

EXHIBITION REVIEW – *Shakespeare in Art* at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

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Exhibiting visual arts which illustrate literary texts is not so common these days. *Shakespeare in Art* at the Dulwich Picture Gallery thus provided new insights offering re-evaluations of Shakespeare's honoured place in the canon of English literature, whilst simultaneously challenging the modern dislike of story painting. This exhibition demonstrated how informative it can be to move beyond the boundaries of strict academic disciplines. A concentration upon eighteenth and nineteenth-century art indicated how aesthetic attitudes change and also served to immerse the viewer in other cultures during the period 1730–1860, when actors, painters, scene designers, and engravers began the investigation and representation of Shakespeare that continues to evolve.

No better site for the exhibition could have been chosen than the Dulwich Picture Gallery, which has a close affinity to Shakespeare. This was manifest by the positioning of Dulwich College's Elizabethan paintings just beside the entrance to the special exhibition galleries. Thus one began with Edward Alleyn, founder of Dulwich College and principal actor of the rival companies of the Admiral's Men and Lord Strange's Men, along with Ben Jonson, rival playwright and friend of Shakespeare, and William Slye and Richard Burbage, two actors for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company. These compelling portraits show distinc-

tive individuals, but they do not indicate ties to the theatre. Those came later.

Jane Martineau and Marcia Grazia Messina were exhibition curators and there is a well-illustrated catalogue (Merrell Publishers). Martineau's 'Bardolatry' and Jonathan Bate's 'The Shakespeare Phenomenon' describe the circumstances of the exhibition's conception. Enthusiasm for Shakespeare gained momentum in the eighteenth century through the many efforts of David Garrick as actor and promoter. Fittingly, images of him dominate the early theatrical paintings. Benjamin Wilson's *David Garrick as Romeo*, *George Anne Bellamy as Juliet in David Garrick's adaptation of 'Romeo and Juliet' of 1748* (1757) is a remarkable document of stage performance at this time; it shows not only the actors' gestures of surprise and greeting (Juliet is awake and sitting up) and Garrick's typical stance with legs apart, but also how Shakespeare's 'inner stage' survived in the Capulet tomb, which is brightly lit by a lamp, while the moon shines stage left, the right of the picture. Muted browns, representing the textures of stone and wood, along with the black of Garrick's costume, heighten the effect of a night scene. Johann Zoffany's *David Garrick as Macbeth and Hannah Pritchard as Lady Macbeth* (c 1768) makes a fascinating comparison. Here the characters, again in modern costume, are in

bright colours: a white satin gown, a blue coat, heavily bordered in gold, a golden waistcoat, red breeches, white stockings. The two figures pull away from each other as Lady Macbeth urges her husband to return the daggers. Garrick's short stature is undeniable, since Mrs Pritchard is almost a head taller, but the energy in his posture, with one knee bent, suggests a dynamic performer. The setting is a Gothic castle, a commonplace at the time, but with armour and a carved door; light streams from the slain Duncan's chamber to illuminate the actors, while the storm lights a large window behind them.

Although Hogarth's painting of *Garrick as Richard III* was not in the exhibition, there was Nathaniel Dance's work of 1771, to show the actor in historical costume (as the part was always played) with sword raised on the battlefield instead of in his tent before battle. The exhibition provided other impressions of this popular Shakespearean role: Charles Robert Leslie's *George Frederick Cooke as Richard III* (1813) and Samuel Drummond's *Edmund Kean as Richard III* (c 1814), both examples of the Romantic vision of Shakespeare that was also widespread in Europe. In France Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Moreau and Théodore Chassériau expressed enthusiasm for *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, also inspired by the vogue for Sir Walter Scott, whose novels were widely admired. The English literary tradition is also emphasised in *Sir Walter Scott at Shakespeare's Tomb* (1840–45), attributed to David Roberts. This memorable image of Shakespeare himself marks Scott's identification (including the same initials) with the playwright, seen in the famous bust.

Another homage is William Blake's *Imaginary Portrait of Shakespeare* (1800–03); the head is based on the illustration in the First Folio, but surrounded by a wreath and flanked by small scenes from *Macbeth*.

