

Shakespeare Seminar

William Shakespeare



Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft

Ausgabe 17 (2020)

Shakespeare and Dance

Shakespeare Seminar 17 (2020)

EDITORS

The *Shakespeare Seminar* is published under the auspices of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, Weimar, and edited by:

Dr. Kirsten Sandrock, Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Seminar für Englische Philologie, Käte-Hamburger Weg 3, D-37073 Göttingen (ksandro@uni-goettingen.de)

Dr. Lukas Lammers, Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Englische Philologie, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin (l.lammers@fu-berlin.de)

PUBLICATIONS FREQUENCY

Shakespeare Seminar is a free annual online journal. It documents papers presented at the Shakespeare Seminar panel of the spring conferences of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft. It is intended as a publication platform especially for the younger generation of scholars. For the current Call for Papers, please see our website: www.shakespeare-gesellschaft.de

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER

ISSN1612-8362

CONTENTS

Introduction Lukas Lammers and Kirsten Sandrock	1
Not Moving a Foot: The Dancefloor as an Amorous Battleground in <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> Valentina Finger	3
Gender and the Dancing Fairy Body in Frederic Ashton's <i>The Dream</i> Steven Ha	17
Visual Culture and Gendered Histories: Dancing Fairies and Ballet Adaptations of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Julia Hoydis	30
Missing Words, Polydirectional Adaptation and Metareference as Choreographic Strategy in Shakespearean Dance Adaptations Maria Marcsek-Fuchs	45
"For other than for dancing measures": Jigs at Shakespeare's Globe and the Politics of Shakespearean Performance Marlena Tronicke	59
Call for Statements Shakespeare Seminar 2021.....	72

GENDER AND THE DANCING FAIRY BODY IN FREDERICK ASHTON'S

THE DREAM

BY

STEVEN HA

Introduction

Nestled in the hollow of a tree lies Titania, Queen of the Fairies. As if plucked out of a nineteenth-century lithograph, she assumes the appearance of the romantic ballerina with her white satin bodice, tulle skirt, miniature wings, and a crown of flowers. She glows in the moonlight as she rests – but her peaceful slumber is an illusion that masks the sensuous, unruly creature that lies within her porcelain exterior. A cadre of fairies made in her image form a circle in front of this sacred dwelling, first gesturing with a finger to their lips to beckon quiet, then raising their arms in a V-shape and lowering them crossed, as a chilling chorus of voices fill the air to complete a spell of protection for their Fairy Queen. However, resistant to the charm is the compelling Oberon, dark eyed and verdant, who observes from above Titania's resting place. As Titania's court leaves the scene, he creeps in, his diaphanous cape trailing behind him like spider webs. He alternates expansive *arabesques* with a contracted body shape in an upright position and bent knees, rebounding precariously on one leg with each repetition, as the hollow sounds of reed instruments pepper the night. He then whirls into a pirouette and panther-like, slides backward into deep lunges with an arched back, while clutching a magic flower intended to enchant Titania with a love spell. Majestic and alluring, Oberon too has an air of eroticism like his female counterpart – and a streak of wickedness as well. For the magic flower is not a benevolent love spell intended for her to fall in love with him, but rather to enact his devious plan of impelling her to become enamoured with a human transformed into an ass. It is an act of playful cruelty, in the manner of nineteenth-century supernatural beings, whose mischievous behaviour is as essential to their being as is their penchant for the erotic and the grim.

The aforementioned scene is extracted from Frederick Ashton's *The Dream*, a one-act ballet adapted from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹ Choreographed in 1964 as part of a celebration for the fourth centenary of the Bard's birth, Ashton truncates the ballet's plot, omitting the Athenian wedding and instead highlighting the intertwining narratives of the four young lovers, the mechanicals (sans the play-within-a-play), and most predominantly, the quarrel between Titania and Oberon. He chose Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61 (1842), a musical interpretation of the play that integrates elements of romanticism from the

¹ Choreographic analysis for this paper is primarily derived from two sources, the 1978 broadcast by the BBC from the Royal Opera House, London, as performed by the Royal Ballet and featuring Anthony Dowell as Oberon and Merle Park as Titania, and several performances I attended of the American Ballet Theatre, June 21-23, 2012, Metropolitan Opera House, New York.

