

Abstracts
SAA 2024
Dance on and Beyond the Early Modern Stage

“The Functions of Dance in the 1999 RSC: *The Winter’s Tale* Recorded at the Barbican Theatre, London”

Judith Petterson Clark

"My heart dances, But not for joy—not joy" (WT 1.2.110). Leontes is muttering to himself in the first act of *The Winter's Tale*. It is the first reference to dancing in the play, and in the RSC 1998/99 production performed at the Barbican, it follows, is seemingly provoked by, a beautiful moment when Hermione and Polixenes first sway then slowly dance to the music of a handsome gramophone. The image of Hermione dancing—mature, composed, wonderfully pregnant, yet chaste in her silver gown and scarf—opposes the septic language coming from Leontes on the other side of the stage. It seems natural for the narcissist to complain about his dancing heart. It is hard to believe that this memorable dance is not in the F stage directions, or in other modern productions available on video: the old BBC production, the Robert Ashford/Kenneth Branagh production. Leontes line looks like a belated stage direction. The paper will explore the nature and function of the four dances in the 1998/99 RSC production asking what makes them distinctive and memorable.

“Very Real Imaginary Friends: Immersive Shakespeare and Audience Experience.”
D.J. Hopkins

Hopkins’s article considers the intersection of Shakespeare Performance and emerging media, especially Virtual Reality (VR). Tracing this dynamic relationship from the beginning of the 19th century, Hopkins asserts that the integration of Shakespeare with new media is at the core of a rich history of adaptation and experimentation. This presentation will focus on the ways in which immersive theatre productions, such as *Sleep No More*, are representative of the latest developments in Shakespeare Performance, and continue to influence more recent performances, both live and virtual. Hopkins synthesizes various discourses surrounding VR, and emphasizes the role VR performance can play in expanding our understanding of both Shakespeare’s texts and new media. Hopkins’s research underscores Shakespeare Performance as an important site for critical inquiry, one that focuses consideration on embodied audience experience (whether live or virtual) and the formation of community.

“Shakespeare, Pedagogy, and Movement Practice”
Lynsey McCulloch

This paper, drawing upon the Royal Shakespeare Company’s major research project *Time to Act*, considers the role of dance within Shakespeare Studies. It focuses on movement practice, not as a feature of Renaissance theatre or as a key aspect of the reception of Shakespeare’s works, but

as a pedagogical and interpretive tool. Historically, the teaching of Shakespeare has been dominated by two interrelated practices: reading and writing. Students read a play-text alongside its ancillary materials, such as editorial and critical responses to the play. They then produce a piece of academic writing, presenting an interpretation of the text predicated on their reading. While classroom discussion supports student learning, much of this reading and writing practice is conducted alone and in silence. In ‘graduating’ from this learning context, ubiquitous within school and university settings, Shakespearians maintain these methodologies. To think about Shakespeare as a researcher is to read his works and write about them. However, these ways of reading and writing obscure Shakespeare’s own stagecraft, privileging the extant text over other aspects of theatrical practice, such as dance and movement, music and sound, art and design. Moreover, for Shakespeare and his contemporaries, critique was not situated in the ‘essay’ but in the creative responses of one practitioner to another. In the academy, we may purport to value the wider arts, including dance, but our professional practice often suggests otherwise. Active approaches to teaching Shakespeare—in which students push their desks back, move in space, and work collaboratively to create the world of the play—acknowledge the kinetic, embodied and powerfully immersive characteristics of early modern theatre. And, in developing these pedagogies, educators not only provide an inclusive space for learning, but they produce a forum for the sharing of somatic knowledge, the kind of interpretive work discouraged in most sedentary and discourse-led classrooms. In sharing the impact of teaching Shakespeare via movement, as evidenced in the RSC project *Time to Act*, this paper also asks: how might we translate these pedagogical practices into our own scholarship?

