

**SAA St. Louis 2014**  
**'Shakespeare and Dance'**

**ABSTRACTS**

Professor Elizabeth Klett | University of Houston – Clear Lake

**Juxtapositions: Theorizing Dance Adaptations of *Othello***

This paper will explore the “movement conversation” between three texts: Shakespeare’s *Othello*, José Limón’s *The Moor’s Pavane* (1949) and Doug Elkins’ *Mo(or)town/Redux* (2012). Limón’s piece, now considered a modern dance classic, reimagines *Othello* as a taut, twenty-minute formal dance set to the music of Henry Purcell, for Othello, Desdemona, Iago, and Emilia. Elkins’ piece responds to Limón’s by retaining the four-character format and some of the key movement motifs, but uses a postmodern aesthetic drawn from hip hop and various other styles, and a Motown (and neo-Motown) soundtrack. My purpose in this paper is twofold. First, I want to apply some of the current work on adaptation theory (using studies by Linda Hutcheon and Margaret Jane Kidnie, for instance) to dance adaptations of Shakespeare. Elkins’ dance, in particular, proves useful to analyzing adaptation as a *process* rather than a product, since he conceptualizes his choreographic work as continually evolving, and *Mo(or)town/Redux* itself (as the title suggests) is a reworking of an earlier piece. Second, I want to explore the ways in which both dances take on the issues of race in Shakespeare’s play, in the context of how race can be read (or erased) in dance performance. Limón, a Mexican-American, created the role of Othello in *The Moor’s Pavane* and presented a striking physical contrast with Lucas Hoving, the Dutch-born dancer who created the role of Iago. Yet Limón attempted to efface a racially-inflected reading of the piece, claiming that it presented “the tragedy of Everyman.” The subsequent performance history of *The Moor’s Pavane* has likewise evaded race-based casting practices, with white dancers such as Rudolf Nureyev playing Othello. Elkins’ piece, by contrast, insists on the visibility of racial issues within the piece, through the history of Motown music, through its uses of hip hop and breaking, and through “color-sighted” casting practices.

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**Dancing on her Grave? Adding Dance for the Tragic Heroine**

In addition to deciding whether or not to realize the dances specified in the stage directions or implied in the dialogue of Shakespeare’s plays, directors of stage and film versions frequently insert dance sequences of their own devising. This paper will analyze three instances in which a director added a dance for a tragic heroine. In Oliver Parker’s *Othello* (1995), Desdemona (Irene Jacob) performs a solo dance for the pleasure of her husband and the dignitaries dining with him in Cyprus to celebrate the Venetian victory over the Ottomans. A solo dance by an elite woman in such a setting is historically unlikely, and its flirtatious nature may be Parker’s way of making Othello’s later jealousy more plausible. In a highly contrasting moment, Grigori Kozintsev’s *Hamlet* (1964) introduces an apparently reluctant Ophelia being put through her paces by a dancing mistress. Taken together, these two scenes suggest the degree to which dancing is gendered and sexualized in the productions, one suggesting pleasure in the body and its ability to please others with its movement, one foreshadowing the heroine’s repressed sexuality and, indeed, her oppression by a patriarchal society. In Rupert Goold’s 2010 TV version of *Macbeth* with Patrick Stewart, Lady Macbeth (Kate Fleetwood) participates in a dance version of musical

chairs, in which the odd man (or woman) out is forced to dance with a mop. In this scene, we see the waning of her sexual and political influence over Macbeth, as he abandons her to the humiliation built into this pastime. In both the choreography and the context, all these cases highlight the vulnerability of the heroine and, with varying degrees of poignancy, prefigure her ultimate destruction. Further, since dance is unexpected in a tragedy, these sequences gain added power from their being included in the first place. Each sequence emerges as a significant intervention that reinforces an important element of the director's vision.

