

MUSIC, SONG AND DANCE: MEDIA COMBINATION IN SHAKESPEARE'S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* AND IN A CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN PRODUCTION

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RESUMO: As produções cênicas de textos clássicos privilegiam as relações dialógicas entre o momento histórico da criação textual e as estratégias de encenação contemporâneas. Diversos críticos argumentam que a convergência entre a alta e baixa cultura resultou em mudança de paradigmas estéticos na encenação teatral na contemporaneidade. Essas premissas também alteraram a política das produções shakespearianas que, na atualidade, tendem a seguir o modelo adotado pelo bardo que misturava múltiplos gêneros, formas de arte e mídias. Em *Sonho de uma noite de verão* e adaptações posteriores para o palco, a música, canções e danças, que pontuam diversas cenas e caracterizam o mundo das fadas, constituem parte integral da *mise-en-scène*. Partindo da premissa que as transposições midiáticas são governadas por atos de mediação, interpretação e (re)apresentação, este ensaio explora as negociações e mudanças de sentido que acontecem na montagem brasileira homônima do texto shakespeariano, dirigida por Patrícia Fagundes, em 2006, que articula novas combinações de formas midiáticas no processo de transmutação do texto para a cena. A mistura midiática *sui generis* que resulta desse processo será analisada à luz dos postulados teóricos de Irina Rajewsky, Júlio Plaza, Julie Sanders, dentre outros.

KEYWORDS: Shakespeare; intermedialidade; combinação de mídias

ABSTRACT: *Stage productions of classic dramaturgy privilege the dialogical relations between the historical moment of textual creation and contemporary mounting procedures. A number of critics argue that the convergence of high and low culture has resulted in paradigm shifts as concerns performance aesthetics in the 20th and early 21st centuries. These premises have altered the politics of Shakespearean productions which now tend to follow the model provided by the bard who also used to mix and combine multiple genres, art forms and media. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its afterlives, music, song and dance, which punctuate several scenes and characterize the fairy-world, constitute integral parts of the *mise-en-scène*. Starting from the premise that medial transpositions are governed by acts of mediation, interpretation and (re)presentation, this essay explores the negotiations and shifts of meaning involved in the process of transmutation and new combination of medial forms in the homonymous stage production of Shakespeare's text, directed by Patrícia Fagundes, in 2006. The resulting *sui generis* medial mixture will be analyzed in the light of the theoretical perspectives of Irina Rajewsky, Júlio Plaza, Julie Sanders, among others.*

KEYWORDS: *Shakespeare; intermediality; media combination*

Introduction

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1594-1595) is one of Shakespeare's most beloved plays as well as one of his most adapted ones, since the questions addressed in it have not lost their interest and urgency. The popularity, regularity of performance and cultural continuity of the play make it highly representative in its universality. The intricate dramatic design and fusion of its hybrid interlocking elements can be pointed out as

axiomatic of its adaptability, i.e., the play's capacity of regenerating itself, since media are charged with specific communicative energies, technical possibilities, and expressive potentials, being more or less compatible with certain narrative substrata, which can be malleable or resistant in terms of mediatic-expressive structuration (GAUDREAULT; MARION, 2008).

The composite structure and multiple diegesis assign an extra level of complexity to Shakespeare's text: instead of a single narrative world, there is an interweaving plurality of universes in the play. Characters from different histories and geographies, from mythology and from fiction are inserted into the different narrative strands, creating multiple levels of reality. The mixture of comedy and tragedy, the juxtaposition of the grotesque and the sublime, the amalgamation of classical, medieval, Romanesque and Renaissance literary traditions, the insertion of farcical elements from the *commedia dell'arte*, embedded structures or *mise-en-abymes*, metatheatricality, parody and self-parody, besides popular traditions, such as the carnivalized festivals of May Day and Midsummer Eve, and elements of spectacle borrowed from court masques which include song, dance and music are responsible for the play's universal appeal.

Shakespeare's strategy of hybridization of disparate elements invites creativity: contemporary Shakespearean productions also overtly mix and combine multiple signs, codes and conventions from different art forms and media. As Laurie Osborne has pointed out, each new mode of production depends on a different generic and medial mixture:

The mixed modes of production [...] demonstrate that the multiple media that are beginning to converge in reproductions of Shakespeare relate directly to colliding materials within the plays. Shakespeare's mixing of language and genres becomes the model for the mixed media that might seem to fragment or diminish the plays. (OSBORNE, 2003, p. 141)

This essay aims at discussing the musical interpolations in Shakespeare's *Dream*, its afterlives in the 17th and 18th centuries, and in Patrícia Fagundes' homonymous production which tended to explore new ways of using music, song and dance, mainly as concerns the intermedial transactions which generate shifts of meaning in the transposition of the Shakespearean text to the stage.