“‘The hobby-horse shall be remembered’: Morris Dancing in *The Witch of Edmonton*”
Linda McJannet

In his appreciative introduction to the New Mermaids *Witch of Edmonton*, editor Arthur Kinney observes that "[t]he play is essentially about village life, . . . the sacredness of the community [, and . . .] the dangers inherent in any threat to its ability to integrate successfully all of its members" (xviii). He points, in particular, to the "reliance on harmony fostered in the morris dance and, more negatively, preserved in the double execution of Frank and Mother Sawyer"(xviii). He also highlights the dance scene (3.4) as "crucial and climactic": it occasions "an abrupt change of mood" and brings all the plotlines together (p. 70, note to 3.4,.0 s.d.). The three plotlines being Frank Thorney's tragic affairs of the heart and the purse; embittered Mother Sawyer's pact with the devil; and morris dancer Cuddy Banks's determination to be the hobby-horse and to win the love of Kate Carter, with demonic help if necessary. Kinney's view is persuasive and can be extended by considering not only the dance as the occasion of communal cohesion, but also the behavior and the ethos of the dancers themselves.

At same time, the dance does rub shoulders with the demonic (in the form of Dog); the gallants poke snobbish fun at it; and other references to dance evoke idleness and sexual dalliance. Although modern productions tend to interrupt the dance with the arrest of alleged murderers, the text of 3.4 does not unambiguously present a "failed morris" (a term that Kinney also uses, xxviii). In some productions, with the help of Dog, Mother Sawyer's familiar, the morris is successfully concluded, and it and Cuddy's unique moral compass leaven the play's dénouement in important ways. Normally, I avoid “fidelity studies” as an approach to modern stagings, but

my investigation so far suggests that, whatever choreography is supplied for the morris sequence, if it lacks the noise, festive spectacle, energy, and physical prowess of an actual morris dance, it will be hard pressed to fulfill its role in the structure and theme of the play.

“Sword-Dancing Revenge”

Jade Standing

At the court of Urbino in 1513, Castiglione watched a dance in the comedy *Calandra* by Barnardo Bibbiena. He describes: “a *moresca* of Jason, who came dancing on the stage in fine antique armour, with a splendid sword and shield... He then sowed the dragon’s teeth, and forthwith there sprang up from the stage antique warriors inimitably managed, who danced a fierce *moresca*, trying to slay him; and having again come on, the each killed the other, but were not seen to die.” (Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino*, 2: 150). Contemporary records attest that sword-fighting morris dances were far from rare. They appear in countries including Italy, Portugal, and England. Long swords, rapiers, daggers, halberds, and swords and bucklers are some of the pointed weapons used in these dances.

My paper traces a connection between the sword dances of England and Europe and the use of swords in the closing acts of early modern revenge dramas, with a particular focus on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge*. Composed within about a year of one another, these plays exemplify two extremes of performance with swords: while the swordplay in the final scene of *Hamlet* is martial and skilled, the use of the halberds, rapiers, and daggers in *Antonio’s Revenge* is stylised, symbolic, and indistinguishable from dance. Perhaps this difference is attributable to differences in fencing knowledge between adult versus boy playing companies, or differences of playing space, playwright’s vision, or audience taste? By comparing the patterns and significations of fencing moves versus sword-dancing, I hope to arrive at a deeper understanding of the role of the player in embodying these movement arts whilst also developing understanding of the variety of performance modes available to revenge dramatists and their audiences.

“Martial Motion: Violence, Disorder, and Dancing in Early Modern England”

Emily Winerock

In the early modern world, in theory, dance symbolized harmony and concord amongst individuals, groups, and the heavenly bodies. However, in practice, the physicality of dance was often cause for discord. “Mixt” dancing of men and women together could lead to illicit sexual encounters, while overly exuberant dancing by groups of men could cause damage to persons and property. Moreover, coordinated movement could feel threatening when dancers overtly or covertly expressed disagreement with authorities or peers. In early modern England, attempts to suppress dancing by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities were prompted, not so much by disapprobation of dancing itself, but by concerns that events featuring dancing were liable to become violent and disorderly.

This paper explores both real and imagined incidents of violent, disruptive, disorderly dancing in Tudor and Stuart England. The first section of the paper examines court cases involving dancing that was either decidedly or potentially disorderly. Cases such as the 1607 *Hole v. White et al* in Wells, Somerset, reveal that authorities and participants might disagree as to whether a particular incident of dancing was “just a dance” or actually a threat of violence disguised as a dance. These cases not only highlight the difficulty of delineating between what was and was not acceptable to insinuate through movement, but they also demonstrate that dance was used and recognized as a form of political protest in early modern England. The second half of the paper considers examples of violent and vengeful dancing as staged in plays such as John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* and *The Malcontent*, contending that these fictional examples of disruptive dancing can help us understand what authorities feared, and why they felt it was necessary to regulate or restrict certain dance practices.