early nineteenth century (Wright 176). The structure of the Mendelssohn score then guided Ashton's shaping of the narrative. Additionally, instead of setting the ballet in a forest outside of Athens, *The Dream* brings Shakespeare's story into Mendelssohn's time, taking place in a foggy woodland glade in the Victorian era. *The Dream* is not meant to be an accurate portrayal of the period – however, I suggest that Ashton's aggregation of Victorian elements, imaginary or real, still contains lingering traces of its gender discourse that shape how power is mapped onto the dancing fairy body. Dance scholar Geraldine Morris argues that the way Ashton portrays fairies in *The Dream* pays homage to the romantic ballet of the nineteenth century, but is also invested in the romanticism of the same period that sees them as lustful, vengeful spirits ("Slumbering" 266-69). This brings to light two major premises: first, that in recalling the romantic ballet of the early nineteenth century, *The Dream* references a time when ballerinas dominated the stage and second, that Victorian fear and fascination with the supernatural is a central theme of the work. However, *The Dream* is not simply a replication of romantic ballet, as its play on representations of gender is markedly different from ballet precedents. As such, in this paper I argue that an examination of gender roles as represented and manipulated through the dancing fairy body demonstrates Ashton's blurring of traditional gender roles that go against the conventions of classical ballet.

Oberon and Liminality

In this section, I examine the role of Oberon in *The Dream* and bring into focus the ways in which Oberon embodies characteristics of both the masculine and feminine, to then situate him as somewhere in between these categories. Traditionally, ballet classicism and its codification of gender roles insists upon highlighting sexual difference as a way of affirming conventions of masculinity and femininity (Daly 58). However, Regina Buccola notes that in early modern times, the fairy was seen as a character of liminality (43-45). In this light, I suggest that Ashton employs the fairy body's liminality and its evasiveness of dualistic structures to challenge the binary model of male and female gender in ballet. In *The Dream*, the fairy body must also be examined in the context of the nineteenth century, as this era provides the setting of the ballet. Thus, my intention here is to demonstrate how Ashton sidesteps these conventions of classicism and gender, in ways that evidence his inconspicuous rebellion.

The role of Oberon in Ashton's *The Dream* was originated by the dancer Anthony Dowell, then a rising star with the Royal Ballet. It is important to note that Oberon and Dowell are intertwined, as Ashton's choreographic process involved highlighting the individual characteristics of the dancers he worked with and distilling those steps and/or qualities with the choreographer's own movement tendencies as experienced through his body as a ballet student (Morris, "Dance Partnerships" 12). This enabled Ashton to have a more flexible approach to choreography (as opposed to the practice of coming to rehearsals with choreography predetermined) and from this, Ashton developed a unique partnership with Dowell in particular, one that "is not confined to 'traditional' male ballet movement" (Morris, "Dance Partnerships" 13). By "traditional," Morris infers that she means the more athletic manoeuvres and *bravura* steps intended to impress audiences; the skyward jumps, multiple pirouettes, and consecutive beats of the legs –

frequently distinguished in terms of quantity (the higher the jump, or the greater number of pirouettes or beats a dancer can achieve, the more impressive the movement becomes). The popularity of emphasis on athletic virtuosity is articulated by Michael Gard, who theorises that “the male dancer as athlete has come to occupy a dominant discursive position in constructions of who the male dancer is, and what kind of skills the male needs in order to become a professional dancer” (76). At times, Ashton’s choreography certainly aligns with athletic male dancing but as Morris has observed, it can also bend the rules. Oberon is a role that necessitates athleticism, but also other qualities not typically expected of male dancers.

Ashton’s dance passages for Oberon generally sort into two categories: the *legato*, or lithesome movements marked by a smoothness typically assigned to ballerinas and thus characterised as feminine and the *bravura*, choreography that is flashier and more dynamic, and in Ashton’s style, densely packed with elaborate sequences of steps *à terre*, meaning movements that are performed on the floor as opposed to the airborne variety. The inclusion of the *legato* phrases is a direct result of Ashton’s working out the choreography with Dowell, whose tendency for lyricism helped make available this vocabulary of movement (Morris, “Slumbering” 277). In one scene, Oberon approaches a sleeping Demetrius and performs a fiendish, agonizingly slow series of carefully tempered pirouettes in varying positions in a diagonal across the stage. This necessitates a high degree of control so that each turn lands in an extended *arabesque*, soaking up the progressive chords of the orchestra and flutes. The effect of this phrase is ethereal and strangely seductive, and it is a fitting response to the narrative. After dabbing the potion in the sleeping man’s eyes to correct the turmoil of Puck’s folly, Oberon extends one leg behind him to repeat his motif of the elongated *arabesque* directly over Demetrius, creating an illusion of portentous weight over the human and suggesting an invasion of his dreams or psyche. This recalls nineteenth-century preoccupations of artists like Henry Fuseli, who linked terror with the erotic vis-à-vis a number of “grotesques and fairy *femme fatale[s]*” who prey upon humans while they sleep (Silver 21-25). In the context of ballet, this fascination with the besieged slumber has been canonised in the nineteenth-century ballet *La Sylphide* (1832), with its famous opening scene of the ballerina/sylph admiring a sleeping James by the fireplace. However, *The Dream* displays a reversal of roles in which male fairies (Puck and Oberon) meddle in the affairs of humans as they sleep. In this sense, the dancing male fairy body as the erotic aggressor of dreams illustrates how the first category of the *legato* movement for Oberon is utilised to reverse gender roles. In classical ballet it is typically the ballerina who assumes the role of a supernatural and dances the *legato* style; beyond *La Sylphide* the motif appears with the *wilis* of *Giselle* (1841), the shades of *La Bayadere* (1877), and the swans of *Swan Lake* (1877) to name a few. Although each ballet is presented as a love story, the ballerina’s appearance at night or as a vision is consistent with images of the supernatural female haunting men. Less frequent is a supernatural male body intruding upon women’s dreams (Michel Fokine’s 1911 ballet *Le Spectre de la rose* comes to mind), as are male dancers performing *legato* choreography.

