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UNDERSTANDING THE MONSTER
Challenging Negative Images of Spiders with Adrian
Tchaikovsky's *Children of Time*

ABSTRACT

Dominique Desanges: Understanding the Monster – Challenging Negative Images of Spiders with Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children of Time*
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Spiders are frequently depicted as malicious and scary creatures in modern media; however, spiders have a rich literary history of both positive and negative traits. Adrian Tchaikovsky's science fiction novel *Children of Time* (2015) challenges fears about spiders and presents spider characters as empathetic. This thesis analyzes the ways in which the novel portrays spiders positively without removing all of their spider characteristics. Animal studies are utilized to examine how Tchaikovsky expands upon themes found in big bug films, the ways in which he retains their spider traits, and how he chooses to anthropomorphize them. Furthermore, the thesis identifies how human fear towards spiders is depicted within the text, and how Tchaikovsky alleviates these fears. This thesis compares the way human and spider narrators depict spiders. The study also examines parallels between the spider and human societies in the novel and what these parallels reveal about human prejudices.

The thesis posits that Tchaikovsky builds familiarity with spider behavior by presenting it frequently within the text instead of hiding the spiders' bodies. Furthermore, the novel anthropomorphizes behaviors in the spiders that deviate too drastically from human behavior, such as the cannibalistic nature of spider mating. By presenting the spider perspective as simultaneously relatable and alien, and contrasting it with the human perspective, Tchaikovsky is able to comment upon human behaviors such as sexism and prejudice towards the unknown. In addition, Tchaikovsky is able to bridge the gap between the monstrous image that spiders have and a more realistic depiction of their behavior through an imagined reality in which spiders are able to express themselves to a human perspective.

Keywords: spiders, animal studies, science fiction, anthropomorphism, prejudice, Adrian Tchaikovsky

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. Introduction

In Western society, spiders are largely feared and mistrusted. Much of this fear stems from a lack of knowledge and an arachnophobic society that normalizes disgust and fear towards spiders. Most portrayals of spiders in popular Western media are negative ones, and even the more positive portrayals focus on anthropomorphizing spiders until they are more like people.

Literature is one of the many ways in which alternate perspectives can be viewed, and so for my thesis I will examine a text, *Children of Time* (2015) by Adrian Tchaikovsky, that combats fears towards spiders and even portrays spiders as relatable, appealing characters without sacrificing all of their spider qualities to do so. The spider has a long symbolic history in literature in various cultures around the world, and the positive portrayal is something that should be revisited in modern writing, especially in fantasy and science fiction, considering the thousands of different kinds of spiders and their long existence on Earth. Spiders are peripherally in popular culture even in nursery rhymes and stories for children, such as *Little Miss Muffet* and *The Spider and the Fly*, but are rarely examined as significant on their own.

Marco Caracciolo describes how the spider is considered a symbol of creativity and technical prowess in various cultures, such as Arachne in Greek mythology, whose weaving is more beautiful than even the gods', and in the Sanskrit Vedic text Mundaka Upanishad, God is compared to a spider (xiv). However, this positive representation of spiders has dwindled in recent history. Spiders can be seen as antagonists in a variety of popular media, such as *Lord of the Rings*, *It*, and *Harry Potter*. Niklas Salmose explains that the almost entirely negative view of spiders in modern Western media is a relatively new one, as depictions of spiders in animal horror films in the 1950s and 1970s were more ambivalent. The mutated spiders often served to reveal the true enemy, which was humanity for creating them. (148)

