Act Break 3:

Shakespeare / Play / Dance

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A rich kinetic energy pulsates in Shakespeare's plays, pushing the performance forward to the rhythm of the spoken lines. Many non-verbal elements modulate the words in performance. Music and song are the pacemakers of Shakespeare's plots, accentuating critical moments, as Elisabeth Lutteman shows. Mere walking, let alone skipping in a dance, can prompt certain audience expectations, and so does the gender of the perambulating character, Eleanor Rycroft argues in the present collection. Arid typesetting can at best gesture at such dynamics, and this collection makes an attempt with a symbol used in literature and beyond. Variously known as *stroke*, *virgule*, *modulo*, *solidus* or *separatrix*, the slash / expresses relationships in many disciplines, from programming and mathematics to syntax and choreography.[1] The slash offers direction even as it separates.

For Shakespeare's words on stage, we have comprehensive early witnesses in Quarto and Folio, yet their stage directions and speeches give limited insight into dancing as part of the performance. Modern productions have found endlessly creative solutions from a global repository of dancing modes with great success; this essay is concerned specifically with present-day avatars of the dances in Shakespeare's time. When a modern performance of Shakespearean drama seeks to recreate early modern conditions and conventions in the spirit of Original Practice (OP), this affects movement as much as words, casting, or costumes. My essay considers whether Original Dance Practice is possible. It reflects on the challenges of translating elusive past movement into present motion – challenges which require thinking about how dances of the early modern period were recorded in the first place, and what the

[1] Proofreading knows the slash as 'separatrix'.

practical implications might be. Comments by Lieven Baert, a professional performer of early dance, conclude the discussion.

In Renaissance Europe, choreographies usually presented themselves as verbal instructions, although the occasional floor pattern survives. A slash might be used like a virgule to indicate the end of a dance phrase, or it might simply fulfil a decorative function, as in this description of 'My Lord of Essex's Measure', danced in London in the 1590s:

> My Lo: of Essex measure. /
> A double foreward one single syde
> 4 tymes 2 syngles syde a double fore=
> ward repr*i*ns back.[2]

This brief description offers a catalogue of steps (single, double, 'reprins') and directions (forward, backward, to the side). The four lines are what Lieven Baert would call the 'skeleton' of a dance which any reconstruction would have to flesh out. There is no mention of music; no indication of the number, gender, or combination of dancers; no instruction for torso, arms, or head. How should the steps be executed – on tiptoe, sliding, with a spring? All these details must be inferred from circumstantial evidence. From other dance manuscripts of the period, a researcher might conclude that this dance was performed at London's Inns of Court on festive occasions; the choreography's simplicity suggests an inclusive social dance which might even have allowed for conversation during performance.

In later seventeenth-century France, non-verbal notation systems emerged: they charted detailed movements of the whole body (feet, legs, torso, arms, wrists, head) and the dancers' progress along a two-dimensional floor plan. Beauchamp/Feuillet notation was widely

[2] As reproduced in Anne Daye and Jennifer Thorp, 'English Measures Old and New: Dulwich College MS. XCIV/f.28', *Historical Dance* 4.3 (2018): 27–40 (29).

adopted, including in eighteenth-century Britain.[3] With a heavy heel, as it were, the slash found its place:

This icon (Figure 6) indicates the right foot's position in Feuillet notation, the leg turned outward from the hip joint and the toes pointing to the right in an angle of about 45 degrees, the foot's ball, heel and toes flat on the ground. The fact that I need several lines to describe this simple static position points to the icon's visual economy. It also explains why there is so little choreographic description in the early modern period, especially before Feuillet – it takes so much time to verbalize a movement that many professionals appear not to have tried at all to express in words what they performed with their bodies. We know of a mere seven manuscripts of English provenance which contain dance instructions and date back to Shakespeare's lifetime, *c*.1564-1616.[4]

'We may rehearse most obscenely and courageously', declares an enthusiastic Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and later he offers a 'Bergomask dance between two'[5] to Duke Theseus's court. Despite such tantalising announcements in a play which has inspired the greatest number of balletic adaptations in the Shakespeare canon, the hints at dancing remain just that – no step descriptions follow.[6] We know that Helena has long legs (3.2.343), and that Oberon likes to call for a dance in trochaic metre, which would have been associated

[3] Ken Pierce, 'Dance Notation Systems in Late 17th-Century France', *Early Music* 26.2 (1988): 287–99. Gabriella Karl-Johnson, 'From the Page to the Floor: Baroque Dance Notation and Kellom Tomlinson's *The Art of Dancing Explained* [1735]', *Signs and Society* 5.2 (2017): 269–92. Wendy Hilton, *Dance of Court and Theatre: The French Noble Style, 1690-1725* (London: Dance Books, 1981), 69.