The second category of movement that exemplifies gender play in Ashton’s solo work for Oberon is the *bravura*, though it is reconstituted in Ashton’s style. This consists of an amalgamation of steps that resist their more typical gendered assignments, thus

indicating a scrambling of the masculine and feminine. This is most evident in the scene set to the *Scherzo* of the Mendelssohn score, where a virtuosic display of mostly pure dance occurs after Titania falls asleep with Bottom, while Puck settles the Lover's confusion by enchanting the correct pairings with the love potion. This section is primarily a vehicle for Oberon, though it also features Puck as a sort of comic relief. Additionally present are Titania's attendants (Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed) who scintillate in short bursts of *petit allegro*, or smaller jumps and filigree footwork. To be clear, Oberon's dancing throughout the *Scherzo* is as challenging as it is mercurial, bounding and winding through the stage space with incredible speed and dexterity. However, the combination of jumps and travelling turns are in some ways atypical of what is often considered masculine in ballet. Some of Oberon's leaps do indeed suspend with amplitude, but in contrast, one series of consecutive jumps that briskly rotate in the air eschews suspension in favour of forward energy and sharp accents articulated by the legs, demonstrating a quickness more akin to the *petit allegro* dancing of the female fairies. In other moments, Oberon performs diminutive beaten steps and flickering footwork with a certain preciousness that actually abstains from occupying a lot of space; this quality might normally go hand in hand with dancing on *pointe* that is designed to emphasise the mastery of detail and expressivity of the feet by the ballerina. Indeed, the juxtaposition of choreography for Titania's attendants with Oberon's movements highlights the similarities in some of their dance phrases like the footwork and the travelling turns that blister across the stage, of which the female fairies also perform in their own featured sections. What becomes increasingly clear throughout the *Scherzo* is that although specific characters are given particular motifs, the movement phrases in which they arise weave together the characteristics that read as feminine or masculine. Furthermore, while the *Scherzo* prominently features Oberon, Ashton's stylization of the *bravura* is not limited to him alone; that the childlike Puck and the attendants also perform in this manner suggests that the *bravura* is accessible to all, regardless of gender.

The way that Ashton counters the traditional gendering of a step can also reference a specific historical precedent. For example, towards the end of the *Scherzo*, Oberon performs a whirlwind of steps that travel across a diagonal of the stage. This diagonal is interspersed with a sequence consisting of a rapid series of hopping turns in place with the leg held straight behind him in an *arabesque*, the arms changing in oppositional oblique lines across the body and punctuated by a suspended pirouette maintaining the body position while the arms rise to circle overhead. I interpret this cyclonic motif as a reference to the title character of the romantic ballet *Giselle* (1841), in which a young peasant girl dies after learning that the object of her affections, Count Albrecht, deceived her by hiding his betrothal to another. In the ballet, she turns into a *wili* or a vengeful spirit and joins a ghostly sisterhood of love forsaken women whose wrath terrorises philandering men by forcing them to dance to death (*Giselle* however, is magnanimous and saves Albrecht from his fate). In the transformation scene specifically, *Giselle* enters the stage dressed in a gauzy white skirt, covering her face with a veil. According to the libretto, Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis removes *Giselle*'s veil and the latter launches into the aforementioned series of turns, thus completing her phantasmagoric transformation (Smith 235). Ashton's re-purposing of her signature step again speaks to his penchant

for quoting the past and because of its iconic use in *Giselle*, it has a subtle effect of feminising Oberon.

