

# Dancing Shakespeare in Europe: silent eloquence, the body and the space(s) of play within and beyond language

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## Abstract

How does one *dance* Shakespeare? This question underpins this collection of six articles, which explore how choreographers have invested space and the play text's interstices to transpose them into ballet pieces – whether contemporary ballet, classical or neo-classical ballet, or works that fall under the umbrella term of contemporary dance. The authors delineate how the emotions translate into silent danced movement and highlight the physical, somatic element in music – beyond spoken language. Through the triple prism of dance, music and a reflection on silence, this special issue invites us to reconsider questions of embodiment, performance and eloquence in Shakespeare's plays.

## Keywords

Shakespeare, dance, performance, physical language

## Résumé

Comment danse-t-on Shakespeare? C'est à partir de cette question fondatrice que les six articles de ce recueil explorent les diverses manières dont les chorégraphes ont investi les espaces de jeu, les interstices du langage, pour leurs propres créations – qu'il s'agisse de ballet contemporain, de ballet classique ou néo-classique, ou encore de ce que regroupe le terme général de danse contemporaine. Les auteurs s'intéressent à la manière dont les émotions se traduisent dans le mouvement dansé, et soulignent la

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dimension physique, somatique, de la musique, au-delà du langage verbal. A travers le triple prisme de la danse, de la musique et d'une réflexion sur le silence, ce numéro spécial sur Shakespeare et la danse nous invite à réévaluer les questions de la corporalité, de la performance et de l'éloquence.

### Mots clés

Shakespeare, danse, performance, langage et physicalité

'and so in their dancing vanish, carrying the garland with them' (Henry VIII, 4.2.82)<sup>1</sup>

To sleep, perchance to dance . . . From court dancing at balls or during celebrations to spirits dancing (as in Queen Katherine's dream, quoted in the epigraph), dance scenes abound in Shakespeare's plays. Alan Brissenden's *Shakespeare and the Dance* (1981) has paved the way for generations of scholars wishing to investigate the connections between Shakespeare and dance and has sparked many fascinating contributions to Shakespeare studies investigating the importance of dance in his works. Studying Shakespeare and dance sheds new light on the relation to the body in the Bard's oeuvre and invites us to reflect on the notion of *embodiment* in a different way: dancing Shakespeare embodies characters, situations, plots, rhythm and metaphors without ever (or only very seldom)<sup>2</sup> resorting to the spoken word. Turning Shakespeare's plays into ballet pieces also refreshes our perspective regarding their *performance*: dancing Shakespeare performs the plays differently from even silent acting, pantomime (like the mousetrap in *Hamlet*), Noh or Kabuki theatre, or contemporary theatre productions that lay strong emphasis on physicality.<sup>3</sup> When dancing Shakespeare on a stage, the playtext and the conventions of early modern theatre engage in a dialogue with the language of dance, which is itself a complex web of different languages (ballet, contemporary dance, social dances like the tango or the waltz and *danses de caractère*) and interballetic references. What this issue wishes to explore is therefore less the place of dance in Shakespeare's works than actually *dancing* Shakespeare; how does one *dance* Shakespeare? How can Shakespeare's blank verse and iambic pentameter be embodied in arabesques, adagios and *pas de deux*? How can performing artists make Shakespeare's words *dance*? How does this dialogue between the playtext and the conventions and interballetic references of the world of dance enrich or refresh our vision of Shakespeare's plays and characters? This special issue of the *Cahiers Élisabéthains* features a selection of essays that attempt to answer some of these questions, by looking into the ways choreographers (and composers) have attempted to make Shakespeare's words dance.

Shakespeare and dance studies have been gaining momentum and visibility in the past few years, as exemplified by the Shakespeare and Dance Project, led by Linda McJannet, Amy Rodgers and Emily Winerock, whose work upholds the legacy of Brissenden's pioneering foray into this field, and expands scholarship on questions related to Shakespeare and dance. The publication of the *Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance* in 2019 marked another important step in Shakespeare and dance studies: it is the

first major publication to offer a comprehensive perspective on the matter. In addition to a first part following the Brissenden lineage, devoted to the study of dance in Shakespeare's works, its second part leads us through a rich and thought-provoking panorama of articles discussing what is at stake when choreographers adapt Shakespeare plays to the ballet stage. The present issue seeks to expand on the many stimulating scientific leads of this publication and contribute to the growing scholarship on Shakespeare and Dance. As the editors of the *Handbook* themselves acknowledged in their introduction,<sup>4</sup> the volume's range is not geographically diverse, largely focusing on Anglo-American scholarship; this selection of articles, by scholars from various European countries and focusing on similarly nationally diverse pieces (with work by choreographers from Germany, Belgium, Monaco, France and Hungary as well as Britain), therefore aims at broadening the scope.