[4] Survey in Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 36–49; for the Dulwich College Manuscript (1590s) see note 2.

[5] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks, Arden 3 (London: Routledge, 1983), 1.2.100-1, 5.1.339–40.

[6] For recent excellent studies see Elizabeth Klett, *Choreographing Shakespeare: Dance Adaptations of the Plays and Poems* (London: Routledge, 2017); Andrew Hiscock, '"Come, now a roundel and a fairy song": Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Early Modern Invitation to the Dance', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 97.1 (2018): 39–68.

with dancing in the early modern period. Yet his promising invitation extended to Titania – 'Cóme my quéen, take hánds with mé,/ And rock the ground' (4.1.84–5) – leaves open the nature of this 'rocking'. No *bergamasca* choreography of the period survives anywhere in Europe. Dance historians must bring to bear the full arsenal of circumstantial knowledge of jigs and tetrametric dances that stress beats 1 and 3 to bear on Shakespeare's comedy, and yet there will always be elements which resist and elude all this academic knowledge and call for creative solutions.

Many questions about dance rehearsal in early modern Europe remain 'unanswered'.[7] Communication must have occurred by physical demonstration and imitation, assisted by verbal instruction. Body memory plays an important role in both dance and acting, and an anecdote regaled by a chronicler of Restoration theatre asserts as much with regard to early modern performance legacies. Apparently, the actor Thomas Betterton was unforgettable as Henry VIII in William Davenant's adaptation of Shakespeare's *All is True* (1613):

> The part of the King was so right and justly done by Mr. *Betterton*, he being Instructed in it by Sir *William* [Davenant], who had it from Old Mr. *Lowen*, that had his Instructions from Mr. *Shakespear* himself […][8]

The claim might be treated with a pinch of salt; remarkably, though, this comment accepts that characterization in word and movement is passed on from one generation of actors to the next by *physical instruction* rather than bookish study, from Shakespeare to Betterton via John Lowin, a versatile King's Man who made his name with definitive interpretations of Falstaff and Webster's Bosola.[9] For modern performers of early dance such as Lieven Baert, acting

[7] Jennifer Neville, 'Dance Rehearsal Practices in Early Modern Court Spectacles', *Parergon* 28.1 (2011): 135–53 (153).
[8] John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus* (London: H. Playford, 1708), 24.
[9] Barbara Wooding, *John Lowin and the English Theatre, 1603-1647: Acting and Cultural Politics on the Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 60.

and dancing are similar in the sense that both train body memory during learning. Interestingly, Mark Rylance's attempts to establish OP routines during his time as Artistic Director at London's Globe theatre included morning recitals for actors 'in the way that ballet dancers have classes in the morning'.[10]

If surviving evidence is so fragmentary, is there any point in Original Dance Practice? For Tim Carroll, who directed OP productions, the aim 'to recreate a vanished world is not authenticity, which can never truly be achieved, but a sense of reality'.[11] In the same way, Baert is wary of claims of 'authenticity' in reconstructions of early dance; nonetheless he believes in the value of presenting historically informed choreographies based on early music and dance sources to a modern audience. Though Baert sees limitations in writing down what he regards as a living art, he has rules to which he refers as a 'grammar'. This grammar allows, to some extent, an imaginative reconstruction of historical dance along pre-established parameters. His paramount aim is to create a modern reality which celebrates dancing and embraces an audience of both academics and non-specialists in a joyful experience. Baert accepts that purists among dance historians may not always agree with his choreographic solutions yet the many lacunae in early modern dance sources give him the licence to be inventive; indeed, artistic licence may be necessary when presenting arcane repertory of the past to a wider audience. Perhaps Baert's approach might be elucidated with an analogy from the visual arts. Should a museum present visitors with multiple fragments of a fresco, or pieces of an antique torso as originally found, or should the fresco be reassembled, and the torso be put together with missing limbs supplied? The practice varies across heritage institutions. In sculpture, it is possible to highlight prosthetics, and modern insertions in a restored fresco might be distinguished by a slightly different colour; but how would you do that in a dance?