Theoretical perspectives

The politics of stage representation in the early twenty-first century is rooted in contemporary cultural change. A number of critics have argued that the blurring of high and low culture and the effects produced by this convergence are responsible for paradigm shifts in performance aesthetics in our global, image-saturated, electronic age which has witnessed a progressive valuing of the languages of mass media, such as cinema, television, MTV, videogames, radio, pop music and other consumer culture manifestations. Furthermore, poststructuralist discourse has appropriated the concept of intermediality which substitutes and includes the terms adaptation and intersemiotic translation. Starting from the premise that every medial transposition involves acts of mediation, interpretation and representation, the value of an intersemiotic and/or cultural translation of Shakespeare's plays will depend on its interpretative and formal differences from the source-text rather than its fidelity (PLAZA, 2003).

Irina Rajewsky subdivided intermedial practices into medial transposition, media combination and intermedial references. In this essay, I am concerned with music, song and dance in Shakespeare's *Dream* and its afterlives, mainly as concerns

Intermediality in the more narrow sense of media combination, which includes phenomena such as opera, film, theater, performances, illuminated manuscripts, computer or Sound Art installations, comics, and so on, or, to use another terminology, so-called *multimedia, mixed media, and intermedia*. The intermedial quality of this category is determined by the medial constellation constituting a given media product, which is to say the result of the very process of combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation. These two media or medial forms of articulation are each present in their own materiality and contribute to the constitution and signification of the entire product in their own specific way. (RAJEWSKY, 2005, p. 51-52, my emphasis)

According to Julie Sanders (2007, p. 29), "Shakespeare established his own precedent in the theatre for the rich tradition of providing musical settings of his lyrics and verse, since many of his plays include set-piece songs that either invite or require the provision of settings by any theatre company that performs them".

Shakespeare's *Dream* and its musical afterlives

In the section "Lyricism, Music and Dance", which integrates the introductory notes to the Arden edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the play is located between spectacle and dramatic representation. Music, song and dance are pointed out as essential elements in the play (not merely optional extras) that go hand-in-hand with the lyricism of Shakespeare's rhythms and cadences: "When the spoken verse is so various in its forms, and so often lyrical in tone, the distance from dialogue to song is not great. And the songs and dances are no less an integral part of the drama than the set speeches" (BROOKS, 2003, p. cxxii). However, rather than advancing the plot, they generally have a ritual function within the play.

The fairies song 'You spotted snakes' (2.2.9-23) is sung to ward off harm from the sleeping Titania, and 'Ousel cock' (3.1.119) is a popular ballad that Bottom sings to himself to keep his spirits up (LINDLEY, 2006, p. 183;185). The 'round dance' of Titania and the fairies can be regarded as popular and egalitarian. Later on, another dance takes place, which far from celebrating cosmic order, manifests Oberon's triumph over Titania (4.1.84-85), as gendered hierarchy is restored in the courtly couple-dance (LINDLEY, 2006, p. 132). And there is the Bergomask with which the mechanicals end their play, a popular dance in imitation of the movements of the peasants of Bergamo in Italy (LINDLEY, 2006, p. 133). This dance, especially if performed by Kempe, whose fame as a dancer equaled his popularity as an actor, would have been a crowd-pleaser, rather than a demonstration of the mechanicals' ineptitude (LINDLEY, 2006, p. 133).

Julie Sanders, in *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings* (2007, p. 29), also states that Shakespeare established his own precedent; his own use of music and dance in his plays is "not just present for the purposes of dramatic punctuation or emotional underscoring", but functions as an integral part of his dramatic project. No wonder, then, that the impulse to adapt the *Dream* to musical form has remained strong since the late 17th

and the 18th centuries vogue for musical insertions and operatic adaptations. Sanders argues that the Restoration theatre, mainly the productions by William Davenant, Thomas Killigrew and Nahum Tate, adapted Shakespeare's playtexts to suit the new political and cultural tastes of their age. They added songs by contemporary musicians which were not included in bard's texts, producing stage adaptations that were

[...] regularly supplemented not only with new dialogue, scenes and characters, but also with new opportunities for musical performance, in the form in both song and dance. [...] These musical additions were themselves frequently recycled in a Restoration and later eighteenth-century theatre context; David Garrick, for example, was much influenced by Davenant's adaptations and alterations to *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when creating his own influential performance scripts. (SANDERS, 2007, p. 31)

Masques and entertainments of the early Stuart courts can be regarded as formative elements of Davenant's and Henry Purcell's operatic works, since masques also "combined spoken drama, spectacle, dance, and music in a kind of total theatre that is readily recognizable in modern opera" (SANDERS, 2007, p. 126). Furthermore, "the musicological as well as the interpolational aspects of the operatic and semi-operatic versions of Shakespeare that were undertaken during the Restoration and after" (SANDERS, 2007, p. 123) were the direct result of the prohibition of theatre events during the Civil War and Interregnum periods. Drama continued to be performed illicitly at taverns and other venues in the form of drolls, short hybridized and cannibalized versions of a number of plays. This provides ironic evidence that a space of prohibition, can also be "a space of liberation, a site of free play and experimentation, and opera was a key to that process" at that time (SANDERS, 2007, p. 125-26).