In my thesis, I will examine how spiders are represented in Tchaikovsky's *Children of Time* and how the novel presents their perspectives in order to normalize and sympathize with them

without compromising all of their non-human nature. I will also analyze the ways in which the narrative anthropomorphizes the spiders in order to allow human readers to relate to them. Tchaikovsky's novel explores a distant planet where a human experiment to implant a nanovirus in monkeys to grant them the ability to rapidly evolve is sabotaged and the nanovirus imbeds itself in spiders instead, allowing them to develop and form their own society. Meanwhile, human passengers aboard the spaceship Gilgamesh seek a new home after the destruction of Earth and soon find themselves at odds with the planet's arachnid inhabitants and the preserved human scientist that has assigned herself as the planet's guardian and god. It is significant that *Children of Time* utilizes the third person for both the spider and human narrators. The spiders' perspective follows various spiders from the same family line, each named Portia, as the spider society evolves over generations. Meanwhile, the human perspective follows a human linguist named Holsten who reawakens from suspended animation multiple times over the course of the Gilgamesh's journey, as well as the scientist Avrana Kern, who is stuck inside a satellite for hundreds of years, overlooking the terraformed planet.

I will examine how Tchaikovsky uses descriptive language to present the spiders as sympathetic, as well as to alleviate readers' potential fears towards spiders, allowing the readers to relate to the spider characters. Furthermore, I will identify how the novel represents the human characters' terrified reactions to the spiders, which is akin to a horror movie, and how this ties into their aggressive mindsets stemming from lack of empathy or understanding, contrasting this with the spider society and their open curiosity and constant learning. Finally, I will discuss the fusion of the human and spider groups in the conclusion and how this confronts and dismantles many of the previous beliefs both societies had of one another.

Positive portrayals of spiders in literature have been rarely studied, and Tchaikovsky's novel would allow insight into what is needed in a text to empathetically portray animals that are viewed as undesirable by society. While Tchaikovsky did write a sequel to *Children of Time* that follows

the spider and human hybrid society after the events of *Children of Time*, I have chosen not to discuss that book, as it involves even more species of creatures and would make the scope of the thesis too large.

In this thesis, spiders will be examined through the lens of animal studies. This will allow me to consider the novel in similar terms as other non-human perspectives that have been examined previously in literature. Animal studies emerged from the question of what animal experience is like, whether animals are able to have conscious experiences, as well as “encouraging reflection on non-human ways of being in the world” (Caracciollo 140). In examining animal perspectives in literature, also cultures are examined through the representation of values and concepts present in the literature. As such, animal studies can seemingly paradoxically lead to a better understanding of the human condition.

2. Fear, Fantasy, and Spiders

In this chapter, I will largely draw upon Niklas Salmose’s study of spiders in big bug rampage films *We Spiders: Spider as the Monster of Modernity in the Big Bug and Nature-on-Rampage Film Genres*. Salmose draws upon two major themes within big bug films that also appear in Tchaikovsky’s text: the identification between humans and spiders, and the cultural history of the spider trope. According to Salmose, spiders represent both fear and creativity, and due to this ambiguous symbolism, spiders are able to present both a threat to and a metaphor for humanity. This ambiguous symbolism presents itself through various thematic dichotomies that appear in big bug films, such as the present and the past, the urban and the rural, or nature and culture. Spiders are able to serve as a symbol of otherness while simultaneously representing the familiar. Tchaikovsky’s text draws upon several themes that appear in big bug films, while also challenging or subverting them.

I will also employ Katarzyna and Segiusz Michalski's study *Spider*, which examines how spiders have been depicted in literature and other media. Michalski and Michalski engage with the spider as a symbolic and culturally significant animal. The spider is a relatively common creature, but despite its domestic status, spiders typically provoke a negative reaction based in disgust and fear. Michalski and Michalski note that while spiders appear in numerous European folktales and stories, there is not a singular developed spider character within the European mythos that could be directly connected to humans and anthropomorphized, and the lack of anthropomorphism with the spider leads to a disconnect between humans and spiders. Even so, spiders appear in numerous works of film, literature, fashion, et cetera. Symbols related to arachnophobia as well as positive traits of spiders are utilized in *Children of Time* to draw upon familiar tropes that the readers are likely familiar with.