Shakespeare's plays have been a major source of inspiration for choreographers around the world since the 18th century, and new productions keep being created, like the L.A. Dance Project's *Romeo and Juliet* (by the French choreographer Benjamin Millepied), which (as I write) is scheduled to premiere in May 2020 in Paris. As the dance critic Alastair Macaulay wrote in 2014, 'because some Shakespeare plays deal with young love, magic and the elemental, they take readily to dance'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, emotion and affect have been crucial elements in the Western ballet tradition ever since dance theorist Jean-Georges Noverre established them as sacrosanct principles of the *ballet d'action* in the 18th century. The Western classical ballet repertory abounds with tragic love stories (*Giselle*, *La Sylphide*, *La Bayadère*, *Swan Lake*) and their comic counterparts (*La Fille mal gardée*, *Don Quichotte*), where young love triumphs in the face of obstacles; in both cases, the audience feels an intense emotional connection with the stories performed onstage – we weep with *Giselle*, fear Gamzatti's jealousy, laugh with Lise and Colas. This emphasis on emotion, on the transmission and shared experience of affect, explains why Shakespeare's plays so organically fit in the ballet repertoire; ever since Noverre established the expressivity of dance and the emotional charge as a basic necessity for ballet, a constant stream of Shakespeare-inspired productions have graced Western ballet stages.<sup>6</sup>

Among Shakespeare-inspired ballets, *Romeo and Juliet* occupies a prominent place, with more ballet versions than any other Shakespeare play. The story of the two star-crossed lovers is ideally suited to the tragic repertoire; first, its plotline fits particularly well with the conventional patterns of construction of classical ballet. Indeed, tragic ballets traditionally follow the same pattern, with an alternation of group scenes (the exposition scene, the group scenes featuring *danses de caractère* – usually a ball or some royal reception, a staple in 19th-century ballets), scenes where a smaller group dances,<sup>7</sup> and finally the *pas de deux* where the lovers dance together. The structure of *Romeo and Juliet* – its exposition scene, the ball scene, the dynamic fight scenes, the alternation between group scenes and moments of intimacy between the two lovers – makes it an ideal Romantic ballet. In addition, Shakespeare's tragic tale of love features other elements that echo the conventions of Romantic ballet. These include binary oppositions (Capulet vs Montague, which we could compare to *Giselle*'s humble background vs Albrecht's noble origins, or the white swan/ black swan opposition); a restrictive reality

that condemns the lovers (Verona, the family feud) and is a major obstacle to their union (the lovers' union is always impossible in Romantic ballet, either for social reasons – the man is the heir to the throne and has to marry accordingly but the female protagonist has humble origins – and/or because of a curse, as in *La Sylphide* or *Swan Lake*); and finally, moments of respite and hope, when the lovers escape into a dream world of their own in the *pas de deux*, projecting on to the audience the possibility of an alternate reality, an ideal world where they could live out their romance freely.

The popularity of *Romeo and Juliet* in the classical ballet repertoire is such that Juliet has become an archetype in ballet language as well, a point of reference that is often used in ballet shorthand when female dancers learn a role that requires youthful energy and innocence. Whereas instructions for dance and expression inspired by *Odette*, the white swan, invite the female performer to infuse her delicately graceful movements with a hint of fear that always resurfaces, even in the moments of sad abandon in the *pas de deux* with Siegfried, dancing 'like Juliet' means going all-in, dancing with youthful, energetic abandon – jumping in the arms of the male dancer performing the role of Romeo, moving with fierce passion, rebelling against the fate that is imposed on her. Juliet's movements must always express the impetuosity of young love, and an awakening sensuality that is both innocent and playful. Because of its intensity of affect and broad palette of emotions, Juliet is one of the great roles of the classical repertory for ballerinas, and often provides younger soloists or demi-soloists a chance to debut in a principal role in a ballet company, since the youngest ballerinas are often selected to play this role. In the play, Juliet is remarkable as a tragic heroine because she is not a silent victim of fate and the patriarchy; contrary to Rosaline, she has depth and substance, and the love she shares with Romeo is real because she is as active a participant as her male partner in the construction of their romantic relationship. This is also what makes Juliet such a great role in the ballet versions of Shakespeare's play: since the 'age of the ballerina' in the 19th century, the lead female role has been the true star of classical ballet, rivalling (and often eclipsing) her male counterpart in terms of dramatic complexity. In the ballet versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, the dramatic and emotional charge of the two lead roles is as evenly distributed as in the original play and Juliet shines just as bright as Romeo onstage, if not brighter.

If we consider Shakespeare's entire dramatic body of work from the point of view of ballet, it appears that Shakespeare's plays actually provide potentially great roles for ballerinas: Cleopatra could be danced like a more assertive, more regal and tantalising Nikiya in *La Bayadère* – slithering on the stage in a way that recalls Nikiya's undulations in her death scene or expressing her power through swift, commanding movements – while Lady Macbeth could become a black-swan type seductress who goes mad like Giselle but in a darker, less innocent way; the father-daughter dynamics between Miranda and Prospero, Jessica and Shylock or Cordelia and Lear could create some interesting *pas de deux* – challenging the norms of this traditional feature of classical ballet in terms of the age of the two dancers as well as the nature of their relationship. Shrewish Katherine, as well as feisty cross-dressing heroines like Viola or Rosalind, can (and have) supply(ied) choreographers with endless possibilities to interrogate ballet codes and gendered movement. Dancing Shakespeare provides the potential for infinite

creative possibilities that interrogate both the playwright's oeuvre and the world of dance in highly meaningful ways.