These multiple musical versions show that additional music and inset dances and ballets were regular occurrences in the staging of Shakespeare's plays which, in a sense, blurs "the dividing line between the operatic and the theatrical Shakespeare" (SANDERS, 2007, p. 32), foregrounding the two-directional flow between stage adaptations of *Dream* and its incarnation in other media and genres, such as ballet, opera, the Broadway and Hollywood musical.

Musical theatre in cabaret atmosphere: reinvention of music, song and dance in a contemporary Brazilian production (2006)

Patrícia Fagundes' inventive stage-production bears her *auteur* signature. She delights the audience with contemporary stage conventions of narrative diegesis which match the metatheatricality so prominent in Shakespeare's text. Her creative version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* represents a revitalization in relation to the source-text; she takes a series of liberties, such as cuts, additions, interpolations, re-shuffling of scenes or lines, etc. In her mixmedia adaptation, she creates cabaret atmosphere and generates emotional response by foregrounding instrumental music, song and dance as central issues of directorial perspective on the performance. Instead of introducing Mendelssohn's nineteenth-century incidental music or assembling musical scores from a variety of pre-existing songs, the 'soundscape' of the production was music created by a single composer, working in close cooperation with the director.

The dramatic action is entirely choreographed in this stage version of the Brazilian director. The insertion of intradiegetic song and dance numbers substitute parts of the dialogue and are intended to accumulate several functions, such as creating atmosphere, evoking the mood of omitted dialogue and scenes, expressing the feeling and thought of the characters, furthering the development of the action and highlighting turning-points or change of perspectives.

Soliloquies and asides are recycled into musical arias. To reflect emotional states, each of the four lovers has a solo aria. Used in this way, the arias are not only integral parts of the *mise-en-scène*, but advance the plot as well. The transformations are functional, because the dramatic and thematic potential of music is explored at key moments, such as Helena's initial monologue that raises important issues that recur in the development of the play. Homage is paid to musical theatre by appropriating and refashioning conventions from the Broadway musical tradition, a genre which, in turn, has incorporated languages from the opera, operetta, revue, cabaret, among others. There is a musical number in which Titania descends a flight of stairs, singing and dancing, accompanied on both sides by adult male fairies, in imitation of the leading lady of a Broadway musical show. And the addition of elements related to globalized popular culture lend special flavor to the production: each musical number is rendered live in different popular rhythms, such as the tango, blues, bolero, samba, jazz, *passo doble*, *bossa nova*, among others, especially composed for the production.

The updating of the setting from forest to cabaret is highly appropriate if we think about change of cultural imaginary in our time, on the one hand, and fragmentation, discontinuity and alternation of narrative plots in Shakespeare's play, on the other – the plurality of narratives can be seen as a series of sketches or routines of a variety show, interspersed with song, music and dance. It is not only the structural and visual aspects of cabaret routines that are represented in the play: the structure of songs and their lyrics, which constitute the basis for the routines, also have an important role in the performance. The cabaret concept is an adequate metaphor which condenses the main elements of the Shakespearean universe in *Dream*, since the nightclub or cabaret in contemporaneity can be compared to the forest of Arden in festive atmosphere (Midsummer Eve/ May Day) – a dark, mysterious place, where licentiousness, the ludic and the oneiric predominate.

Concluding remarks

Today, “the notion of musical theatre is fluid: in the broad sense, this label has been used to designate every artistic manifestation that mixes theatrical and musical elements, no matter which the proportion of these two components is [...]. The term has been applied to all productions which attempt to integrate music, text and visual elements” (PICON-VALLIN, 2008, p. 20, my translation). It can also refer to a kind of theatre in which music is used for dramatic purposes, where there is an equivalence of musical and theatrical components.

Stage history offers evidence that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* underwent adaptation and reworking since it was first produced in the early modern period. The popularity of the play “since the time of its inception encourages and lays the foundations of a rich and diverse afterlife in terms of borrowings and appropriations, be it in the form of painting, musical, dance interpretation, or film (SANDERS, 2007, p 123). Meaning is generated through the interplay of a number of different codes and conventions from

distinct semiotic systems: music, song, dance, theatre and choreography act on our senses and provide us with aesthetic pleasure.

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