

NEW TASTE IN THE MYTH OF SWAN QUEEN IN THE FILM *BLACK SWAN*: THE INNER CONFLICT OF NINA REFLECTED IN THE MIRRORS

Gül den ÇELİK*

Abstract

This paper aims to share how the long-lived myth of the Swan Queen has been interpreted and reproduced by a group of artists from different disciplines including comparative literature, film, and media studies. Inspired by Tchaikovsky's well-known Swan Lake ballet, Darren Aronofsky, who is a well-known American film director, creates the film entitled Black Swan in 2011 in close cooperation with the screenplay writers, Mark Heyman, Andres Heinz, and John McLaughlin, who jointly published the script in 2009. Once the outstanding performance of the cast is added to this creation, the whole film extends itself to different interpretations and insights along with Tchaikovsky's music. Among so many of them, this paper primarily focuses on how this myth of the Swan Queen shapes the inner conflict of a young girl who tries to become a passionate and womanly being from a psychoanalytic perspective that problematizes the issues of the "double". Different from the previous productions which mostly intend to evoke horror, this double image can be followed throughout the film through the reflections in the mirrors, at any rate on any reflective surfaces and this enables us to see how fragile a human being is to differentiate the real from the surreal.

Keywords: *the myth of the Swan Queen, reinterpretation, psychoanalytic approach, double, reflections.*

Date Received (Geliş Tarihi): 19.02.2023

Date Accepted (Kabul Tarihi): 31.05.2023

DOI: 10.58306/wollt.1253165

* Dr., Sabancı University, Foundation Development Year Programme, School of Languages (İstanbul, Türkiye),
e-mail: gulden.celik@sabanciuniv.edu, ORCID: 0000-0001-7061-9261.

BLACK SWAN FİLMİNE UYARLANAN KUĞU PRENSES EFSANESİNE YENİ BİR YORUM: NİNA'NIN AYNALARA YANSIYAN İÇ ÇATIŞMALARI

Öz

Bu makale uzun yıllardır süregelen Kuğu Prenses efsanesinin karşılaştırmalı edebiyat, film ve medya çalışmaları gibi farklı disiplinlerden gelen bir grup sanatçı tarafından ne şekilde yorumlandığını ve yeniden nasıl üretildiğini paylaşmayı amaçlar. Çavkovski'nin ünlü Kuğu Gölü balesinden ilham alan ünlü Amerikalı yönetmen Darren Aronofsky, filmin senaryosunu 2009 senesinde yayımlayan senaryo yazarları Mark Heyman, Andres Heinz ve John McLaughlin ile yakın bir iş birliği içinde 2011 senesinde Siyah Kuğu filmini çeker. Bu yapıma oyuncuların başarılı performansları da eklenince, film Çavkovski'nin müziğinin ötesine geçen farklı yorumlar ve açılımlar kazanır. Bu yorumlar arasında, bu makale “çift karakterlilik” meselelerini sorunsallaştıran psikanalitik bir yaklaşımı esas alır ve öncelikli olarak Kuğu Prenses efsanesinin genç bir kızın, Nina'nın, tutkulu bir kadına dönüşmeye çabalarken kendisiyle yaşadığı iç çatışmaları nasıl biçimlendirdiğine odaklanır. Çoğunlukla seyircide dehşet uyandırmayı hedefleyen daha önceki yapımlardan farklı olarak, bu çifte görüntü film boyunca aynalardaki yansımalarda, hatta yansıma yapan tüm yüzeylerde, takip edilebilir. Yönetmenin bu görsel tercihi, insanın gerçeği gerçek olmayandan ayırt etmede ne kadar zayıf olduğunu anlamamızı sağlar.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Kuğu Prenses efsanesi, yeniden yorumlama, psikanalitik yaklaşım, çift karakterlilik, yansımalar.*

1. Introduction

American film director Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* has achieved success due to its incorporation of a variety of disciplines, perspectives, and insights. Based on myriad fairy tales, the story of Swan Queen gains some familiarity with the libretto to Tchaikovsky between 1875 and 1876 but it achieves better recognition by its reproduction by the French choreographer Marius Petipa and his assistant Lev Ivanov in 1895. This seems to be the inspiration behind Aronofsky's film (West-Leuer, 2017: 1234). However, the impact of Andres Heinz as well as Mark Heyman and John McLaughlin should not be neglected. Having gone over many scripts, they came up with the script for Aronofsky's *Black Swan* in 2010; a year later Andres Heinz explained how he felt obliged to write the story of a