Shakespeare's plays are classics, and their popularity with the general public is of tremendous help when it comes to proposing ballet productions that dispense with the spoken word, but the adaptation of the plays into ballets can sometimes be much trickier than in the more straightforward, 'easier' cases like *Romeo and Juliet*, whose integration in the Romantic ballet repertoire is quite natural. It is the case notably with *Hamlet*; as Iris Julia Bührle notes in her article, 'Three *Hamlet* ballets from World War II to the Ukrainian crisis', ballet productions of *Hamlet* have never had the same enduring success as ballets inspired by *Romeo and Juliet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even if *Hamlet*'s psychological meanderings (his famous 'to be or not to be') are known to all, the intricacies of the plot could be lost on a large portion of the audience who is unfamiliar with the play, as could be *Hamlet*'s constant scheming to avenge his father; dancing *Hamlet*, the thinker, the tortured soul, is a lot less straightforward than dancing *Romeo*. While *Romeo and Juliet* are young and lively, and the eponymous play features a lot of dynamic scenes (fighting, as well as love scenes, which translate easily into dance), *Hamlet* is said in the playtext to be 'fat, and scant of breath' (5.2.240) – resolutely unathletic, as the negative comparison to *Hercules* implies in his first soliloquy: 'no more like my father / Than I to *Hercules*' (1.2.152–3) and characterised by stasis (his last monologue in 2.2 is a long self-flagellation about his incapacity to avenge his father:

I,  
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,  
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,  
 And can say nothing. (2.2.568–71)

Male dancers are usually cast in specific roles depending on their body type and particular physique: a tall, long and lean dancer with beautiful extensions and 'romantic' good looks corresponds to what has traditionally been called in the French school, from the *Vestris* onwards, a *danseur noble*. *Danseurs nobles* are cast as the prince most of the time (in roles like *Albrecht*, *Siegfried*, *James*, or *Solor*), whereas shorter dancers with a more compact, muscular body will be cast in roles that highlight their physicality, such as the Golden Idol in *Rudolf Nureyev's Bayadère* or *Mercutio* in *Romeo and Juliet*. *Hamlet* does not correspond to any type in the traditional repertoire of male roles: he thinks more than he acts, and he is not supposed to be athletic, nor long and lean. There are of course roles that are more acted than danced, and which rely heavily on pantomime (usually the roles of the parents of the prince/princess, or the nurse), but it is utterly impossible to build an entire ballet around a static character. Romantic representations of *Hamlet* in 19th-century visual arts tended to picture *Hamlet* as a tortured, *Heathcliff*-type *poète maudit* – a depiction that could fit the bill for a *danseur noble* part – but even if choreographers were inspired by this vision of the prince of Denmark, a substantial challenge remains with *Hamlet*'s lack of actual action. Similarly, because the play relies so much on the spoken word – 'words, words, words' (2.2.195) – the plotline is difficult to convey without resorting to verbal language.

This issue looks into the ways choreographers have tackled challenges such as these, and how the timeless ‘tales of human frailty and sorrow’ (to use Nathaniel Hawthorne’s words)<sup>8</sup> of Shakespeare’s plays have inspired them to create ballets that speak to the human soul without resorting to verbal language. Many choreographers have capitalised on the universality and timelessness of the themes of the plays in their own productions; among the elements that make Shakespeare’s dramatic plots universal and relevant for modern audiences is the political dimension that is present in all his plays. Shakespeare wrote in a context when early modern England was still recovering from the trauma of political unrest it had endured for over a century, with the Wars of the Roses and the issues raised by King Henry VIII’s succession, and at a time when the country was ruled by an heirless queen whose very legitimacy was questioned by many. Several European choreographers have integrated these issues of succession, legitimacy and political oppression by referring to Eastern European dictatorial regimes either directly – as in Radu Poklitaru and Declan Donnellan’s *Hamlet*, where Claudius is portrayed as a dictator wearing a military uniform – or metaphorically. In Angelin Preljocaj’s *Roméo et Juliette*, for example, the Albanian choreographer’s own experience of growing up in a dictatorship is evoked through the power relations at work in the family feud and the constant aggression and oppression embodied by the militia (in his version, the Capulet family rules the city); the futuristic sets designed by Enki Bilal do not directly refer to Eastern European dictatorial regimes but are meant to convey totalitarianism in general, with militia men walking around with clubs and watchdogs. The Hungarian choreographer Youri Vámos, like Preljocaj, eschewed direct visual references to Eastern Europe to focus on building a climate of violence and aggression – this time in a context of gang wars, which strongly reminds us of the transposition into a feud between the Jets and the Sharks in *West Side Story*. As in Shakespeare’s plays, these references to issues of succession, legitimacy, and political oppression are highly gendered in ballet adaptations of tragedies like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet*. In Vámos’s version, there is a strong emphasis on Juliet’s being cruelly crushed by an extremely oppressive and violent patriarchal system, and in Donnellan and Poklitaru’s *Hamlet*, Ophelia is thrown to the floor repeatedly by her brother and father, and by Hamlet in the nunnery scene where, contrary to the play, the choreographers chose to depict her as ‘more [of] an equal partner than a passive victim of Hamlet’s mistreatment’, as Bührlé notes. Adapting Shakespeare into a ballet therefore allows choreographers to question the conventions of gendered movement, partner work and the place of the ballerina in classical ballet, particularly in relation to domination and the depiction of gender violence. In Romantic ballet, the heroine is conventionally a victim of the inconsistency of men and a patriarchal, classist system, which will not allow her to aspire to happiness. In Shakespeare’s plays as in many of the ballet versions, the heroine fights back, defying ballet conventions; Shakespeare’s plays also explore gender reversals extensively, through cross-dressing and challenges to traditional gender roles with bold heroines and shy men (feisty Rosalind and shy, clumsy Orlando, for example), which once again poses a challenge to choreographers, who have to bend ballet conventions and devise a way to alter traditional gendered movement accordingly.