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### **Drama into dance via music**

Most ballets and modern dances are performed to music. When dance pieces are based on literary texts, choreographers are sometimes faced with conflicting allegiances, since there are, in a sense, at least two different "original sources" to work with, sources that at times may be at odds with one another. In the case of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, this frequently involves Sergei Prokofiev's ballet score of the same name, first composed in the mid-1930s (with a "happy ending") and then revised (as the "tragic end" version best known today) by 1940. Recently the original score was restored by musicologist and Prokofiev specialist Simon Morrison, and a "happy end" version was choreographed by Mark Morris and performed by his company in 2008. In this paper I examine two short scenes from two very different works choreographed to Prokofiev's music: Romeo's entrance from Mark Morris's "happy end" version, and Juliet's entrance from Angelin Preljocaj's "tragic end" *Roméo et Juliette* (1990), along with brief glances at other works for comparison. My purpose is to illustrate how these two choreographers, faced with choreographing to pre-existing music that has its own fully worked-out dramatic scenario and compositional logic (as they are by choosing to use Prokofiev's score, in either version) can create untraditional interpretations without either ignoring or contradicting the music, but, on the contrary, by channeling it towards their intended purpose.

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### **Sprezzatura's Necessary Rupture: Breaking the Codes and Metaphors of Dance in *Romeo and Juliet***

Alan Brissenden reads the scene of dancing at Capulet's house as a crucial source of irony that shapes the meeting of Romeo and Juliet, as it is a "dance in which Romeo and Juliet do not participate together. The pattern of their love is not to be the harmonious regularity of these man-made stars, the torches, or the dancers themselves" (65). This paper will expand upon Brissenden's premise that the tragedy disrupts the expectations established by the dance itself, which evokes ideal cosmic order and successful courtship and marriage on earth. Romeo and Mercutio's puns begin by linguistically rupturing the settled meanings of dance, and they also introduce the language of observing and judging others at this masked dance. The social setting of the dance becomes a dangerous, volatile space filled with many different people watching and noting one another in particularly competitive and erotic ways. Entering with the masked party crashers, Benvolio says, "let them measure us for by what they will" (1.4.9). Juliet attends the dance having promised her mother she will "look [at Paris] to like, if looking liking move" (1.3.97), and, after Romeo voyeuristically watches

Juliet dance, he adds he will “watch her place of stand (1.5.50) afterwards in order to accost her. Dance manuals double as conduct books that try to regulate licit interactions between the sexes. Comparing precepts for interaction between men and women at a dance from sources such as Thoinot Arbeau’s *Orchesographie* (1589) and Fabritio Caroso’s *Nobilità di Dame* (1600) with Romeo and Juliet’s first meeting further demonstrates their transgression of prescriptive social boundaries from the first moment of their relationship. Finally, Romeo’s ruptures of social codes of hospitality, etiquette, and courtship have all the qualities of successful sprezzatura, which wins his lady but cannot endure.

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### **Commodifying the Courtly in *The Two Noble Kinsmen’s* Anti-Masque Dance**

When John Fletcher and William Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (c. 1613-14, printed 1634) was performed by the King’s Men at the Blackfriars, it included a version of the anti-masque morris dance from Francis Beaumont’s *Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray’s Inn*, which had been created as part of the nuptial celebration of King James’s daughter. In addition to better marketing the play to London audiences who wanted to see what the elite themselves saw, re-staging the anti-masque highlighted the liminality of the stage space—its perceived sharing in both the public of the theater and the private of the court. Here, the anti-masque and its dance functioned as bridges between the spaces and experiences of the aristocracy and of those below them socially. In offering this point of contact, the play was selling the opportunity to experience a specific, well-known royal recreation. The inclusion of the anti-masque would have appealed to audience members who wished to attend or participate in an elite entertainment, and the vicarious fulfillment of such desire depended on the complicated status of the morris. Because it is also a court anti-masque, it is not coded simply as rural or common. If the court parodically appropriated the folk dance for the anti-masque, then as the stage re-appropriated the dance for its own purposes, it weakened the core of parody and reclaimed the morris for the public arena; but by making the morris an embedded masque, the stage also applied to it a new sheen of court association.

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