Titania as Matriarch

In order to further clarify the gender play in *The Dream* and how it troubles the associative power dynamics, in this section I consider Titania and her role as the matriarchal leader of the fairy world. First and foremost, there are several layers to identify in terms of delineating the dynamics of power and gender in *The Dream*. Buccola notes how the sociocultural context of the early modern period indicates that audiences of that time would have recognised Titania as an omnipotent figure (60-61). Interpreting Titania as a central figure in Ashton's ballet then reveals how power pivots around her. Additionally, Ashton's nostalgia for the Victorian era and his decision to set the ballet in the mid-nineteenth century necessitates attending to Victorian attitudes towards gender that espoused patriarchal rule over the household as a defining feature of masculinity, one that I suggest motivates Oberon's actions in the ballet. Ashton's ballet aligns with Gary Williams's assertion that the various re-stagings and creative liberties artists have taken with *Midsummer* "have often simultaneously affirmed and challenged cultural practices of the social mainstream," including the codification of gender roles (Williams 2). It is through this lens I consider the politics of gender, as imparted from the time period of the text and Ashton's idealization of the Victorian era, to establish how Titania expresses through movement her status as an equal, if not dominant power in the ballet, which appears more devoted to the idea of the fairies living in a matriarchal society.

To begin, dance plays an especially important role in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in that it is indeed an expression of social power. Rodney Edgecombe notes how this play in particular "is the only work in the [Shakespeare] canon in which the well-being of the cosmos, and of the society that subsists within it, is predicated on the dance" (203). And more specifically in the context of the Elizabethan era, Sidia Fiorato describes how "dance fostered a gendered and patriarchal kind of hierarchy. Masculine performative precedence, conjoined with female containment and subordination in the dance movements, created a balance of opposites which symbolised concord: gender balance led to social harmony" (154). However, in spite of this discourse, the body also contains the potential to move against structures of power, and especially the female body's ability to upend the patriarchy through autonomous self-fashioning (Fiorato 154). In this light, Titania can then be seen as a subversive figure, one whose defiant behaviour issues a challenge to Oberon's power. However, when taking into account the folklore regarding fairies of the early modern period, Lisa Walters suggests that audiences would have acknowledged Titania's sovereignty and argues that "[t]he figure of Oberon, examined through the political lens of Titania's matriarchy, serves as a figure of masculine disorder, where he is more aligned with rebellious and disorderly women in the play" (159). Titania's power also resonates with the political backdrop of the early modern era in which Mary I and Elizabeth I became the first reigning queens of England, going against the precedent of patriarchal rule (Beemer 258-59). As such, I see Titania's defiance of Oberon's wish to acquire the Changeling as not so much a subversive act as

it is assertive of the power she already possesses, “a statement of sovereignty, a challenge to masculine authority” (Fiorato 166). As a matter of coincidence, Ashton’s ballet seems to align with this perspective. I do not mean to suggest that Ashton had a keen understanding of early modern history, but rather that Walters’s argument offers new insight into the ways in which gender and power can then be examined in *The Dream*. Rather than interpret the quarrel between the Fairy Queen and King as a clash of equals, it is perhaps more appropriate to lean towards Walters’ stance that Ashton’s Oberon is actually an outsider to a matriarchal world, emphasised by his frequent presence at the outskirts of the performance space.

Accordingly, the composition of dancers who portray fairies on stage emphasises the matriarchal community in which the ballet takes place. Of female fairies, there is Titania, her four attendants, and a *corps de ballet* of twelve women. Of male fairies, there is only Oberon and his lackey Puck, and the newly adopted Changeling – Oberon’s court is nowhere to be seen throughout the ballet, which for the purposes of the ballet’s narrative, might hint at the reason why Oberon desires the Changeling so much. Oberon is essentially without a following of his own and thus begins the ballet from a place of disempowerment, while Titania’s devotees populate the stage space as an extension of her power. The very presence of the ballet hierarchy – principal, soloists, *corps de ballet* – as exclusive to Titania confirms who is in charge. Indeed, it is Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed who are the first to enter the stage after the curtain rises at the beginning of the ballet, skittering to and fro as their wings quiver in response to their mercurial runs, eventually followed by the *corps*. Oberon, however, lurks in the background, and emerges from the forest shadows. He is a sinister force, whose omnipresence is a vital thread that connects the disparate parts of the ballet’s narrative (Morris, “Slumbering” 274-77). And yet, this opening scene clearly centralises the dancing of the women, exhibiting a social setting in which Oberon is denied access; he is made to be an intruder even in his own alleged domain. Moments later, Titania enters with the Changeling and the argument ensues, the verbal jabs expressed through punctuated kicks and glaring eye contact. When the kerfuffle ends with the fairy King and Queen accidentally throwing the Changeling to the ground, Titania is quick to comfort the boy before turning to her coterie of fairies and with two loud claps, summoning them to follow her off stage. As they exit in militaristic fashion, Titania and the Changeling followed by the four soloists and then the *corps*, they repeatedly turn their heads away from Oberon with haughtiness and disapproval. Oberon is disparagingly abandoned on stage, where he ambles about in confusion and embarrassment for a moment before devising his plan to humiliate Titania in return. For the most part, Oberon is alienated from the various communities he encounters, whether they be fairy or human.