The conventions and codes of classical ballet distribute gendered movement in a way that does not allow a lot of permeability between the feminine and the masculine; from the early days of their training, dancers learn to dance ‘like a man’ or ‘like a woman’. The emphasis of lightness and delicateness is more pronounced for women, men’s jumps are more explosive than women’s (male and female dancers are traditionally split into two distinct gender groups during jump exercises in ballet class), the approach to *port de bras* is different, and more generally, a lot of movements are initiated differently – for example, in the preparatory movement to a series of jumps in *manège* or *diagonale*, it is common for men slightly to thrust their hips forward, shifting their body weight to allow more momentum, something women would never be expected to do because it would be deemed masculine and too sexual to do so. When taking into account the gender-bending dimension of Shakespeare’s plays, choreographers have to rethink gendered ballet movement, infuse feminine restraint in men’s dancing, for example, or find a way to make the ballerina’s movements more masculine, through subtle changes in the approach to movement. Another take on Shakespeare’s gender-bending is to attempt to dispense with gendered movement altogether, as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker proposed to do with *Golden Hours (As You Like It)* (analysed by Andrew Hiscock in this issue) – to the risk of losing legibility for audiences that are accustomed to these gendered conventions in dance.

The articles curated for this special issue also invite us to examine how the gender of the choreographer inflects the approach to Shakespeare’s canonical texts. While male choreographers might grapple with Bloomian ‘anxiety of influence’<sup>9</sup> and engage in a Freudian quest to kill or surpass the canonical ‘father’, we might wonder how female choreographers (who are still a minority in the ballet world, an overwhelming percentage of the work programmed by the great houses across Europe being authored by men) engage with the Bard. Introducing Amy Rodgers’s essay on George Balanchine’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance* explain that

the translation of Shakespeare’s works into dance functions as a rite of passage for twentieth-century choreographers, one that offers both the opportunity for dance makers to place themselves in the ‘great man’ genealogy and to influence, even reshape, that canon through an alternative lexicon.<sup>10</sup>

This is certainly true for Balanchine, José Limón, or Jerome Robbins, whose engagement with the canonical figure of the Bard is furthermore to be replaced in the context of an Americanisation of Shakespeare<sup>11</sup> and the concern both to rival the Bard *and* produce a uniquely *American* vision that would be distinct from the European canon and just as innovative as Shakespeare’s works were in their time. But again, what of female choreographers?<sup>12</sup> In her seminal collection of essays entitled *Women’s Re-Visions of Shakespeare*, Marianne Novy delineates in her introduction how women writers have responded more strongly than their male counterparts to Shakespeare’s protean dimension<sup>13</sup> and more generally to everything that is fluid, shifting and metaphorical in Shakespeare – traits that they associate with femininity, as opposed to an authoritative, less



flexible masculine stance.<sup>14</sup> The work of two female choreographers, Sasha Waltz and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, is discussed in this issue by Jonas Kellermann and Andrew Hiscock respectively: on reading their articles, it appears clearly that both Waltz and De Keersmaeker also drew on the metaphorical, protean dimension that Novy analyses as feminine. In *Golden Hours (As You Like It)*, De Keersmaeker capitalises on the gender-bending dynamics of the original play, while Waltz, using techniques borrowed from contact improvisation, blurs gender lines in the *pas de deux* between Romeo and Juliet and emphasises the fluidity and immediacy of the two lovers' dance.

In her essay on Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Rodgers suggests considering this version as a 'translation' rather than an 'adaptation'.<sup>15</sup> The question of the appropriate terminology to designate Shakespeare-inspired ballets is one every scholar engaging in a reflection on this matter grapples with. Should we talk about translating? Tradapting? Remediation? Is there a way of looking at Shakespeare-inspired pieces without considering Shakespeare's plays as the authoritative, primary text and the ballet text as the secondary one, the adaptation which is supposed to serve, faithfully obey or subvert its authoritative model? *Doing Shakespeare into dance*<sup>16</sup> poses unique challenges which need to be addressed in the field of Shakespeare and adaptation studies:<sup>17</sup> when the plays are 'done into dance', there is of course the matter of adapting the plays to a modern context, using the resonance of Shakespeare's works in popular culture and the audiences' familiarity with the plotlines to reinvent them – and all the other challenges commonly tackled by adaptation studies – but danced versions of Shakespeare also imply a complex heteroglossia, in which the language of the play interacts with the language of dance, the language of the body, and the language of the choreographer.<sup>18</sup> It seems that remembering the inherent volatility and versatility of Shakespeare's texts might be helpful here; Shakespeare's plays are not definitive – they were initially meant to be performed rather than for print – so there should be no requirement to be 'faithful' to the original version, in the absence of a single, original version. The stage of the Globe Theatre was relatively bare, with very few props and minimalistic sets, and with men playing female roles. As such, Shakespeare's theatre relies solely on the powers of imagination of the audience and the evocative power of language. On the early modern stage, his plays were a world of imagination that came alive during the performance and then disappeared, as many of the play's epilogues remind us. If we consider, for example, the prologue to *Henry V*, the audience is clearly invited to invest the interstices of the representation and to engage in a willing suspension of disbelief; to participate in the creative act of making the play come to life onstage.