[10] Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Mark Rylance at the Globe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), interview with Mark Rylance, 196.
[11] Noah Millman, 'Shakespeare in the Original', *The American Conservative*, Jan/Feb (2014), 54–57 (55), Carroll's statement summarized by the critic. The productions in question were *Twelfe Night* and *Richard III*, both starring Mark Rylance, in New York in winter 2013/14.

Should you insert pauses after a few steps and then carry on? How 'authentic' would the effect be? Would this not damage the overall cohesion of the choreography as originally planned? While a dance in 'diplomatic transcription' of the source might be fascinating for an expert to behold, would this not ruin any performance for a wider audience? For Baert, an aesthetically coherent, convincing and appealing performance comes first: as he puts it, critics simply 'have to live with it'. Arguably, Baert's creations could be understood as a 'palimpsest', a twenty-first-century artistic expression bearing traces of older work, in the same way as Restoration adaptations made use of Elizabethan and Jacobean Shakespeare yet managed to please a later, Carolean audience.[12] Baert speaks of 'colouring in' the unknown parts of an early dance: he supplies movements that might, in his experience, work in the given choreographic context. His visual analogy is strikingly close to the image of a miniaturist who completes the blank spaces of a manuscript with adornments. Both artists might, who knows, use /.

Interview with Lieven Baert, 30 November 2022

Professionals who make the study and practice of early European dances their métier are rare. Lieven Baert is a choreographer, dancer, teacher and theatre director who has worked at the Dance Academies of Stockholm and Re Juan Carlos Madrid, Stanford University, the Royal Ballet School of Belgium, and the Royal Opera of Flanders. Over his 40-year-long career, he has directed many productions internationally, including collaborations with Philip Pickett. He was member of the Conseil International de la Danse, UNESCO.

When was your first contact with early dance?

[12] See Amanda Eubanks Winkler's idea of 'palimpsest' in '"Let's have a dance": Staging Shakespeare in Restoration London', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Music*, ed. by C. Wilson and M. Cooke (Oxford: OUP, 2022), 387–408, at 387.

Being on stage is my passion, and as anyone knows who studies performance history, there was not much distinction between dancing and performing in the early modern period. I took acting classes for six years. I was thirteen or fourteen when one of our theatre directors was using *Ancient Airs and Dances* by Respighi, and I liked the sixteenth-century tunes very much: this music is so beautiful, how did they dance to it? I played characters such as Mercutio and Romeo. For me it was natural to think about how characters in *Romeo and Juliet* moved on stage, because there were ball scenes in the play.

There is no school for early dancing, not even today, so you had to look for a professor. We are talking the end of the 1970s. No formal education was available for early dance. You had to look for inspiration elsewhere, and you had to look for people who could move you. So I studied with Barbara Sparti, Andrea Francalanci, Angene Feves, and Peggy Dixon [*all noted scholars, instructors or performers of early dance*].

How do dance forms in Shakespeare's time compare to later classical ballet?

My core business is dancing of the mid-fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, which for me is still a very natural way of dancing. There is technique, of course, but dance isn't artificial in the way we see later in classical ballet. What I like about Renaissance dance is that it's connected to the ground. Although we are jumping a lot, we don't want to 'get high', *en pointe*, with high legs [eg. *grands battements*], which is a classical thing. You have five positions in classical ballet, which is an artificial way of standing: how far you can turn your legs in the hips? Up to the early seventeenth century the posture was developed from a natural position. I had a lot of discussion with colleagues about this: what is natural? how much *turnout* [*posture of the feet in the first position of classical ballet*]? Well, we don't come out of our mother with a *turnout*. Classical dance has many similarities with acrobatics to impress the public; the high legs and pirouettes are more exaggerated, more ornamental and fussy, a bit like circus.

Ballet dancers have a special dynamic in their body. They have been trained in classical movement, not quite fitting for early dance. They are wonderful dancers, but I want to have a different body dynamic and we often need to make a compromise, because it is difficult to change your attitude, your posture, to make that mental switch.

Is early dance easier, then?

Everything done in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century is underrated because it is now mostly danced by amateurs. Most amateurs cannot do double *tours en l'air* [a jump leading to two full 360° turns in the air] and such, but these movements did exist. Most of the dances which Negri and Caroso[13] describe are social dances. The technical part was not so developed in the social dances, but you realise that there was more if you look closely at all the steps which are described in the step sections of Renaissance dance books. You do a 'kick in the air' in Santucci.[14] When I put together galliards of my own, another expert said, 'you invented this', and I answered, 'but it's in Santucci'.

Are there any differences when you work with professionals or amateurs?