person with whom he had lived once through the story of the Swan Queen. That person with “a psychotic breakdown” galvanized him into action to create “the story of one ballerina’s perseverance to succeed – no matter what it takes” (Milly, 2011). When the imagination of these screenwriters and Aronofsky’s creation come together along with the music of Tchaikovsky, the Oscar-nominated film *Black Swan* transpires, and its cast including a group of successful and talented performers, Natalie Portman, Vincent Cassel, and Mila Kunis undeniably accelerates its impact. Under the enchanting spell of these talents, the fascinating story of a young girl named Nina Sayers, performed by Portman who was “not only trained for a year as a dancer to prepare for the role but paid for the training out of her own pocket until the film found investors” (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2020), emerges.

Giving the taste of bildungsroman¹, the story tells the challenges of a young girl trying to become a grown-up woman through the story of the Swan Queen. Nina (Nathalie Portman), in her twenties, is a successful and talented ballerina who is looking forward to being promoted to the New York City ballet Company. One day, her dreams come true and she is selected as the new prima-ballerina of the Company, casting her in the lead as the Swan Queen. However, her sheer happiness does not last long. Since she was expected to become a childlike White Swan and a womanly Black Swan simultaneously on the stage, her new role devastates her life. Saturated with all the characteristics of the White, she suffers from acquiring any traits of the Black. The White Swan is the naïve, fragile, pretty, and innocent one, like her, whereas the Black Swan is the one with passionate feelings, free from anyone and anything, unlike her. To be able to perform each, Nina thinks that she needs to know and experience what it feels like to be the Black Swan, to be a mature, sexy, and passionate woman. Suppressed by her womanhood and sexuality for a long time², she is clueless about her new role and how to perform it. At the stage of her own learning and discovery, she has some difficulties, which results in inconsistencies in accepting and denying her womanhood and sexual desires. In the end, this leads her to a terrible inner conflict making her become a stranger to herself and causing her to face her uncanny double self which is always against her.

Accordingly, Nina’s tragic story turns out to be a story of an inner conflict revealing the suppressed sexuality of a young girl who is treated as if she were a kid. All her fight is against herself-her hidden self which needs to be resurrected. Despite our suspicion, she has no enemies or rivals opposing or threatening her in the narrative of the film; the only rival she has is obviously herself.

¹ “Bildungsroman” is a genre of novel which tells a story of a young person who grows up not only psychologically but also morally as a result of numerous challenging experiences. Although Nina’s story is written as a film script not as a novel, the flow of the story reminds us of this genre.

² Laine thinks that “[it] would be easy, banal even, to interpret the peculiarities of Nina’s psychic pathology in terms of repressed sexuality in relationship with artistic performance” (2015: 130); however, it seems obvious that the realization of sexuality after long years of suppression has a considerable impact on Nina’s transformation and artistic performance in this story. Later, Laine also emphasizes how Nina’s repressed sexuality influences her life and artistic performance, which eventually leads her to encounter and deal with her uncanny double (2015: 137).

Throughout the film, the images on the mirrors, or on any reflective surfaces, artfully reflect Nina's inner conflict which symbolizes and reinforces her clashing selves by a figure of a double. Through a psychoanalytic approach, that could be linked with Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's Mirror Stage, which focuses on the child's development in the earliest years of their life (Lacan, 2006). When considered from this perspective, it might be interesting to think that Nina like a child starts to realize the difference between herself and the other. "Before this, the child is from birth in the Real stage, driven by needs and lived in unity with the mother. With the Mirror Stage, the child attains the first realization of its bodily autonomy. Thus, begins the lifelong process of identifying the self of the other" (Mambrol, 2016). However, since Nina is not a child but a young girl, the scenes focusing on the mirrors offer us more valuable insights.