Many of Shakespeare's plays reflect on what lies beyond language, beyond the 'words, words, words' fixed on the pages of Hamlet's book, beyond the many words Hamlet speaks and is obsessed with, beyond the artificial Petrarchan love discourse Romeo is entangled in at the beginning of the play: Shakespeare's language is poetic, and like all poetry, it creates spaces within language where language can play and breathe, opening new possibilities of expression beyond language. It is this open space of play and poetic licence that choreographers have invested, thus honouring the very purpose of Shakespearean theatre and the constitutive, active role given to the spectator that is intrinsic to Shakespearean theatricality. Shakespeare's theatre invites us to engage in a



transformative process of sublimation; in its chemical sense, ‘sublimation’ means transforming a substance from a solid to a gas, without transitioning through a liquid phase. References to dreams, to spirits, to air and incorporeality, abound in the ‘insubstantial pageant’ (*The Tempest*, 4.1.155) that unfolds in the plays: it seems that when choreographers invest that dynamic, shifting space of imagination in their transformative creative process and let go of any obsessive concern of ‘faithfulness’ to the original text, they are actually doing justice to the spirit of Shakespeare’s plays by honouring the importance of this sublimation process – much more so than when trying to present what might be commonly designated as a ‘faithful’ adaptation. What is striking, when reading reviews and looking into audience responses, is that a certain degree of fidelity to the original plays is still expected most of the time: audiences like to recognise the original plotline and text, and often resent artists who take too many liberties with the Bard’s works.

Andrew Hiscock’s paper, ‘Moving Shakespeare: *La danse narrative* and adapting to the Bard’, brings together two contemporary pieces, Jean-Christophe Maillot’s *Le Songe* (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) for the Ballets de Monte Carlo and *Golden Hours* (*As You Like It*) by De Keersmaecker’s Rosas Company. Hiscock considers the audiences’ responses to these pieces within the overarching framework of current contemporary debates in dance studies on the transposition of Shakespearean plays into the physical language of dance. Starting from Noverre’s definition of the *ballet d’action*, or *ballet narratif*, Hiscock discusses what becomes of Noverre’s principles in cryptic contemporary pieces such as *Golden Hours* – where bold artistic choices almost comically echo the dance theorist’s principles (in the choice of costume, the number of people onstage, and the level of detail in the libretto). The article examines the use of the spoken word in both productions and contrasts the balletic lexis of a more narrative piece, supported by lavish sets and costumes (*Le Songe*) with that of a very abstract one, where the use of props is as minimal as it was on Shakespeare’s stage. Discussing the audiences’ puzzled – and sometimes outraged – responses to the two pieces, Hiscock shrewdly queries the expectations audiences may legitimately have when attending a Shakespeare ‘adaptation’, and deftly tackles the question of labelling any Shakespeare-inspired piece as an ‘adaptation’, when the language of dance is placed in a subservient position to Shakespeare’s original text and cannot seem to exist on its own. Is it possible for audiences to let go of their expectations of what a piece inspired by Shakespeare’s texts *should* look like? Can audiences forsake their compulsive desire to *recognise* the original Shakespeare play in the new dance production? To what extent can choreographers take liberties with narrative structure and still make the piece legible to the audience? Do we absolutely need to mobilise an impressive visual arsenal to make a dance piece legible, or can a Shakespeare-inspired piece exist in the same conditions as his works, played out on a bare ‘unworthy scaffold’, with minimal costumes, sets and props – reduced to its very essence?

In addition to the Rosas Company’s *Golden Hours* (*As You Like It*), this issue focuses on other Shakespeare-inspired pieces that have hitherto received little to no critical attention as far as Shakespeare and dance scholarship is concerned. A lot has been written on the John Cranko, Rudolf Nureyev, and Kenneth MacMillan versions of

*Romeo and Juliet*, which are now part of the repertory of any major ballet company in the world. Two less mainstream versions of Shakespeare's famous tragedy are discussed here – German choreographer Sasha Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* and Hungarian choreographer Youri Vámos's *Romeo and Juliet*. While Waltz's version can be labelled as 'contemporary ballet', incorporating contemporary movement and the language of contact-dance to more classical movement, Vámos's ballet manipulates several dance languages, from Broadway dance to tango, to play on their evocative power for the audience.