Professional dancers don't write down things, they are learning quickly. Often, amateurs in the early dance scene are what I call 'brain people': they want to see everything on paper, they like to have notes. They want to read the steps and learn the dance again. A professional dancer simply repeats the dance on the next day. A choreographer reminds them what they have done, and then they say, 'oh yes, I remember'. They never need paper. They write it down in their body memory. That's the difference between professionals and amateurs: the professionals have body memory.

[13] Fabritio Caroso, *Il Ballarino* (1581) and *Nobiltà di dame* (1600); Cesare Negri, *Le gratie d'amore* (1602) and *Nuove inventioni di balli* (1604).
[14] Ercole Santucci (Perugino), *Mastro da Ballo* (1614), Carina Ari Library Stockholm; a very comprehensive manuscript describing an extensive number of steps and jumps as well as dances.

How much can dance sources of Shakespeare's time tell us about the actual dances?

At a certain point I became quite sure that what was written down was just a skeleton: what dancing masters were able to describe at the time. It was a living tradition, not a written one. As a dance teacher you cannot explain everything. You just do it and your students repeat it. If you look at the measures in the Inns of Court manuscripts: these sources are putting down an outline, giving basic steps, but as a choreographer or dancer you can develop and improvise, and people did that once.

Is it possible to reconstruct movements from surviving evidence?

It is possible to reconstruct movements in early dance but to a limited extent. This applies to every description of the period, however precise, from the fifteenth century to even the most detailed baroque notation of the eighteenth century: there is always a limit to how much you can put on paper. Most dancing masters assume that, at a certain point, everybody knows what to do. When masters like Caroso were asked to prepare *balletti*, they first found out who was a good dancer, and who didn't know what to do; then they adapted the dances in the flow of the rehearsals. Dancing is a process. You change it in the moment. At a certain point there is no time to write it down. As a choreographer, you prepare, of course, but you do change all the time.

How do you deal with absent information in dance sources?

A good question. I've been struggling with many dance historians, who refused to reconstruct and perform a choreography for which they had not enough information. My approach is different. If I arrive at this gap I don't understand, I just colour it in with my knowledge. Let's say, we have a piece of eight measures, and we don't know what the dancers are doing at a certain point: I colour in what is missing with the same style. Also, if you listen to the music

there are second and third voices; there is a basso continuo in the *Spagnoletta*, and you can follow that as a dancer.

When you prepare an early dance show, do you make notes?

I start with some notes. You have to decide which pieces to choose, and how many dances – three, four, six? I try to make a skeleton of my choreography with the material before me. Initially, I develop 75-85%. My weak point is finishing the choreography. I will do that when I see my dancers.

Is it possible, in your view, to achieve any 'authenticity' when performing early dance today?

There is no authenticity in what we do today. We are people from 2022 and the public looking at us is also from 2022. I can perform a torch dance from Negri and follow his instructions but when it was originally staged over four hundred years ago, the Infanta of Spain and Archduke Albrecht were the intended audience in Milan. Audiences today do not relate to the Infanta, the spaces are no longer arranged by social hierarchy, and people have a different view of the dancing they see. The circumstances are different now. For me it is very important that the audience sees the joy of the dancing.

If you play Mozart or Beethoven, you can use a period violin or piano, but the body of a dancer today you cannot replace. You cannot have a body acting in 1588. Of course I can do a very cold reconstruction of Negri, Caroso, Santucci, or Arbeau,[15] but this will never grip the public of today, so I have to think about something that people can be a bit more enthusiastic about. I don't change very much. I start with music of the period. This is very important: the music comes first. I look for attractive music played by excellent musicians. Then I make a choreography, not the other way round. I use spacing and steps from my sources, but I also

[15] Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie* (1589).

take care that I create something that appeals to the public and matches the music. I love to give my audiences an *ohrwurm* [*German for 'earwig', a tune you cannot get out of your head*].

Sometimes people judge me when I don't follow the rules. I'd rather listen to the music for my choreography. I have to do my job. My performance has to be ready by a certain time, and the dancers involved must be able to perform what I want them to do. A specialist may say, 'but this step is not right, it's too short by four centimetres!' or 'this step is misinterpreted!' – but what might be accurate in an academic context wouldn't work in my performance. If you direct an early dance production, you have to convince your experts, but aside from the two, three or four specialists in the room, you also have to convince the other six hundred members of the audience. I know my grammar and I know that even the specialists of the time couldn't write down everything. I feel free to go further. As an artist you have to be creative. Critics just have to live with it.