Titania’s power is further underscored by the historical nature of her imagery and Ashton’s devotion to the nineteenth century in *The Dream*. Visually, Titania and the female fairies are modelled after lithographs of the Romantic ballerinas dressed as sylphs, to the extent that the choreographer frequently quotes their poses as sketched by various nineteenth-century artists (Morris, “Slumbering” 269-74). Thus, for Ashton, it stands to reason that a ballet with a story that takes place during the Victorian era would then allude to the fanaticism for the ballerinas that dominated the early nineteenth

century. Mendelssohn's own infatuation with the iconic Marie Taglioni also suited Ashton's enthusiasm for an impression of historical appropriateness (Kavanagh 455-56). I use the term historical appropriateness here rather than historical accuracy in order to clarify that Ashton was not particularly interested in reproducing a nineteenth-century ballet. Instead, his affinity for ballet history served as a source of inspiration for engineering his own aesthetic ideals. In any case, the composer's admiration of the nineteenth-century ballerina then figured as a kind of endorsement or affirmation for regarding Titania so highly in the ballet. However, it is also important to note that Titania's power is not strictly limited to her status as the Queen of the Fairies and that her currency has an element of fear. Folklore throughout the British Isles often noted the close relationship between fairies and witches, and the Victorians feared them similarly to the extent of confusing the two (Silver 175). Carole Silver elaborates:

[B]oth witches and fairies were perceived primarily as groups of wild or uncontrolled women who were possessed of powers that had not been civilised or domesticated. These powers were symbolised by the wild, orgiastic dances both groups performed; dances that suggested the savage, sensual nature of the females who participated in them and, through them, lured innocent men to destruction. (176)

Thematically, Silver's statement is certainly in agreement with Titania's predecessors of the romantic ballet, such as the sylph and her parallel relationship to the witches of the ballet (Aschengreen 7-11; Baner 19). Additionally, the idea of women dancing men to death is one of the major premises of the ballet *Giselle*. In her own way, Titania also taps into this synthesis of witch and fairy. In appearance, David Walker's designs for the original production dresses Titania like a romantic ballerina with the signature tulle skirt and miniature wings but instead of the braids and tidier hair styles of the romantic ballet, her hair is only partially tied back, with the rest hanging in a cascade of curls, "unusual in ballet" (Morris, "Slumbering" 266). James Kennedy of the *Guardian*, in reviewing the 1964 premier of *The Dream* harped on this choice in particular and wrote that Antoinette Sibley's hair "made her look less like a fairy queen than a witch." In contrast, in referring to the same production, Andrew Porter of *The Financial Times* describes her as "young, pretty, touching; delicate in all she does." These opposing views suggest Titania's ability to integrate witch-like and fairy-like qualities, to recall and embody Victorian fears of the supernatural and simultaneously be an object of beauty. In other words, Titania demonstrates her capacity to play the sexualised fairy of the nineteenth century and also to resist eroticization with the underlying terror of the witch.

This empowerment vis-à-vis a kind of strangeness in Titania is also a testament to the qualities that Sibley herself brought to the role as its originator. Initially, Ashton chose her for the role because he did not want Titania to just be "sweet" and saw in Sibley a "farouche character" that lent itself to developing the role to its fullest potential (*Dance Master Class*). Not only was Sibley's temperament well matched to the character, it also meant that in the rehearsal process she brought her own attributes into the movement. For example, the way she elongated her arms beyond the typically rounded shapes of classical ballet are incorporated throughout and obviously sanctioned by Ashton when he saw the way it worked with the character (Kavanagh 456). In the section referred to as the *Lullaby*, Titania and her court perform a dance that coincides with the Shakespeare text, which also serves as the lyrics to Mendelssohn's music. This scene, featuring the

entire cast of female fairies highlights Titania in dizzying, spritely passages of dance that weave in and out of geometric formations with the soloists and *corps de ballet*, and functions as a pre-somnial ritual to protect the Fairy Queen. Titania seems to flicker across the stage space with hops on *pointe* and “unusual, straight leg pirouettes” that Sibley excelled at and she recalls as enabling her to perform with more speed (Kavanagh 456). Speed was a favoured quality of Ashton in general and Sibley perfected these particular turns *en dedans*, or inward toward the body, as opposed to *en dehors*, or outward and away from the body. Later dancers often preferred outward turns as they were generally less comfortable performing the step in Sibley’s manner (Dowell and Sibley, 154). In another section of the *Lullaby*, Titania’s attendants gently lead her upstage toward a hidden hollow underneath a tree, presumably to sleep, and the Fairy Queen brings her hands to her face as if to rub her eyes – she then immediately springs into a series of hops on *pointe*, temporarily thwarting her drowsiness. She pivots in an *arabesque* position before switching feet to extend the other leg in front, immediately slicing it behind her and dropping her weight into a *plié*, while simultaneously swinging her arm forward in opposition to the leg. Her feigning slumber and unpredictable, explosive changes of direction – further accented by another series of hops on *pointe* on two feet that dart from side to side – indicate a wildness, as if to remind both her court and the audience that she is a Queen not easily tamed.