Marco Caracciolo's study that discusses animal narrators and how their perspective is utilized in texts also informs a significant part of this thesis. Caracciolo explains how literary depictions of animal consciousness both bring attention to the perceived worlds of animals while also engaging with human worldviews. Animal narrators frequently cause a disparity between the readers' empathetic desire to relate to them and the need to distance themselves based on their own human perspectives. Tchaikovsky engages with the simultaneous connection that reading through an animal narrator's perspective may bring, while also contrasting it with the human characters' own perceptions of spiders within the novel.

3. Human and Spider Perspectives

A significant means within the novel in portraying the differences between human assumptions about spiders and how the spiders actually function are the various forms of narrative perspective. While the alternating perspectives between the human and spider narrators involves a degree of anthropomorphism in regards to the spiders, especially since they have developed their

own society, Caracciolo explains that “Just as in medical imaging contrast agents are used to reveal parts of the body that wouldn’t be visible otherwise, injecting an anthropomorphizing element into a (fictional) nonhuman consciousness can allow us to – paradoxically – see further into the nonhuman” (141). He notes that what separates humans and animals is animals’ lack of language-dependent, higher-order cognitive faculties (Caracciolo 143); however, Tchaikovsky subverts this by including the nanovirus. As a result of the virus, the spiders enter into a new territory in which their separation from humanity is not as distinctly defined through the lens of intelligent and non-intelligent species, and this anthropomorphism allows for the text to more closely examine the differences and similarities between the worldviews of spiders and humans. This chapter will analyze the various perspectives present within the novel and how they elaborate upon the views of the humans and spiders of themselves and each other.

3.1 Human Fears

In contrast to the spiders’ view of their own society, the humanity portrayed by Tchaikovsky struggles to come to terms with the non-human life forms that appear on the terraformed planet. While the human society clashes both in the spaceship among their own and with creatures viewed as threats, such as the spiders, the difference in the two perspectives serves as insight into how people may view a social other or the unknown.

The first interaction the human passengers have with the spiders on the terraformed planet occurs when a group of mutineers from the *Gilgamesh* crash-land on the planet. Holsten has been taken as a hostage by the mutineers and observes as the mutineers spot a spider inspecting them: “It had enormous great dark orbs, like the eyesockets of a skull, and it approached in sudden fits of movement, a rapid scuttle, then it was still and regarding them once more. It was a spider, a monster spider like a bristling, crooked hand. Holsten stared at its ragged, hairy body, its splayed legs, the hooked fangs curled beneath it” (172-73). As stated previously, the humans view the spiders as

terrifying beasts that must be destroyed. To them, the spiders are a plague to an otherwise idyllic planet and future home for them. Even Kern initially views the spiders as “scuttling, spinning monsters,” devastated when she discovers that her monkeys were not the ones that inherited the planet (341). Kern views the planet and its inhabitants as something for her to control, which is reflected in how she refers to the planet as Kern’s World and gives detailed instructions to the creatures on the planet on how their society should progress. Kern’s distress over the spider society reflects a similar trend found in many big bug films in which the scientist is horrified by the results of their experiment, which is truly beyond their hands.

While the humans feel disconnected from and distressed by spiders, their feelings of disgust and discomfort extends even to their own kind. The line of who is worthy of being viewed as a person is blurred even among the human inhabitants of the *Gilgamesh*. During the journey back to the terraformed planet, Holsten wakes up to discover that several generations of humans have been growing up on the ship while he was in his cryogenic sleep. These people have been indoctrinated by Guyen, the ship commander, to believe that the original crew members are superior, but with the growing population and dwindling supplies aboard the ship, they live in squalor, and Holsten struggles to accept their humanity: “They peered out at him, these long-haired, grimy inheritors of the ark. They talked to one another. They stank. He was ready to loathe them, and be loathed right back, observing these degenerate savages locked in the bowels of a ship they were slowly destroying” (281). It is only after seeing children and realizing that the people on the ship are victims of their difficult circumstances that he is able to view them without simultaneously dehumanizing them.

