



Symbolism in Nineteenth-Century Ballet: Giselle, Coppélia, The Sleeping Beauty and Swan Lake

Margaret Fleming-Markarian

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This book investigates allegorical meaning in the ballets *Giselle*, *Coppélia*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*, principally by examining their original librettos and costume designs, as well as considering their surviving choreographic legacy. Each ballet is examined scene by scene in order to identify occult symbols secreted within its structure. The names of characters, their costume details (form, colour, pattern and attribute) and the parts they play and dance (mime, choreographic step and staging) are individually searched for symbolic correspondences.

The author argues that the meaning of these symbols reveals a serious subtext embedded within each ballet and shows that these subtexts are all found to fable the spiritual journey of the soul towards a heavenly paradise. The distinctive set of symbols and the method of interpretation differ in each case: *Giselle* takes on a Swedenborgian slant, *Coppélia* hinges on Masonry, while *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* are steeped in mysticism.

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