Nocturne Pas de Deux

In this section I examine the *Nocturne* as a continuation of the gender discourse between Titania and Oberon, and how this duet correlates with Victorian perceptions of masculinity. My reasons for focusing on the Victorian construction of masculinity in particular are in response to Ashton’s romanticising of the period and also because of how Ashton’s version of events comments on idealised love, especially by comparing Titania and Oberon to the human lovers who appear to be members of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Whereas Titania and Oberon are the first to exemplify discord in the ballet, Hermia and Lysander instead represent tenderness and harmony. With this duality in mind, I argue that historicising the lovers through the lens of Victorian ideals of masculinity offers additional insights as to what Oberon’s motivations might be for trying to figure out human love. My interpretation is predicated on Oberon’s existence as a fairy who does not understand human love; nevertheless, he attempts to model himself after a Victorian household where he sees himself as a father figure, and Titania and the Changeling as representative of wife and child. Literary scholar Shirley Nelson Garner notes of the play that “Oberon’s wish to have the boy is consistent with the practice of taking boys from the nursery to the father’s realm so that they can acquire the character and skills appropriate to manhood” (Nelson Garner 49-50). In the context of the ballet, one can then interpret Oberon’s pursuit of the Changeling as a way to achieve fatherhood and a sense of family. In effect, he is then asserting a sense of masculinity, as “the home was central to masculinity, as the place both where the boy was disciplined by dependence and where the man attained full adult status as householder” (Tosh, “A Man’s Place” 2). While Victorian social norms typically gendered the domestic space as feminine, they simultaneously espoused the household

as a site of masculine identification and maintained a “belief in the household as a microcosm of the political order [...] [and] underlined the importance of the man being master in his own home” (Tosh, “Manliness” 36). Men were expected to be the masters in the privacy of the home, but beyond the domestic space, their dominance extended to the public sphere as well, where “masculine authority over women and children, as well as over men who were not considered to be fully masculine, had to be maintained in the street and in public places, in order for masculinity to be seen to be preserved and bolstered” (Brady 25). In bringing these historical frameworks of Victorian gender codes into *The Dream*, I suggest that certain elements can then be re-interpreted in a new light. For example, in Shakespeare’s play, much attention is given to Oberon’s cruel prank on Titania (Garner 49-50). However, in Ashton’s narrative of the ballet, it is actually Titania who first humiliates Oberon. Indeed, the quarrel at the ballet’s opening not only sees to her denying him the Changeling, but the argument itself takes place in front of Titania’s court, essentially disgracing Oberon in a public space (and to make matters worse for him, an all-female social setting). For Oberon, this means that his inability to control Titania and confiscate the Changeling emasculates and disempowers the Fairy King. This position of subordination then fuels his desperation throughout the ballet to interfere with Titania’s affairs and in observing the Lovers, it is as if the Victorian household becomes his path to turning the tides to his favour. With Titania and the Changeling at his side as wife and child, he can then establish his household unit and stake his claim to authority. Indeed, it is only when Titania finally gives the Changeling to Oberon, that we hear the familiar fanfare of Mendelssohn’s *Wedding March*, to signal that the marriage is at last consolidated, and the trio exits the stage with Oberon in the center.

Although in Oberon’s estimation, he has seemingly won his bid for power, the *Nocturne pas de deux* tells a slightly different story. Featuring only Titania and Oberon, the duet is their most private moment, making ever distant the sequence of tumultuous events that led them to this juncture. In my own viewings of *The Dream* by the American Ballet Theatre in 2012, I was struck by the intimacy of the *Nocturne*, to the extent that it almost seems forbidden for the audience to bear witness. Accordingly, the choreography of this *pas de deux* capitalises on this introspective quality where Titania and Oberon seemingly dance more for each other than for the pleasure of the audience. What transpires is a danced dialogue between Titania and Oberon, which finds its moments of presenting the dancers as equals (Kavanagh 457-58). Additionally, although the duet contains the formal elements traditional in the *pas de deux* of classical ballets, this one is inflected with Ashtonian twists that discard its gendered conventions (Morris 2014, 280). Traditionally, the *pas de deux* of classical ballet “evokes romantic, heterosexual love on both a literal and metaphoric level, emphasising opposing characteristics and distinctions between male and female” (Novack 43). For example, the classical *pas de deux* begins with a duet, where the male dancers are seen in physically supportive roles as cavaliers and princes, there to assist the ballerina on *pointe*, who creates complex body shapes for display. This is followed by a solo for each dancer to display their skills individually, where the men show off their *bravura* skills and the women perform solos that highlight precise footwork and refinement of the upper body. Then, the *pas de deux* typically ends with a *coda*, a high energy finale to