Holsten’s depiction of the bedraggled new generation mirrors the way in which the spider inhabitants are viewed as savage interlopers that do not belong. After first seeing one of the evolved spiders and looking into its eyes, Holsten recognizes a connection with himself and the spider that he has only every felt with other humans. However, Holsten feels as though the connection they

share is a false one that the spider is trespassing into, and this reflects his discomfort with those he cannot understand. The spiders are clearly intelligent beings, but the humans in the novel view the status of intelligence and consciousness as being exclusive only to them, and any other creatures that display intelligence are either not noteworthy or serve merely as larger threats. Upon returning to the terraformed planet after failed attempts to settle on other planets, the humans discover that the spiders, who have been steadily evolving in the humans' absence, have created a network of satellites connected by webs that surround the planet. The crew of the *Gilgamesh* is only able to view this system as predatory and horrific, stalling the planet in a cocoon like prey (384). The humans do not make any attempt to further understand the spiders beyond their surface level fear and aggression. To the humans, it is irrelevant that the spiders may be an intelligent species merely existing in their home. Joshua David Bellin notes that big bug films reflect a desire within the audience to have a land cleansed of a monstrous opponent that is invading their homes (146), and the humans aboard the *Gilgamesh* feel as though the terraformed planet is their birthright that must be purged of its negative influences.

When Holsten initially begins to suspect that the spiders are sentient, his crewmates dismiss him, as this observation complicates their attempts to get rid of the spiders and take the planet for their own. Even after Holsten has made his realization, the spiders that are killed by the humans are described similarly to inanimate objects being broken: "Holsten saw one of the spiders abruptly shatter, torn open by a shot from Karst or one of his team" (429). This refusal to acknowledge the spiders' sentience is indicative of a fear that there could be human-like intelligence elsewhere in the universe, and since it is something so alien they cannot comprehend or relate to it. The humans have only seen glimpses of the spiders and how they behave, and this nebulous lack of knowledge makes it easy for these humans to conclude that the spiders are a threat.

3.2 The Worldview of Spiders

Unlike the animal narrators Caracciolo examines in *Strange Narrators* who are so divorced from human consciousness when in an animal state that it frequently causes feelings of disgust and discomfort within readers, Tchaikovsky's text is more subtle in how it presents its spider narrators. The text engages in constant reminders that the spiders are not human, while simultaneously building familiarity with them. The spiders portray unique mannerisms that would not be found in humans, such as nervously spinning and destroying webs or baring their fangs when threatened. Despite these mannerisms being alien to the human reader, they are present throughout the story, and the spiders' bodies are not made invisible in their interactions. Their very way of communication is dependent on their spider bodies, as they communicate using their legs and palps, as well as being able to communicate over long distances using vibrations on their spider silk. Their unique mannerisms are especially noticeable when interacting with humans. As a crew of spiders infiltrate the human ship in order to stop the humans from attacking them, they notice humans approaching, and the current Portia, a soldier, notes: "The vibrations of the enemy's approach serves as a forewarning of an almost absurd degree" (432). After the spiders capture a human who was left behind by the initial mutineers, they note that the captured human appears mute, as she does not seem to use any gestures or vibrations that would resemble spider speech. When she begins to replicate the palp movements that the spiders use to communicate, but is not able to develop deeper communication with them, the spider scientists determine that this is because the human is a simple creature merely incapable of sophisticated thought. Just as the humans refuse to accept the dignity and intelligence of the spiders, the spiders are unable to view the humans as an intelligent species. Carracciolo notes that "a degree of anthropomorphization can challenge assumptions about the human vs. animal distinction; it can create a tension between readers' familiarity with human consciousness and their recognition of the textually represented consciousness as fundamentally nonhuman" (141). Thus, the spiders serve as a reflection of the

humans and their own society. As the reader views the human through the spiders' perspective, the reader also becomes distanced from the idea of the human. However, as the spiders' curiosity continues to push them towards new knowledge, and through their interactions with Kern, they are able to reconcile their previous misconceptions and build a new understanding of humans.