Focusing on Romeo's silent solo, Jonas Kellermann's article, 'A breach of silence: Affective soundscapes in Sasha Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette*', examines the affective soundscapes in Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette*, that was commissioned for the Paris Opera Ballet in 2007. In this paper, Kellermann looks into the way Waltz (and Hector Berlioz) explore non-verbal language to echo the play's own reflection on the expressivity of language and what lies beyond language; drawing from Lisa Freinkel's argument that Juliet's unspeakable 'rose' (*sic*)<sup>19</sup> in the balcony scene (which encapsulates the impossible world of her love with Romeo), though 'independen[t] from language', 'does itself signify a world outside language', Kellermann cleverly shows how Waltz and Berlioz have elaborated on that tension within language in Shakespeare's play, through the hybrid form of the 'dramatic symphony', which relies only minimally on the spoken word, and Waltz's use of silence in Romeo's solo. Mirroring Romeo's pragmatic reaction and tense, clipped response to the news of Juliet's death in the play ('Is it e'en so? Then I defy you, stars. / Thou knowest my lodging. Get me ink and paper, / And hire post-horses. I will hence tonight', 5.1.24–6), which contrasts with his previous loquaciousness in the dialogues with his beloved, the silent solo stems from the gaps within Shakespeare's language, the abysses where unspeakable pain breathes and expresses itself beyond spoken language. Danced in utter silence, Romeo's solo lets the audience hear the physical struggles of his grief, through his breath, the sound of his feet slipping and sliding down the platform he is trying to climb – therefore engaging the audience physically in a collective experience of grief and loss, in which the performer's laboured breathing and physical tension resonate with the audience's.

Drawing from his own conversations with the choreographer and the dancers, Mattia Mantellato discusses the creative process and choreographic decisions in Vámos's *Romeo and Juliet*, which premiered in 1997 in Germany. The choreographer, who has also produced musicals (*My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*), was obviously inspired by this genre when he designed his *Romeo and Juliet*, with influences combining classic Hollywood cinema (particularly gangster or mafia movies, like *The Godfather*, for example), the genesis of Sergej Prokofiev's composition of the score, as well as interballetic references. In his article, '(Re)Playing Shakespeare through modern dance: Vámos's *Romeo and Juliet*', Mantellato offers an in-depth study of the creative process and a compelling analysis of the choreographic tropes in the ballet and its dance intertext, combining musicals-inspired movement, classical ballet, and Argentinean tango. Through a meticulous analysis of the choreography, his paper highlights how the systems of opposition in the play are reflected in Vámos's artistic choices, notably in the opposition between the language of the lovers – which is poetic and transformative – and

the language of the group that dooms their love, which is sterile, repetitive and restrictive. While the physical language of the lovers is fluid, passionate and communicative in the *pas de deux*, the group scenes are built around repeated sequences and highly constricted movement.

Even less mainstream in the ballet repertory than those two recent productions of *Romeo and Juliet* are ballet productions of *Hamlet*, which have failed, throughout the history of Shakespearean ballet adaptations, to leave as enduring a mark as those of the story of Verona's star-crossed lovers. Iris Julia Bührlé's article, 'Three *Hamlet* ballets from World War II to the Ukrainian crisis', explores the challenges choreographers face when they decide to embark on such an endeavour. Bringing together Robert Helpmann's 1942 adaptation, Kenneth MacMillan's 1988 *Sea of Troubles*, and Radu Poklitaru and Declan Donnellan's 2015 production for the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow, Bührlé retraces the history of Hamlet-inspired ballets and examines how these three versions fit in the general evolution of the play's status in the repertoire of Shakespeare-inspired ballets. While earlier versions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries portrayed Hamlet as a romantic hero torn between love and duty (with a heightened emphasis on his relationship with Ophelia) that made the ballets more immediately intelligible to the audience, modern versions from the 20th century onwards have presented a more 'psychological' vision, focusing on Hamlet's inner struggles. Bührlé shows how this shift has granted choreographers more freedom regarding the playtext; focusing on Hamlet's psyche has allowed choreographers to take liberties with narrative structure and produce a ballet with great emphasis on the virtual, on the world of imagination and fantasies. Hamlet's doubts, nightmares and visions come to life onstage in a way that resembles the dream-world scenes of classical ballets like *Giselle*'s 'Wilis' scenes or Solor's opium-induced reverie in the 'Shadows' third act of *La Bayadère*. Because we know straight away that this is a dream world, the audience's 'willing suspension of disbelief' is the basic premise of these highly condensed versions (which are not full-length ballets but pieces that last up to thirty minutes). Helpmann uses flashbacks, in which the dying Hamlet reminisces about past events, that allow the choreographer to condense the plot in action-dense sequences and to crystallise different elements of the play in one scene. The dream context in Helpmann's version opens the possibility of a significant blurring of the limits between reality and fantasy, which is particularly interesting when it comes to depicting Hamlet's obsession with female sexuality: as Bührlé notes, the absence of the spoken word makes parental ties less obvious, and the audience does not immediately understand that Gertrude is Hamlet's mother, contrary to theatre productions. Helpmann clearly capitalises on this potential confusion between mother and lover, creating several scenes where Hamlet confuses Gertrude and Ophelia, therefore echoing the play's motif of nightmarish proliferation (associated with female sexuality) – Gertrude's 'unweeded garden' (1.2.135–6) and Ophelia as a 'breeder of sinners' (3.1.120–1). Premiering more than forty years later, MacMillan's *Sea of Troubles* also follows this psychological streak, as the title chosen for the ballet implies; just as fragmentary as Helpmann's version, MacMillan's is more contemporary in terms of choreography and staging, featuring six dancers onstage who change roles (via a change of stage props – crowns for Gertrude and Claudius, flowers for Ophelia, a book