Preferred plays are suggested by the number of paintings in the exhibition of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*. An early example is William Hogarth's *A Scene from The Tempest* (c 1735) that brings together all the principal characters. Miranda is reminiscent of the Virgin Mary in both the colour of her costume and her pose (giving milk to a lamb from a shell that echoes the throne chair on which she sits), an elegant Ferdinand bows to her with joined palms, while a monstrous Caliban glowers on the opposite side; at the centre the magician Prospero stands protectively. Similarly, Millais' *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1849–50) comes from the text rather than a performance. One of his earliest works executed with Pre-Raphaelite principles, it is remarkable for the precision of details painted from nature and for the imaginative treatment of a



Figure 1 Henry Fuseli, *The Weird Sisters, Macbeth*, 1783, Royal Shakespeare Theatre



green Ariel flying on the backs of blue-eyed, gnome-faced bats, so that it is an arresting illustration for the catalogue cover. Daniel Maclise's *Priscilla Horton as Ariel* (1838–39) is an alternative of an actual actress in short diaphanous costume.

Henry Fuseli was, without doubt, the most prolific and daring creator of images from and for Shakespeare; a strength of the exhibition is that it includes several fine examples of his work. From *Macbeth* come *The Three Weird Sisters* (c 1783, figure 1), a disturbing and bold representation selected for the catalogue frontispiece, and *Lady Macbeth seizing the Daggers* (1812), a brilliant elaboration on an earlier painting of Garrick and Mrs Pritchard in the roles. Fuseli's several evocations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are represented by *Titania embracing Bottom*

(1792–93, figure 2), chosen for the catalogue's back cover.

Much less familiar is his *The Vision of Queen Katharine* (1781), a scene from *Henry VIII* (Act IV, scene ii, 81–94) that is mystical rather than nightmarish. Fuseli was the first to paint the scene, and the exhibition shows how others treated this play, which became very popular. Blake's watercolour of the same title (c 1790–93) is similar in tone. In contrast, George Henry Harlow provided a remarkable record of performance in *The Trial of Queen Katherine* (1817) played by the Kemble family, featuring Sarah Siddons as the Queen, and recording Victorian enthusiasm for authentic period costume and spectacle. The capabilities of Covent Garden are well shown in Henry Andrews' painting of the trial scene (Act II, scene iv), perhaps

from Kemble's last season as manager in 1831. Andrews shows the boxes and pit as well as the full height and depth of the stage. The Grieve family designed the scenery. *Eight designs for A Midsummer Night's Dream* show the elaborateness of their work and explain cuts in the text to accommodate their complex grandeur – a conflict still faced by directors and set designers.

Zoffany, who is well represented in



Figure 2 Henry Fuseli, *Titania embraces Bottom*, 1792–93, Kunsthau, Zurich

the exhibition, did much to create the vogue for the theatrical conversation piece, engravings of paintings, most fully realised in the Shakespeare Galleries of John Boydell, which opened in London in 1789, and James Woodmason in 1792 in Dublin. Boydell and Woodmason commissioned pictures by many famous artists that were circulated through engravings to a wider audience. Essays by Robin Hamlyn and David Alexander explain how prints made Shakespeare available to wider audiences.

Some critics perceived in the exhibition a lack of 'great' and 'famous' paintings, but many pictures gave this the lie, especially those of Henry Fuseli. The catalogue entries include the works on exhibition in Ferrara

from 16 February to 15 June 2003 as well as those shown at Dulwich. It has eleven articles (not previously mentioned are Christopher Baugh on staging, John Warrack on music, Brian Alien on early illustrators, Desmond Shawe-Taylor on theatrical painting, Marcia Grazia Messina on the Sublime and Romantic painting in Europe, John Christian on Victorian art) as well as illustrations of many important examples not exhibited. All of this indicates that 'Shakespeare in Art' is a topic worthy of additional exploration.

Shakespeare in Art was on show at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London from 16 July to 19 October 2003