2. Nina's Pleasing Reflection in the Mirrors

At the beginning of the film, Nina is reflected in the mirror as an ideal and perfect image in her pinkish room evoking childhood dreams. Reminding us of Lacan's Mirror Stage, the mirror here depicts what that "child" wants to look like: an amazing ballerina who salutes the shining day by practicing dance routines. Strengthening the effects of her dream-like world, she starts telling her dream in which she performs the White Swan but with different choreography, [...] and it is the prologue when Rothbart casts his spell (Heyman, Heinz, and Laughlin, 2010: 2). At this moment, according to Freud's interpretation of dreams³, Nina does not only wish to construct her dream but also experiences its distortion. Therefore, although there is no clear hint of conflict or tumult of confusion around, a grim sense of foreboding can be felt.⁴ Her reporting of the dream ends while she is having her breakfast, a half of the boiled egg with a grapefruit which is "pink and pretty". She and her mother, Erica (Barbara Hershey), emphasize how pretty the grapefruit is as if they were blessing any sort of beauty together. This pleasing scene is interrupted by a quick mirror reflection and her mother's realization of a scar of a rash on her back shoulder. Checking her own shoulder on the reflection in the mirror, she abruptly ignores it by saying that it is "nothing". Her mother's anxiety gets so clear when she offers to accompany her. At that moment, there is a kind of warning to us about something which Nina would undergo against her ideal and perfect self and appearance, and we know that whatever she experiences would be watched on the recurrent mirror images of the film.

³ Freud (1900) mentions how a person encounters the distortion in their dream while trying to fulfill their wishes in his book *Interpretation of Dreams*, "Distortion in Dreams".

⁴ According to Laine, the very beginning of the film "with an echoed mechanical rattle mixed with distorted laughter" is "the first uncanny movement of the film" and this continues with Nina's dream of the prologue of the Bolshoi version of *Swan Lake* which shows us "Rothbart's becoming an animal" and Nina's dancing "the role of Princess Odette" (2015: 131). My interpretation of her story starts with the time when she wakes up, which signals the 'reality' of the story; therefore, until she comes in front of the mirror and encounters her reflection there, nothing seriously alarming or threatening has been felt. However, "a sense of foreboding" is still somehow felt there.

Following the mirror images enables us to observe Nina's inner conflict throughout the film. The next mirror image reflects itself through the window of the subway, but this time she has a different image than the first one: What we see at that moment is Nina's reflection in complete darkness whilst she is looking for herself toward the light. In other words, Nina's reflection is in black or in darkness whereas Nina is in white or in light in the "reality" of the movie; thus, it can be suggested that the reflected image of Nina and herself become contradictory in the mirrors (unlike Lacan's Mirror Stage), which will be repeated several times in the rest of the film. It is also interesting to realize that when Nina gets away from her reflection, she encounters the image of a woman in black with the same movements she makes. Since she turns her back to her, Nina cannot see her face, thereby getting so curious about her. Reminding of Plato's cave allegory, this scene offers a different depth to the film implying the idea that the reality to which we are exposed in the film is as unreliable as the reflection in the mirror images.

Displaying such blurry distinctions, the whole film seems to be divided into darkness and light or "reality" and reflection. For instance, the darkness of the subway is followed by the light of the street on which Nina walks to the Company and then the next time we see her is again in front of the mirror at the backstage. Still, there is no sign revealing any conflict Nina has, but we feel that the mirror reflections are not simply there. As Aronofsky very clearly explains, it is so likely to see so many mirrors in the world of the ballet dancer since

[...] mirrors are omnipresent in the ballet world. Ballet dancers are constantly examining themselves in mirrors, looking at their line, looking at how they move, as so we (referring to himself and his team) always knew the mirror would be a big part of it and reflection was part of it. (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2020)

Nevertheless, in this film the mirrors are not merely there for the decoration of the ballet world; they seem to primarily serve the aim of demonstrating what is beyond the seen. In that scene, recognizing whose image is reflected in the mirror and who is speaking at that moment is a little bit tricky and misleading, which makes us speculate that as of this moment, Nina could never ever hold a real image of herself again.

No matter how hard she tries to make her presence felt by others around, her reflections in the mirrors highlight her fragmented self. This may sound like a kind of surreal story of the double in quest of the other side and the following scenes might somehow strengthen this possibility. Especially when we see the director of the Company for the first time telling the story of the Black Swan which has been decided to be performed recently, we feel that this role of one dancer playing two roles opposing each other will be a real challenge for her inner conflict, which triggers her split self. In the book entitled *Bodies in Pain: Emotion and the Cinema of Darren Aronofsky*, Laine describes this as follows

[...] Nina is simultaneously portrayed as innocent and devoted, vulnerable and controlled. This ambiguity in her personality is reflected by the challenge she is faced with, namely to perform the emotionally and physically demanding double role of Odette and Odile in the legendary Tchaikovsky ballet *Swan Lake*. In order to rise to the occasion, Nina must plunge deep into her uncontrolled dark side. But she is prone to mental illness, and her artistic progress is increasingly hampered by violent hallucinations and severe panic attacks. (Laine, 2015: 127)

This starts to be observed at the time when she steals the lipstick of Beth, the “dying swan” (West-Leuer 2017: 2) of the Company; the naïve, pure, and childish Nina takes something which belongs to someone else without permission with great pleasure. However, it is also possible to speculate that this is a typical childish thing to do: taking the lipstick of a woman whom she adores and who used to have a significant status and reputation as the prima ballerina of the Company. Whatever she has in her mind, this scene gives us a clear insight into the possibility that Nina can do anything which could be against her ideal and perfect self to reach her dreams.