for Hamlet, etc.) as the piece unfolds. The use of costume and props (all the performers are dressed in similar neutral garb and carry minimal props), as well as the fact that performers play several parts, echo the original dynamics of Shakespeare's stage. After a brilliantly detailed analysis of the choreography of both ballets, Bührlé moves to a presentation of the prominent place of *Hamlet* in Russian ballet, which she traces back to the 18th century, when Tsar Paul I (later dubbed 'The Russian Hamlet') lost his father, Peter III, in circumstances highly reminiscent of the death of Hamlet's father. In this section, Bührlé examines the political dimension of these *Hamlet* productions in a Soviet context, and particularly the connection between the 2015 production by Poklitaru and Donnellan and the Ukrainian crisis. Set in a military setting reminiscent of a dictatorship, this full-length ballet (contrary to the previous two productions examined in Bührlé's article) also emphasises the psychological dimension of the play, featuring scenes where Hamlet's obsessions and hellish visions come alive onstage. After a detailed analysis of the choreography of the Poklitaru-Donnellan ballet, Bührlé concludes with the various ways the three choreographers have managed to go beyond a mere transposition of a famous play to produce pieces that not only develop elements underscoring the original work, but also push the limits of choreographic innovation and adaptation.

A question that inevitably arises when focusing on Shakespeare and dance is of course the relation to music; both Vámos and Waltz have produced versions of *Romeo and Juliet* that offer a reflection on the musical adaptation of Shakespeare's play in addition to a reflection on the play itself, thus opening a three-way dialogue between drama, music, and dance. Vámos's *Romeo and Juliet* is intimately enmeshed with the Prokofiev score, referring to its genesis and trying to replicate its variations in intensity. Waltz was obviously inspired by Berlioz's eschewing of the spoken word at key moments in his dramatic symphony in her own use of silence. In her piece, Romeo's silent solo is inserted between 'La Reine Mab', a scherzo (a light, playful movement – 'scherzo' meaning 'joke' in Italian) played by the orchestra alone, and Juliet's funeral march (where the chorus and the orchestra mourn Juliet): in between these two movements where music and text occupy a central place, Romeo's silent solo stresses the isolation of Juliet's secret husband in his grief, whose intensity can only be somatic, unsounded, and unsoundable. Mirroring the chance encounters and amorous *marivaudages* or love games in Shakespeare's play, De Keersmaeker imagined her piece *Golden Hours (As You Like It)* as an 'encounter' between dance and Brian Eno's 1975 'Another Green World', which is played in a loop of five repetitions, thus fitting De Keersmaeker's concern for studying minute variations in movement within repetitive sequences. In this piece, the Belgian choreographer explores silence even more than Waltz, since a good part of the ballet is danced to no other music than the sound of the dancing bodies on stage.

The final two articles of this special issue extend the dance papers' reflection on music and drama as well as the physical, somatic element in music – through the physicality of music onstage and its resonance for the audience. Deanna Smid's paper, 'Spoken song and imagined music in *Cymbeline*', focuses on the role of the 'song' that Arviragus and Guiderius sing when they believe their sister Innogen – disguised as Fidele at that point in the play – to be dead after drinking poison. Like Juliet, Innogen is

in fact only temporarily ‘dead’ at this point, but the brothers’ grief is just as deep as Romeo’s when he learns of Juliet’s ‘death’, and the relation between silence and affect is quite comparable in the two plays. ‘(N)o words can that woe sound’ (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.2.126): the brothers don’t actually *sing*, but speak the ‘song’, which, as Smid argues, ‘creates no consolation for the brothers who do not sing, and may leave the audience similarly discomforted’. Drawing on early modern medical practices about curative music and the theory of musical intervals of discord and concord, Smid compellingly analyses the dramatic and affective role of the unsung song in the play, which provides a tension that is both dramatic and somatic; because the unsung song does not provide the audience with the relief music was thought to bring to troubled minds, the spectators remain in a state of physical and psychological tension – as in Romeo’s silent solo in Waltz’s ballet. The tense atmosphere created by the absence of musical relief also heightens the dramatic power of that moment in the play, and provides the audience with clues as to the events that are about to unfold onstage – thereby increasing their anticipation and affective involvement in the play.

The final paper, Lindsay Ann Reid’s ‘The (lost) tune of “Raging Love” and its reverberations in Isabella Whitney’s *Copy of a Letter*’, contextualises Whitney’s *Copy of a letter, lately written in meeter, by a yonge gentilwoman: to her unconstant lover*, in the overarching early modern soundscape and the material, textual, and aural environments of early Elizabethan ballad culture. Showing how writings such as Whitney’s integrate classical intertexts such as Ovid’s *Heroides* through comparisons with Penelope, Dido, Medea, or Ariadne, Reid delineates how Whitney’s poem interacts with other pieces contained in collections like *A Handefull of Pleasant Delites* or Richard Tottel’s *Songes and Sonettes* to create variations on the theme of the scorned or abandoned woman and explore the many dramatic and affective inflections of the female voice in the ballad.