showcase technical brilliance. In the classical *pas de deux*, what men do as dancers and what women do as dancers tends to be strictly codified. Although the *Nocturne* contains these disparate parts (partnering between Titania and Oberon, solo phrases for each dancer, virtuosic elements), Ashton fragmentizes these elements and reassembles them into one continuous dance, dissolving demarcated sections of the classical *pas de deux* and forgoing the traditional order of duet, male solo, female solo, and coda. Instead, the various elements are broken into smaller pieces and woven back together, guided by musical motifs that link Titania to woodwinds, Oberon to strings, and partnering to the brass or the full orchestra. The end result is a seamless progression of alternating solo phrases interspersed amongst the partnering, which in muddling the classical structure is truer to depicting a conversation between Titania and Oberon, with its various moments of individuality and union. In other words, this *pas de deux* is less about showcasing the ballerina as is often the case in a classical *pas de deux* and more about the characters and the nature of their relationship.

Historians and scholars have attended to the numerous ways that the *Nocturne* illuminates a jostling for power between Titania and Oberon vis-à-vis their pursuit of erotic fulfilment (Vaughan 241; Kavanagh 457-58; Morris, “Slumbering” 279-280; Fiorato 169). Indeed, these tensions are expressed in the choreography through what original dancer Antoinette Sibley describes as a “pulling away and coming together” (Dowell and Sibley 149). For example, Oberon will offer a hand to his Queen and she accepts, but she leans away in resistance at first, before slinging forward and forcing him to pull her back before she strays too far. When they eventually separate, Titania’s movements include quick steps ornamented with shoulder shimmies and undulating arms to indulge her own sensuality, while Oberon’s solo work primarily consists of various leaps that are curved both in body shape and trajectory, emanating a spryness in ecstasy. Tellingly, Titania is often the first to move, whether starting a new phrase or in leading the *manège* (a series of ballet steps travelling in a circular pathway), with Oberon cavorting around trying to trap her. When he manages this feat, their partnered work is a capricious assortment of movements where Titania might fall backwards for Oberon to catch her, or spring erratically into wayward lifts, interspersed with melting collapses into his arms. As the *pas de deux* builds in intensity, she sprints into a running dive, with Oberon catching her mid-air and gently returns her to the ground. Sibley describes how the character is intended to be combative, as if to tease and test Oberon: “She’s as great as he is in her own right, and she’s not going to let him win anything off her until she finds that he is winning, and then she has to completely wilt for him and mesmerise him again” (qtd. in Kavanagh 457). In this sense, Titania retains flashes of authority in spite of Oberon’s temporary victory, and neither fairy is ever completely in control of the situation, competing even for the viewer’s attention in their constantly crossing pathways.

The fickleness and sexually charged nature of the *Nocturne pas de deux* is a curious focal point in that it presents a relationship that does not immediately jibe with perceptions of Victorian marriage as I have previously discussed. Indeed, recalling my argument for recognising Oberon’s endeavour to establish his household contradicts what *The Dream’s pas de deux* actually presents, which is far more egalitarian than patriarchal. However, it is important to note that the companionate marriage, one based

on love and affection rather than social obligation or arrangement defined Victorian ideals of domesticity (Tosh, “A Man’s Place” 27). Although Oberon’s position as a figurative head of a household is important in the context of the ballet, so too is the mutualistic – even if contentious – relationship he maintains with Titania. In one moment of the *pas de deux*, they link both hands and Titania spins into an *arabesque* and tilts her torso forward and extends the *arabesque* leg upward (also known as *arabesque penché*). It is a pose most often performed by women, however, without losing their grip on each other’s hands she turns to face Oberon and they perform the movement together – she having done it first as if to demonstrate how it should be done. When the fairies execute the step simultaneously, they are angled so as to tip forward toward the audience, their linked hands creating a diamond shape, their lifted legs pointed behind them on a diagonal, and forming a lattice design by virtue of their symmetry. It is an ephemeral picture of harmony, when both dancers must be perfectly balanced on their own but also use each other for support. This sequence is repeated albeit slightly faster, indicating the transitory nature of perfection. For the time being, they have achieved a sort of symbiosis, refusing to release their handhold as they perform a frolicsome twirl, with both dancers spinning in unison. This double-handed partnering, a frequent choreographic device of Ashton’s, has an appearance more akin to social dances than classical ballet by forcing the bodies to dance in closer proximity rather than at arm’s length. In total, the profundity of the *Nocturne pas de deux* lies in its wide range of emotions, such as the moments of intimacy to distance, unison and individuality, and shifting power between partners. It is an expression of a love unbridled but complicated, far from an idealised image of perfection.