Unlike their interactions with the passengers aboard the *Gilgamesh*, the spiders' interaction with Kern is much more mysterious. Kern is stuck in a satellite with only the artificial intelligence of the satellite keeping her alive. She views the planet and its inhabitants as being hers; however, she is initially unaware that her project has not gone to plan and that the creatures that are eventually able to respond to her radio signals are not monkeys but spiders. As such, she assumes a certain trajectory for their development, and insists that they follow in humanity's footsteps in order to become a truly civilized species. Meanwhile, the spiders discover the radio waves that Kern has been sending to the planet in wait for a response from the planet's inhabitants, and the messages they receive begin to hold a somewhat spiritual meaning for them: "They do not conceive of it as some celestial spider-god that will reach down into their green world and save them from the ant tide. However, the message *is*. The Messenger *is*. These are facts, and those facts are the doorway to an invisible, intangible world of the unknown" (122). Kern, whom the spiders refer to as the Messenger, serves as a symbol that there is more to discover and learn for the spiders. While the unknown serves as a point of fear for the humans aboard the *Gilgamesh*, for the spiders, the existence of more beyond what they understand is a source of hope. Due to the mysteriousness and significance of the message that Kern broadcasts to the spiders, the spider society initially tries to mold itself into what Kern wishes of them, but due to their way of life and their very existence being at odds with Kern's expectations, this is not sustainable and the spiders do not continue it for long. The spider society is not able to anthropomorphize itself into a form that would please a human, as they are inherently something other. It is only once Kern accepts that they are not the monkeys she believed them to be and begins to listen to them and their output that the relation

between the two species is able to amount to anything. Similarly, it is only once the spiders are able to confront their preconceived notions about humanity that they are able to fully benefit and learn from a completely different perspective.

3.3 Growth and Stagnation

Spiders are frequently used to represent dichotomies in big bug spider films, such as past and present (Salmoise 151), but in Tchaikovsky's novel, they represent the positive present (and even the future); in contrast, the humans are woefully stuck in the past, depending on the technology of their ancestors and traversing space in a ship that is falling apart. Throughout *Children of Time*, the theme of who truly is the alien is used to juxtapose the human and spider society.

Within the text, there are humans that wish to ascend beyond humanity to godhood. This can first be seen in Avrana Kern, as she sets herself within the satellite in order to observe her experiment from above and dictate its progression, and later aboard the *Gilgamesh* when Guyen attempts to upload his consciousness into the ship's interface in order to live beyond his dying body. For humanity, godhood is achieved through technology and artificiality. Kern eventually merges with the computer that keeps her alive, but her human consciousness becomes muddled and erratic. Guyen's already warped mind becomes so focused on preserving himself that he becomes a virus within the ship's interface. Comparatively, the spider technology is more biological and natural due to the fact that their world is not old enough to have oil and coal deposits. This results in the direct comparison of the artificial versus the organic. Even within their living environments, Portia notes once inside the *Gilgamesh* that "the giants must live their lives amongst these rigid, unvarying right angles, entombed between these massive, solid walls. Nothing makes any attempt to mimic nature. Instead, everything is held in the iron hand of that dominating alien aesthetic" (431).

By aligning the spider society with nature and growth, and humans with artificiality and stagnation, Tchaikovsky expands upon the common themes of big bug films and turns them on their

head. In this case, the large alien interlopers are the humans instead of the bugs. The alien and the familiar becomes complicated as humanity becomes divorced from its original form. Furthermore, as the humans become more alien to the readers, the spiders become more familiar due to the nature imagery associated with them, as well as the readers acclimating to their society.

3.4 Spider Society

The spiders' innate curiosity, a trait that has been closely linked to spiders in literature for thousands of years, is emphasized in this spider society, and this trait is only further enhanced by the nanovirus. The spiders, in having completely different biology to humans, are able to thrive in situations that humans would not, and as a result, when they begin learning how to create satellites, including proto-space stations where they would be able to live, they find unique solutions to their new situation:

They are a species that is well made for a life of constant free-fall around a planet. They are born to climb and to orient themselves in three dimensions. Their rear legs give them a powerful capacity to jump to places that their keen eyes and minds can target precisely, and if they get it wrong, they always have a safety line. In a curious way, as Portia and many others have considered, they were born to live out in space (388-89).