3. More than Mirrors, Reflections through Any Reflective Surfaces

It can be claimed that reflections have a crucial role in the film; that is also what makes mirrors important, but there are more than mirrors that could activate the impact of these reflections. As Matty Libatique, the cinematographer of the film, shares, not only mirrors but also any reflective surfaces are aimed to increase the effects of these reflections (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2020). Besides them, it seems probable to put forward the idea that Nina’s hallucinations concerning her other self can be perceived as a form of reflection. For example, when Nina goes back home, through a place like a tunnel, she encounters her other self which looks precisely like her but all in black with loose hair, evoking a sense of freedom. This seems to be the reflection of her other self that she craves but cannot possess since she is still under the influence of her mother, who is believed to “take control of her life in every aspect”, as stated in a short review of the film (“Black Swan Theory”, 2023). Marston believes as Nina still lives with her “jealous and overbearing mother Erica... (her) development appears halted in a phase of pre-adolescent girlhood” (2015: 696). This scene also makes us feel that Nina’s relationship with her mother is about to change because when her mother calls, we expect her to respond to it immediately like a nice little girl but she does not. She may feel that her other self, the one she is so close to get at that moment, would not be welcomed by her mother; therefore, she may prefer to get away from her (either from her double or from her mother) as quickly as possible.

Feeling unhappy and anxious about her “ineptitude”, which is frequently said by Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) who is the artistic director of the play, in performing the Black Swan, she gets obsessed with it. When she comes home, she obstinately continues rehearsing the Black Swan in her room. We

watch her practicing mostly through her reflection in the mirror, and the other times her spinning around blurs the “reality” around; then, this moment is halted by her getting injured. This could be interpreted as Nina’s unpreparedness for performing the Black Swan; her mother’s care of her enables us to understand that she is still not ready to become a womanly Black Swan. Her injured toe is healed, her earrings are taken off; she is consoled and supported by her “mommy”, and like a little child, she gets into bed with the music coming out of the music box. Unlike the impact of this scene, the following scene shows us her reflection in the window of the subway again while putting on Beth’s lipstick, and then for the first time, Nina is shown with her loose hair, on her way to talk to the director about her readiness about the role. However, the director still thinks that she is quite talented for the White Swan but not for the Black one; whatever he sees is her obsession to hold herself to be more disciplined and perfect, which hinders her potential to become a Black Swan. To test her readiness, he wants to provoke Nina by saying that he has already chosen Veronica for the role but he does not succeed in that. Thus, he stops her with a kiss at a time when she does not expect it; Nina resists and bites him.

Supposing that she loses, she celebrates Veronica, another ballerina in the Company, for the role and decides to leave the Company without checking the announced list for the cast. Filled with anger, Veronica comes back to shout at Nina for deceiving her; Nina understands that Veronica is not the one who was chosen for the Swan Queen but herself. Finally, her dreams come true; to share her happiness, she calls her mommy in the toilet. When she gets out, another mirror reflection, which focuses on a nasty message written on the mirror with lipstick, is shared. Even though there is still no sense of conflict between Nina and her reflection, we feel that with this message - “whore” - the tension is about to accelerate. Since there is no noise of opening or closing the door of the toilet, we tend to think that there is no one inside, except for Nina; therefore, she is highly likely the person who writes this message with the lipstick that she previously steals from Beth’s room. Believing that being kissed by the director helps her to be chosen, which may make her a “whore” in the eyes of others, she feels guilty about the way she gets the role and accordingly blames herself for being unfaithful to herself.

