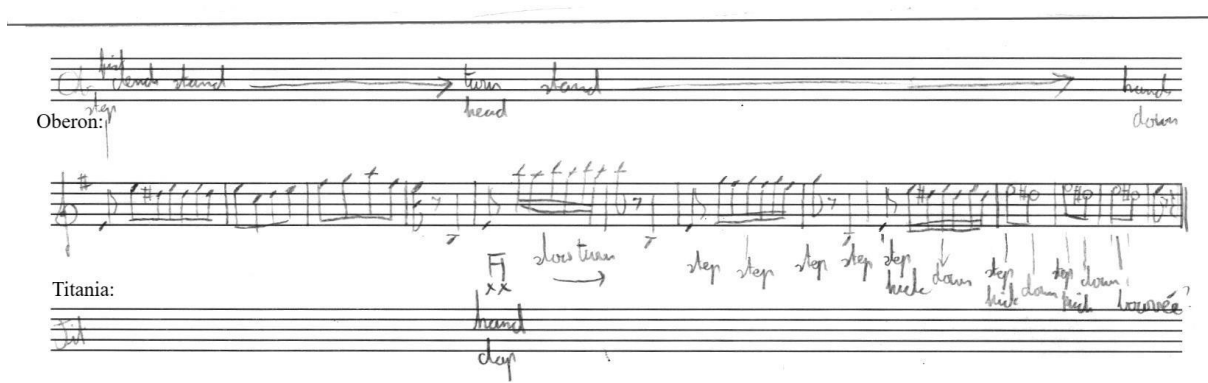
Ob Oberon: pull hid, pull hid, hid falls, step, step, step

Titania: grab hid, pull, pull (hick falls)



Ob Oberon: hick, hand, hand, turn, hand, hand, hand, down

Titania: F xx hand, step, step, step, step, step, hick, down, step, down, hick, bowée?



Maria Schreurs







