

Shakespeare Seminar

William Shakespeare



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Shakespeare and Dance

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INTRODUCTION

LUKAS LAMMERS AND KIRSTEN SANDROCK

Shakespeare and Dance

Dance was a prevalent art form in early modern culture, and it is a central element in many of Shakespeare's plays. From masques to interludes to jigs to courtly entertainments and weddings: dancing was both a popular entertainment and a ceremonious form of expression. Governed by numerous rules, it is strongly implicated in questions of power. As the editors of the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance* assert, dance, for instance, "neatly created horizontal divisions among classes and vertical distinctions between the sexes" (McCulloch and Shaw, 3). In recent years, the topic has attracted considerable interest in both public and scholarly circles. Different theoretical and methodological approaches have been instrumental to this development. The 'bodily turn' has drawn attention to the significance of bodies in textual and artistic production (e.g., Aebischer; Brusberg-Kiermeier; Shaw), and a focus on dance helps throw into relief the significance of the body as a site of historically variable signifying practices. Likewise, scholarship in the fields of choreography, gender studies, performance history, and musicology (McCulloch and Shaw) has helped to change the ways we think about the relation between dance, movement, music, and text. In some cases, dance is revealed as a crucial means for challenging social norms or contesting specific traditions of a genre.

While some of the papers in this issue of *Shakespeare Seminar* consider dance in its various formations and functions in Shakespeare's plays, others highlight important moments in the long tradition of musical and ballet adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. They all demonstrate that paying close attention to the specific expressive repertoires of different forms of dance and movement can shed new light on Shakespeare's dramatic oeuvre, both as conceived and performed in its own time and as adapted and received in later periods. Among other things, dance emerges as one way of translating Shakespeare's plays across time.

Together the articles in this issue of *Shakespeare Seminar* bear out Jennifer Nevile's observation that "[a]daptation, recreations, replications, and reductions enrich our understanding not only of current and past dance practices, but of their performative strategies and material conditions" (Nevile 6). They cover a range of periods and perspectives. In the first contribution, Valentina Finger focuses on the use of masks in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Reading the play in the wider context of early modern debates about cosmetics and masking, the article shows how the female maskers successfully challenge not only the gendered conventions of dancing but also dominant assumptions about female sexuality. The female characters emerge as "leaders in the social battlefield of amorous interaction," whereas the male characters become followers.

The contributions by Julia Hoydis and Steven Ha both engage with some of the most significant twentieth-century ballet adaptations of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In a close reading of Sir Frederick Ashton's *The Dream*, Ha reveals the subtle

ways in which this version troubles conventional ideals of masculinity in ballet. Adopting a choreographic and intertextual approach, the article shows that particularly Ashton's choreography for Oberon plays upon and ultimately unsettles traditional gender roles and gender hierarchies in ballet. Hoydis's article also examines Ashton's adaptation and reads it alongside George Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1962). Drawing on Elisabeth Bronfen's concept of crossmapping, Hoydis explores the connections between the Elizabethan play, the tradition of nineteenth-century romantic ballet, music, and visual art to argue that the *Dream* takes up a central place in contemporary iconographies of dancing fairy figures. Moreover, Hoydis demonstrates that Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's musical score as well as Victorian fairy painting were central to the development of fairy figures in ballet in general and in adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in particular. The article thus shows how concepts such as crossmapping can help challenge the traditional privileging of the textual over the visual and acoustic.

Maria Marcsek-Fuchs and Marlena Tronicke offer analyses of the larger structural functions of dance in Shakespeare performances. In her contribution, Marcsek-Fuchs "studies the use of meta-choreographic elements and the blurring of medial boundaries as means of characterisation and re-interpretation of Shakespeare's plays" (47). Among the ballets considered are John Cranko's and John Neumeier's *Romeo und Julia*, Christopher Wheeldon's *The Winter's Tale*, and José Limón's *The Moor's Pavane*. As Marcsek-Fuchs shows, some of these works not only reference each other but also invite reflection on the long tradition of ballet in Western culture. Tronicke, like Finger, focuses on a specific form of early modern dance – in this case the jig – but studies its popularity as a "new tradition" of Shakespeare's Globe. This tradition has served the company to reflect on Shakespeare as a cultural icon as well as to intervene in contemporary debates about race and gender roles, as Tronicke illustrates in her readings of a number of Globe productions from the years 2014 to 2019. Following Tronicke, these productions make effective use of the form of the jig to intervene in debates about normative whiteness, gender, and able-bodiedness. Dance emerges as particularly potent and political artform – both in Shakespeare's days as well as in our own time.

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