As of this moment, her inner conflicts get stronger and her uncanny double, which starts to be seen in the mirror, gets ubiquitous. That is to say, Nina’s uncanny double is not only in the mirror any longer; it is on any type of reflective surface in her surroundings. For example, when Nina comes back home, she seems bewildered by her own reflections on the paintings, not on the mirror, in her mother’s room. However, this scene is quickly followed by another mirror reflection: After taking a bath, Nina realizes the bleeding rash on her back shoulder; not to cast a shadow upon her happiness, she quickly tries to clean it up and behaves as if nothing happened to celebrate her achievement with her mother. The next day is another practice day in the studio. In a place crammed full of mirrors, Nina performs the White Swan and Leroy praises her for her performance, but he says he knows her performance of White Swan is nice; the real work for her is “[her] metamorphosis into [her] evil twin”. Accepting this criticism

and being determined to obtain what she is said to lack, Nina gets into Beth's room again. This time, unlike her first coming, we see her as a glad and happy woman to get what she wants - not only Beth's lipstick or earrings but also all of her accessories including anything and everything in the room. It appears that Nina subverts Beth's kingdom and announces her own dynasty at the Reception Ball where she is publicly declared as the new prima-ballerina of the Company.

Having been welcomed by the public, Nina goes to the toilet, and we see her reflection in the mirror again while tearing the skin off her finger. Interrupted by the knocks on the door, she washes the blood away from her finger in panic. Since the blood disappears too quickly and the scar totally goes away in a second, we understand that Nina has another hallucination. This double image reflected in the mirror extends to the double image between Nina and Lily (Mila Kunis), who is defined as "Nina's 'evil twin' in real life" according to Laine (2015: 127). In this scene, Lily is the one who is waiting for being accepted in whereas Nina is in to accept her. When Lily comes into the toilet, the reflection in the mirror is strikingly suggestive of the double image between Nina in white and Lily in black as counterpart bodies or souls of the one.

4. The Changing Self Reflected in the Mirrors

The following mirror image is the one which increases the tension of Nina's inner conflict. Her mother sees the scar of the rashes on her back shoulder, and she lets us know that they are not rashes but the scar because of Nina's own scratching. Besides, we learn that it is not the first time Nina has ever scratched herself; it is her "disgusting habit" that her mother thinks she gives up a long time ago. In later scenes, we are presented another practice day at the studio, Beth's accident, and Nina's visit to her mother. After these scenes, which do not include any significant mirror reflection, Nina is in front of the mirror in Beth's room again but this time she is crying. She is so devastated and disillusioned that no one knows for sure to whom she is crying, either for Beth or herself. The next day is another practice day at the studio and for the first time, she is practicing the Black Swan with her loose hair suggesting her attempted and claimed freedom or womanhood. Nonetheless, whatever she does, Leroy thinks that she is so "stiff" (Heyman, Heinz, and Laughlin, 2010: 45) as a board. Suffering from the contraction, Nina needs to pause to get some help to relax; it is like a signal from the body crying out that it is not ready for such a transformation yet. Coming back to the stage to practice, she fails to perform the Black Swan again and again despite Leroy's efforts to seduce and provoke her.

While mirrors reflect her grief, Nina meets Lily, and their reflection in the mirror enables us to see another double image, which is already stressed in the script as follows: "Nina startles and looks up. Sees the dark figure of somebody watching her from the doorway. Looks like herself" (Heyman, Heinz, and Laughlin, 2010: 49). The double image here focuses on the one for the girl of rules ("You can't smoke in here") and the other one for the woman of violations ("Well, I won't tell if you won't") (49).

In a short span of time, we see how Nina accepts Lily's offer to smoke despite her initial reluctance. Like a little child, Nina starts to cry and talks about how she is not good enough for Leroy.⁵ Lily understands that Nina feels something special for Leroy, like a child's inexplicable love for her teacher. Embarrassed, she goes back home. At that moment, another reflective surface different from the mirrors is used: she is alone in the bathroom trying to hold her breath under the water. The reflection over the water, not in the mirror, is blurred by drops of blood making her undergo another hallucination of herself, her double, as the script describes, trying to harm her. Realizing the blood on her fingers, Nina feels the need to check her back shoulder; and when she does that, through the mirror, we see how badly she scratches herself. In a panic, she wants to protect herself like her mother does by cutting her nails to halt her scratching. Just at that moment, the mirror clearly depicts the other Nina with a cruel and angry expression on her face. Enchanted by her double in the mirror, Nina hurts herself more while trying to protect herself. This scene seems to be highly critical for Nina's inner conflict reflected in the mirrors as well as any reflective surfaces since we start to acknowledge that Nina goes beyond reality and lives with an evil twin, as the play requires. This uncanny double of her comes alive as an elusive and persistent enemy or rival against her, and her inner conflict gets more and more obvious from that moment on since the uncanny double in the mirror or on any reflective surface gets out as a hallucination.