Conclusion

Our last glance at Titania and Oberon shows the latter gently offering his hand to her, she accepts, and they retire to the hollow of the tree, sinking to the ground into a tightly locked mutual embrace. Curiously, Puck takes center stage and to the final chords, casually shrugs his shoulders with upturned palms, blithely grinning as the curtain falls. It is as if his final gesture signals a nonchalance towards the capriciousness of love and the entirety of the evening’s events. If love is subject to ambivalence, why not the conventions of gender and ballet classicism? An examination of gender, as performed by the dancing fairy body in Frederick Ashton’s *The Dream* indicates the possibilities.

Works Cited

- Aschengreen, Erik. *The Beautiful Danger: Facets of the Romantic Ballet*. Trans. Patricia N. McAndrew, New York: Dance Perspectives Foundation, 1974.
- Ashton, Frederick. *The Dream*. WNET/Thirteen, 1978.
- Banes, Sally. *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage*. London: Routledge, 1998.

- Beemer, Cristy. "The Female Monarchy: A Rhetorical Strategy of Early Modern Rule." *Rhetoric Review* 30.3 (2011): 258–74.
- Brady, Sean. *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Buccola, Regina. *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith: Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006.
- Daly, Ann. "Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 3.2 (1987): 57–66.
- Dance Master Class: Episode 1, Sir Fredrick Ashton with Antoinette Sibley, Anthony Dowell, Karen Paisey, Phillip Broomhead*. Frederick, Ashton, Anthony Dowell, Antoinette Sibley, and Bob Lockyer, BBC Worldwide, 1987. *Alexander Street*. 44 min. <https://video-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/watch/dance-masterclass-sir-fredrick-ashton-and-anthony-dowell>. Accessed 7 May 2020.
- Dowell, Anthony and Antoinette Sibley. "Pas de Deux from *The Dream*." *Following Sir Fred's Steps: Ashton's Legacy*. Ed. Stephanie Jordan and Andréé Grau. London: Dance Books, 1994. 147–157.
- The Dream*. Choreographed by Frederick Ashton. Performed by American Ballet Theatre. Metropolitan Opera House, New York. June 21–23, 2012.
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. "Shakespeare, Ballet, and Dance." *The Edinburgh Companion to Shakespeare and the Arts*. Ed. Mark Thornton Burnett, Adrian Streeete, and Ramona Wray. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. 200–18.
- Fiorato, Sidia. "Shakespeare's 'Complex' Dance Imaginary from Text to Stage: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Frederick Ashton's *The Dream*." *Law and the Humanities: Cultural Perspectives*. Ed. Chiara Battisti and Sidia Fiorato. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019. 153–71. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110670226>. Accessed 29 Mar. 2020.
- Gard, Michael. *Men Who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics, and the Art of Masculinity*. New York: Peter Lang, 2006.
- Kavanagh, Julie. *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton*. New York: Pantheon, 1997.
- Kennedy, James. "Three Shakespearean Ballets at Covent Garden." *Guardian*, 3 April 1964.
- Morris, Geraldine. "Dance Partnerships: Ashton and his Dancers." *Dance Research* 19.1 (2001): 11–59.
- . *Frederick Ashton's Ballets: Style, Performance, Choreography*. Hampshire: Dance Books, 2012.
- . "Slumbering Amidst the Visions: Frederick Ashton's Fairyland." *Comparatio* 6.2 (2014): 263–282.
- Nelson Garner, Shirley. "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'Jack shall have Jill;/Nought shall go ill.'" *Women's Studies* 9.1 (1981): 47–63.
- Novack Cynthia J. "Ballet, Gender and Cultural Power." *Dance, Gender and Culture*. Ed. Helen Thomas. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993. 34–48.
- Porter, Andrew. "The Dream." *Financial Times*, 7 April 1964.

- Silver, Carole G. *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Smith, Marian. *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Tosh, John. *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire*. Harlow: Pearson, 2005.
- . *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Vaughan, David. *Frederick Ashton and his Ballets*. 2nd ed. London: Dance Books, 1999.
- Walters, Lisa. "Oberon and Masculinity in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 26.3 (2013): 157–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2013.779172>. Accessed 19 Nov. 2019.
- Williams, Gary Jay. *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997.
- Wright, Craig. *Listening to Western Music*. Belmont: Thomson, 2008.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel untersuche ich die Inszenierung der Körper der tanzenden Feen in Frederick Ashtons *The Dream* (1964), einer Ballettadaption von Shakespeares *Ein Sommernachtstraum*. Durch choreografische und intertextuelle Analyse argumentiere ich, dass Ashtons Choreografie für Oberon sowohl weibliche als auch männliche Attribute verwendet und so traditionelle Genderrollen im Ballett hinterfragt. Im Tanz mit Titania erscheint er als Mann mit devianter Sexualität in einer matriarchalischen Gesellschaft.