It is our hope that this issue will spark new discussions and open new perspectives of investigation in the ever-growing rich field of Shakespeare and performance studies.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Notes

1. All references to Shakespeare's plays are to Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds), *The Complete Works*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
2. Some productions, like the Rosas Company production of *Golden Hours* (As You Like It), discussed by Andrew Hiscock in his article for this issue, 'Moving Shakespeare: La danse narrative and adapting to the Bard', use Shakespeare's text sparingly, for instance through short fragments spoken by the dancers.
3. There are too many examples to reference them all here, but we can mention Daniel Kramer's 2017 production of *Romeo and Juliet* for Shakespeare's Globe, which relies quite heavily on the actors' physicality. Jonas Kellermann, a contributor to this issue, discusses this production in his Ph.D. dissertation, "'Thou Canst not Speak of that Thou Dost not Feel": Dramaturgies of Amorous Emotion in *Romeo and Juliet*', University of Konstanz, 2020.
4. Lynsey McCulloch and Brandon Shaw (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 9.
5. Alastair Macaulay, 'To Dance, Perchance to Dream', *New York Times*, 28 March 2014, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/arts/dance/shakespeares-plays-are-a-natural-fit-with-dance.html>> (13 February 2020).
6. Incidentally, Jean-George Noverre was the first to adapt a Shakespeare play to the ballet stage (*Cleopatra*, which premiered in 1765 in Ludwigsburg), as Iris Julia Bührlé notes in 'Shakespeare Ballets in Germany, From Jean-Georges Noverre to John Neumeier', in McCulloch and Shaw (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, pp. 359–86, 359.
7. These scenes allow dancers other than the principals to shine during their moments onstage: a good example of such a scene could be the three big swans and the four little swans in *Swan Lake*, or the fight scene between Mercutio and Tybalt.
8. These are the last words of the first chapter of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986 [1850]), p. 46.
9. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973]).
10. Lynsey McCulloch and Brandon Shaw, 'Introduction', in McCulloch and Shaw (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, p. 7; Amy Rodgers, "'Thou Art Translated": Affinity, Emulation, and Translation in George Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', in McCulloch and Shaw (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, pp. 327–42.
11. See Vincent Broqua (ed.), 'American Shakespeare', *Transatlantica*, 1, 2010, <<https://journal.s.openedition.org/transatlantica/4782>> (13 February 2020).
12. For a discussion of how female directors engage with Shakespeare, see Kim Solga, 'Shakespeare's Property Ladder, Women Directors and the Politics of Ownership', in James C. Bulman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 104–21. Susan L. Fischer discusses this essay in 'Review Article: The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance', in this issue.
13. Marianne Novy (ed.), *Women's Revisions of Shakespeare, On the Responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H. D., George Eliot, and Others* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). In her Introduction, Novy writes: 'Three images of Shakespeare have particular resonance for women's history: the outsider, the artist of wide-ranging identification, and the actor' (2).
14. 'Woolf, H. D., and Cather, like Brontë and Eliot, all associate Shakespeare, explicitly or implicitly, with qualities that they see as feminine . . . one survival strategy for many women writers may have been to construct an image of one male author whose metaphorical gender, at least, was somehow not only masculine. This version of Shakespeare could be a model with whom

- they could feel some affinity – one great counter-example to the image of the writer as stereotypically male. They did not need to define their creativity exclusively as rebellion, in the agonistic model of literary influence Gilbert and Gubar borrow from Harold Bloom; in relation to Shakespeare, they could also see creativity as appropriation’. Marianne Novy, ‘Introduction’, in Novy (ed.), *Women’s Revisions of Shakespeare*, p. 5.
15. Rodgers, “‘Thou art translated.’” (p. 328).
  16. I refer here to a formulation by Isadora Duncan which she used in one of her earliest programs in 1898, before she left the United States to go to Europe. Duncan engaged in that form of ‘translation’, doing concert music (among which Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) or poetry into dance. See Ann Daly, *Done Into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002 [1995]).
  17. For a recent and comprehensive panorama of Shakespeare and adaptation studies, see Bulman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance*, reviewed in this issue by Susan L. Fischer.
  18. This is actually literally a translation, if we consider the various possibilities in which Shakespeare’s texts can be translated into the many systems of dance notation (Labanotation, Beauchamp-inspired notation, sténochorégraphie . . .). The essays collected by Bulman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance* (2017) explore the various questions and challenges raised in modern adaptations of Shakespeare, but while they broach the subject of puppetry (Carol Chillingworth Rutter, pp. 64–86) or opera (Carey M. Mazer, pp. 184–99) and music (Scott Newstok, pp. 369–86, and Courtney Lehmann, pp. 402–21), dance is altogether left unexplored.
  19. I’m using Freinkel’s own typography here.

### Author biography

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