Having failed in her attempt on another practice day, Nina goes home. She is with her mother in her room in front of the mirror repairing her ballet shoes.⁶⁷ Her mother is concerned about her daughter and wants to check whether everything is all fine with her. Once Nina shows negative reactions to her, she gets more suspicious about her wellness and asks how her skin is. Nina refuses to show; her mother gets up to force her but the tension is interrupted by the doorbell (like the knocks on the toilet door before). It might be claimed that Lily is the only person coming to see Nina and this is her first night out as well as her first rebellion against her mother; therefore, from that moment on, we feel that nothing will be the same for Nina. She gradually turns into another person that no one including herself would know.

The next mirror image is in the bar's toilet showing Nina's wearing the black underwear that Lily gives her. Ignoring her mother's call, she goes back to Lily who asks her not to go back home to her mummy. To "live a little", Nina decides to have fun for a couple of hours: she meets the boys and takes

⁵ It is interesting to see how different Nina and Lily in their perceptions and how this is reflected on the choice of words: Nina thinks that Leroy is "brilliant" whereas Lily thinks that he is a "prick". Another time when Nina and Lily are in the bar talking about Leroy and his calling to Beth as "little princess", Nina finds it so "sweet" while Lily says that it is so "gross". This language seems to strengthen the effects of the double image between Nina and Lily.

⁶ This scene, like some others, is different from the one in the film; it is significant to realize that there are some differences between the script and the film. This paper follows more the film than the script although it benefits from both time to time.

⁷ Laine seems so true to claim that "the violent breaking in of the shoes is emblematic of the ruthless way in which Nina treats her own body" (2015: 133).

the drug Lily gives. Interestingly, at this moment they are all reflected through the mirrors of the bar. Trying to get to know the girls, one of the boys asks Nina who she is and instead of sharing her name, she replies that she is a dancer. It seems whatever she does is more important than who she is. Then, the boys wonder whether they are sisters and Lily instantly accepts whereas Nina flatly refuses. In the end, Lily says that they are “blood sisters”. This claimed sisterhood somehow suggests the double image between Nina and Lily and the following scenes somehow strengthen the duality between them.

Having fun with Lily, Nina comes back home, and her coming is reflected through the mirror at her home. We see Nina with Lily in the mirror and then Lily gets separated from her, leaving Nina alone with her mother. When she speaks indecently, her mother tries to take her to her room to sleep but she resists and goes to her room “with Lily”. Preventing her mom’s coming with a latch, which she takes before, she shouts for privacy. Her metamorphosis is getting more and more vivid by these rebellions against her mother. She openly declares her own adulthood and womanhood by crying out “[she] is not [...] twelve years old anymore” (Heyman, Heinz, and Laughlin, 2010: 73), but this stress deteriorates her mental health, causing her to suffer from more severe hallucinations. The next day when she wakes up, she gets confused about the mess around realizing that Lily is not with her, and she is already late for the rehearsal. Unkempt, she runs to the studio. This time, there is no mirror around and Lily, instead of Nina, is on the stage practicing her part. After talking to Lily, she understands that Lily does not sleep over at her house. Thus, Lily turns into a kind of mental picture in Nina’s mind as the embodiment of womanhood. She is the part Nina thinks she needs to possess; she should be as womanly as her. It can even be claimed that all her transformation is for being a woman or not to be treated like a twelve-year-old child. That might also explain why she has a sudden urge to get rid of her music box, toys, and babies. By then, as Laine very nicely shares, “[Nina’s] reflection starts living its own life – with dreadful consequences. It appears both inside and outside the mirror, materializing in the flesh” (2015: 137).

5. Nina’s Unpleasing Reflection in the Mirrors

As days elapse, the pressure that Nina feels increases and becomes intolerable. Her eating disorder and her scratching get worse and worse every day because of the stress she feels. Accordingly, the more stressed she is, the more frequent the hallucinations she has in the mirrors are, and the more serious her inner conflict becomes. On the day before the premiere, Nina is rehearsing the finale on the stage; once again there is no mirror around, but it is felt that Nina is still stressed. At the end of the rehearsal, Nina gets measured up; when she is asked to take her shrug off, she panics because of the scar on her back shoulder. Then, she encounters her double self in the reflection of the mirror while violently scratching herself. Frightened, she tries to pull herself together, but she loses her control when she learns that Leroy makes Lily her “alternate”. No matter how hard Leroy tries to console her, she is completely infatuated with the role and despite his recommendation to go home to rest before the premiere, she continues practicing strenuously in the studio.