It is not their anthropomorphism that allows for them to thrive in their new environment, but instead, their spider qualities that enable them to exist more efficiently.

With their spider nature comes many negative qualities as well. The spider society is not a utopia, and the spider perspective follows the improvements of their society over the course of many generations. Certain behaviors that would not be considered natural in humans, such as the eating of the male spider after mating, are ones that have social implications in this post-nanovirus society. Caracciolo discusses how animal narrators frequently produce feelings of “moral disgust” within readers which is in reaction to morally deviant behaviors. As Joyce Tally Lionarons

describes, female spiders' cannibalism during mating is frequently used as a metaphor for human female sexuality, thus linking the imagery of spiders with deviant sexuality. Not only that, but Lionarons notes that the giant demon spider Shelob and her arachnid kind are intrinsically linked to evilness and darkness in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, as Shelob is linked to death (12). As a result, the female spider behavior of eating mates is challenged in *Children of Time*, and the evolved spider society is further anthropomorphized. Just as humanity society grows and changes, so too does the spider one.

It is notable that while all of the spiders are curious, male spiders of previous generations are not allowed to foster this curiosity into intelligence due to a rigid, female-dominated society. Gendered differences in the spiders and how they manifest in their society prove to be a noticeable conflict, especially for one of the generational spiders named Fabian, who fights for the same protections and privileges as the female spiders with his intellect and skill. This parallel of human sexism manifests in new ways. For example, when a colony of evolved ants, who do not have intelligence or consciousness like the spiders but still serve as a great destructive force, begin attacking and destroying various large spider colonies, the warrior spider Portia considers how they are going to defend themselves: "For a moment she had a mad idea: arm and train males, thus vastly increasing the number of fighters available to Great Nest. But she shies away from the idea instantly – that way anarchy lies, the reversal of the natural order of things" (118). This passage strongly reflects sexist attitudes that frequently appear in human society. Tchaikovsky does not shy away from making this reflection even clearer: as Portia describes how young female spiders occasionally descend into the lower reaches of the city in order to hunt males, she excuses it with the phrase "girls will be girls, after all" (120). When a sizeable portion of the female population dies after the ant colony destroys the Great Nest, the largest spider colony on the terraformed planet, the spider society is forced to acknowledge that spider males have more use than merely as mates to carry on

their traits to a set of offspring. Even so, it takes many generations after the fact for their society to stop viewing male spiders as lesser.

Even as these aspects of the spider society are anthropomorphized, their traits are not ignored, and the reader slowly acclimates to the behaviors so that they hold a different weight than they would in a human society. When the spiders are sending out their first satellite, the mission goes awry and the two spiders on the craft used to release the satellite, Portia and Fabian, find themselves lowering back down to their earth in an overheated craft. They do not have enough air or sustenance for the both of them to survive the descent. In order to save Portia's life, Fabian courts her and out of instinct, Portia feeds on him. While this may seem horrifying and alien to the human reader, within the context of the story and from the perspective of the spiders that has been presented to the readers, this moment of sacrifice is poignant and significant. Therefore, it is important to note that while Tchaikovsky does anthropomorphize the spiders in order to allow them to have a society, the purpose of this anthropomorphism is not to make the spiders appear more like humans, but to bring more clarity to their spider nature. Even so, Tchaikovsky is also able to reflect upon certain traits in human society through the spiders.