Rehearsing repeatedly for the play, the pianist leaves Nina alone saying that he has a life to live. Disregarding the pianist's suggestion not to work hard and to rest a little before the big day, Nina keeps on practicing until she encounters her double in the mirror again. This is the second time Nina sees her other self, her evil twin, in such a clear way but then the electricity goes off to blur her vision. Scared, she gets out of the studio after getting Beth's possessions to return them to her. When Nina comes home, she suffers from horrendous hallucinations of Beth and her crying reflections on the paintings. Although Nina thinks that giving back anything that Beth used to possess once would be enough to regain her control, she is mistaken. Everything seems to be spinning out of control and Nina is no longer able to differentiate what is real. Suffering from a kind of paranoid schizophrenia, her mind and body could not endure the pressure of the role any longer and in the end, we see her literally and completely falling into pieces.

The pursuing mirror scene is one of the most vivid scenes of the film showing Nina's metamorphosis with thorn-like things growing in her back shoulder with reddened eyes. Such a transformation is the one Aronofsky intends to achieve; he explicitly states that he wants to "turn Natalie into a creature, literally a creature" (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2020). However, he is quite cautious about not showing this transformation through the mirrors like the "clichéd mirror gag, which [we] have seen in so many (horror) films". He expresses that he "[tries] to do something new with it and [tries] to make it more compelling and more different and more freaky" (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2020). Choosing the "double image" as a recurrent theme in several scenes to attain a lasting impact, Aronofsky extends the use and form of the mirror image to any reflective surfaces suggesting the nebulous distinction between the real, what is seen, and the surreal, what is perceived. That might also explain some of the differences between the script and the film. For example, after this transformation, Nina hurts her mother to prevent her from getting inside; then, her body collapses probably because of hunger, tiredness, and stress that she is terribly saturated with. This is shown as follows in the script: "She stumbles back... Accidentally tripping on the fallen jewelry box. She falls and slams her head into the radiator. Smash to black" (Heyman, Heinz, and Laughlin, 2010: 88). Unlike the script's real description, Aronofsky creates a surreal one where we see the reflection of Nina in the mirror again while getting into pieces part by part, which ends with her broken legs reminding us of the fragility of any bird.

Whilst Nina undergoes such a terrible psychic breakdown, her mother gives the impression that she knows, from the very beginning, that she would not be able to get over the pressure of this role. Now, it is so evident that she accepts her daughter's transformation and that should be the reason why she asks where her sweet daughter is. She seems to reclaim her but obviously, her little one is already gone. However, she still tries to protect her sweet daughter. Like a newborn baby, she covers her hands with a pair of socks to prevent her from scratching herself, yet this is all in vain. Dodging her mother, she runs to the premier.

5. Conclusion

The final scene is a series of mirrors demonstrating the inner conflict of Nina in a nutshell. The first scene of the final occurs when Nina comes back to the Company Hall regardless of her mother's cries. She gets ready for the performance in front of the mirror although Leroy states that he has already asked for Lily. Contrary to the previous scenes, Nina is so confident and self-assertive to declare that she is there to do it. While, in a most professional fashion, Nina wears make-up, she persuades Leroy, who is happy to finally see her confidence. However, Leroy still wants to warn her about the fact that the only person standing in her way is her own. This succinctly explains Nina's inner conflict: the only enemy or rival she has is no one but herself; in other words, no one is after her to harm her.

While getting dressed, we see Nina's literal transformation into a swan, not through any reflective surfaces: her fingers get web-footed like a swan. Trying to manage her emotional ups and downs, she approaches the stage but gets confused with the entrance and must hastily enter it from a different direction. Even though performing the White Swan is the part she naturally plays brilliantly, she gets so careless when she realizes Lily's relationship with the lead dancer who accompanies her. When lifted up, she loses her balance and falls down. Disappointed, she goes back to Beth's room and another striking mirror image takes place there. This is the last but the most significant mirror image reflecting the end of Nina's inner conflict with her evil twin. She sees her sitting in her room and refreshing her makeup. Despite her warning to her uncanny other self about leaving her alone, she is persistent to stay with(in) her, humiliating her ineptitude for her performance. When offered to be replaced, Nina loses herself and tries to kill Lily, her evil twin, to ward off any threats against her presence and performance. She pushes her towards the mirror, which shatters into a thousand tiny pieces one of which causes her to lose her life. It is intriguing to think that besides the termination of the double, this moment somehow reveals the end of all the mirror images of the film and if this was the end of the film, it would be possible to claim that it is the end of Nina's inner conflict, which could bring her anxieties to an end.

After stabbing her double with the mirror shard in the stomach, she announces that it is her turn, no one else. The dead body of Lily lying on the ground is the only menace she needs to beat, and she gets rid of it before going back to the stage as the Black Swan. On stage, there is no mirror reflection: Nina performs amazingly, and not only the lead dancer, who previously says that he is not sexually attracted by her, but also the audience get surprised and mesmerized. Being greeted with a big round of applause, she is pleased to perform the Black Swan satisfactorily and happy to finally experience the feeling of being an attractive and seductive woman. Confidently, she steals a passionate kiss from Leroy at the backstage, which, for the first time, embarrasses him. In the end, she feels that she fulfills her role admirably and tastes the pleasure of womanhood. Nevertheless, when she comes back to her room to get ready for the epilogue of the play, she faces up the harsh reality: When Lily comes to celebrate her

for her amazing performance, she grasps that the one who is stabbed is not Lily but herself. Petrified and shocked, she hardly but helplessly acknowledges her situation.

The mirror, for the last time, reflects Nina as the White Swan and for the last time, she gets on the stage to perform what she naturally does best, the role of Odette. Through the end, Nina completes the whole story of the Swan Queen in her mind: She is transformed into a swan and tries to break the spell by the love of the prince who, she thinks, falls for the wrong girl, and then kills herself. In the bar, Nina tells the story of the Swan Queen in the same order of events, and at the end of her telling she says that such an ending is beautiful. Similarly, having experienced all, Nina says her farewells to all the performers of the Company, her mother, and the audience in company with “music by Clint Mansell on the sound track, which re-imagines Tchaikovsky’s original score” (Laine, 2015: 131) and then jumps down to the stage to end her role/life in Leroy’s direction in line with the screenwriters’ and Aronofsky’s imagination. In the end, everyone shouts with appreciation, but Nina starts to bleed to death; however, she appears to be content believing that she does not fake and thereby being perfect to deserve to become Leroy’s “little princess”.

References

- Aronofsky, D. [Director] (2010). *Black Swan* [Film]. Los Angeles, California, United States: Fox Searchlight Pictures.
- (n.d.) Black Swan Theory: A Freudian Psychoanalytic Perspective. *Studocu*. Retrieved February 15, 2023, from <https://www.studocu.com/id/document/universitas-negeri-surabaya/extrinsic-approaches-to-literature/black-swan-theory-a-freudian-psychoanalytic-perspective/45819280>.
- Fox Searchlight Pictures (2020, October 11). *Black Swan (2010): Making of a Masterpiece/ Darren Aronofsky* [Video]. Retrieved February 15, 2023, from YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BSZymoCUuU.
- Freud, S. (1997). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Wordsworth Editions: Hertfordshire.
- Heyman, M., Heinz, A. & McLaughlin, J. (2009). *Black Swan Shooting Draft*. New York City, New York, United States: Protozoa Pictures. Retrieved February 15, 2023, from <https://thescriptlab.com/script/black-swan-draft/attachment/black-swan-pdf-2/>
- Lacan, J. (2006). *Ecrits*. “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the / Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” 1st ed. [ebook]. pp. 93-100. Retrieved May 17, 2023, from <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/deconstructionandnewmediatheory/Lacanecrits.pdf>.

- Laine, T. (2015). *Bodies in pain: Emotion and the cinema of Darren Aronofsky*. Berghahn Books, Incorporated: Oxford.
- Mambrol, N. (2016, April 22). Lacan's Concept of Mirror Stage. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Retrieved February 15, 2023, from <https://literariness.org/2016/04/22/lacans-concept-of-mirror-stage/>.
- Marston, K. (2015). The Tragic Ballerina's Shadow Self: Troubling the Political Economy of Melancholy in *Black Swan*. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 32(8), 695-711. DOI: 10.1080/10509208.2015.1060825. Sexeny, J.
- Milly, J. (2011, February 22). Podcast: Andres Heinz Talks *Black Swan*. *Script*. Retrieved February 13, 2023, from <https://scriptmag.com/features/podcast-andres-heinz-talks-black-swan>.
- Plato (2017). The Allegory of the Cave (Benjamin Jowett, Trans.). In *Book VII of the Republic*. Enhanced Media Publishing (Original work published in 375 BCE).
- West-Leuer, B. (2017). *Black Swan* – the Sacrifice of a Prima Ballerina: Psychosexual (Self-)injuries as the Legacy of Archaic Experiences of Violence. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 98(4), 1233-1244. DOI: 10.1111/1745-8315.12658.