In allowing the spiders to have their own thoughts, communication, and social interactions with other spiders, Tchaikovsky builds upon behaviors and traits that spiders already possess. A noteworthy fact is that while most spiders are solitary and do not care for their young, this is not true for all spiders. Certain spiders form colonies as a means of protection from predators, and wolf spiders carry their young on their bodies until they are capable of fending for themselves. In order to allow for the spider society to function, Tchaikovsky merges behaviors from some spider species outside of the *Portia labiata*. The way in which the spider colonies in *Children of Time* are structured is similarly based on actual spider behavior: spiders that are positioned within the center of the colony face lower risks of predation, and as a result, the spiders that tend to be at the center of colonies tend to be the larger mature spiders as well as spiders guarding eggsacs (see Rayor

and Uetz). This is found in *Children of Time* as well – the “social pariahs” exist on the outskirts of the Great Nest, the home for many of the spiders on the terraformed planet, and are therefore more likely to die due to predators, whereas the more valued members of society live in the center. Furthermore, it is precisely the *Portia labiata*’s ability to learn and experiment – qualities that are found in the original spider and are enhanced in the story due to the nanovirus – that the spider colonies are able to grow and thrive.

3.5 A New Society

At the conclusion of the novel, the spiders and the humans reach a reconciliation. The very reason that allowed for the spiders to develop and become more understandable to the human perspective, the nanovirus, is used by the spiders on the humans, thus mirroring their genesis. Now it is not merely that the spiders are anthropomorphized, but the humans are provided with a closer connection to the spiders. This is easily reflected in the change of attitude the humans have when they finally land on the terraformed planet peacefully: “They step down among the tide of spider, whose hard, bristly bodies bump against them. . . . One even puts her hand out, letting it brush across the thronging backs” (447). While the spiders are still viewed as somewhat alien in their appearance by the humans, there is an acceptance and even camaraderie between the two different species.

The final chapter of *Children of Time* occurs multiple generations after the spiders have successfully given the humans the nanovirus. This new generation of humans and spiders are preparing for an intergalactic journey for the first time on a new spaceship named the Voyager. The ship is built of both human and spider technology, and the crew is similarly mixed. There are limits that the humans and spiders both cannot cross in understanding each other, but Helena Holsten Lain, a descendant of the original human passengers, notes that “that is why they need each other” (450). The casual and understanding relationship between the humans and the spiders portrayed

represents a drastic shift in the attitudes of the humans in which differences are still present, but now they make the whole stronger.

The new society relies on understanding the dignity in all living creatures as a way to build empathy and better understand the world. Human perceptions of spiders within the novel kept them from being able to learn from them. The hybrid society of spiders and humans is akin to that of humans from different cultures. While those from the two 'cultures' within the new society may not have a complete understanding of one another, they are able to overcome their prejudice and co-exist.

4. Conclusion

Tchaikovsky both draws from and subverts tropes regarding spiders. Instead of using them to signify death and destruction, they represent growth in his novel. In order to avoid the pitfalls that moral disgust may cause within human readers who are not comfortable with spiders' more predatory behavior, Tchaikovsky chooses to confront these behaviors; however, instead of simply erasing these behaviors completely, he makes them have societal weight. Tchaikovsky also uses the spiders to parallel situations occurring within human society, such as sexism and prejudice. Regardless, Tchaikovsky also emphasizes the importance of spider behavior in how they are able to overcome obstacles and learn.

The image painted of humanity in *Children of Time* is quite pessimistic, as the humans are prone to resorting to violence as a means to approach conflict, and the cynical Kern remarks that even if the nanovirus had been used on humans back when they lived on Earth, they still would have probably had wars and strife amongst each other. That said, Tchaikovsky also presents an optimistic future where humans come to understand the connection that links these vastly different species together.

Ultimately, it is the humans that must learn from the spiders, instead of dominating or destroying them. Kern, who originally attempted to force her plans onto the spiders, finds herself stepping back to allow them to teach her and work in partnership. Thus, *Children of Time* emphasizes the importance of connection and acknowledging the importance of life in all things, including the unknown. As Tchaikovsky notes in the final chapter, “Life is not perfect, individuals will always be flawed, but empathy – the sheer inability to see those around them as anything other than people too – conquers all, in the end” (451).

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