

Research Statement

My current research project, 'Women and Martyrdom in the Religious Drama of the Abrahamic Traditions' ('WOMARD', SNSF-funded 2024-2028) compares the traditional religious drama of Judaism, Christianity, and Shia Islam. Although intriguing connections exist among these dramatic traditions, comparative study has been hampered until now by the range of languages involved, and the inaccessibility of the manuscripts in which texts are preserved: my team includes experts in Yiddish, Hebrew and Persian, as well as European languages, and our most important task is to edit and translate relevant texts, and make them available in online editions to the broadest possible scholarly audience, as well as to international readers of whose heritage they are a part. For example, the most important collection of Shi'ite scripts, in Persian, is held at the Vatican, where very few Iranian scholars can see it: the Vatican Library is therefore collaborating with us to facilitate the preparation and publication of editions of these scripts, and we have also just completed an article studying the processes by which this collection was created.

Drawing on historical script collections and eye-witness accounts, and sponsoring performances in cooperation with faith communities, the WOMARD project examines the dramaturgy of religious Jewish, Christian and Shi'ite theatre. How are holy figures brought 'closer' to the audience? How are stories common to the three faiths treated across their dramatic forms? How are these traditions influenced by secular forces? How are they adapted at pivotal historical moments, and at such moments is their performance suppressed or promoted? We narrow the scope of these broad questions by focussing on female characters: all three dramatic traditions feature powerful female protagonists, sometimes in common. The project is thus focused on the interplay of theatre and martyrdom, the sacred, and the female.

The Early Drama at Oxford (EDOX) project, which I lead, explores plays written and/or performed in Oxford Colleges between 1480 and 1650. The surviving body of scripts and performance records from Oxford constitutes a substantial proportion of the available evidence for theatre in England in this period, but it has been largely unstudied. EDOX, which was funded by the SNF between 2014 and 2018, has challenged scholarly ideas that University Drama was homogenous, Latin, dull, and divorced from the important developments of English theatre in the Playhouse (Allen, Dutton, McBain 2016). It has demonstrated the importance of vernacular drama in Oxford, and explored the relationships between drama and university pedagogy (Dutton 2017, 2019a) and between academic and playhouse scripts (Dutton 2017, 2018a, 2018c). EDOX stagings have proven the theatrical quality of selected Oxford plays and the appropriateness of their style to performance venue (Dutton 2018b, 2019b) as well as the influence of the College household on their production (Dutton 2019a). EDOX has shown too the diversity of surviving Oxford drama, which ranges from imposing big-budget spectacles for state occasions to in-house student Christmas party parodies (Dutton and McBain 2016); the project has also explored the engagement of Oxford drama with theological controversies of the Reformation (Dutton 2020, Dutton and Allen 2016, Dutton, Cecire and McBain 2014).

EDOX launched the documentary film 'Performing Dido' in collaboration with the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and sponsored by their Public Engagement wing: the film was premiered with accompanying talks by early career scholars about Dido-related objects in the Museum collection; these were also filmed and all this material is now freely available on the EDOX website, along with our commissioned translation of Gager's Latin. The project sponsored, and I produced, Charles May's *Grobiana's Nuptials* in collaboration with Edwards' Boys (October, 2016), Nicholas Grimald's *Archipropheta* in collaboration with Atlantic College (March, 2017) and Thomas Gascoigne's *Supposes* in collaboration with the Cambridge Young Actors Company (July 2017). Our

translations and editions of these plays are now online, along with performance footage and documentaries and interviews that facilitate understanding and appreciation of these neglected texts. I produced a film of the anonymous 1602 *Narcissus* play, and this film is also now available on the project website alongside the annotated online edition. The EDOX films explore aspects of the Oxford plays in performance such as cross-gender acting, improvisational practice within scripted plays, actor-audience interaction, and in-house satire. The EDOX website, which will continue to be updated, will facilitate ongoing scholarly access to this important but neglected body of dramatic work. I am currently working on a monograph that discusses the connections between academic and playhouse drama and establishes the importance of considering the Oxford plays within histories of English theatre.

I won an SNSF grant (2016-21) to fund the Medieval Convent Drama project. This project explored a very different form of institutional drama -- plays written and performed by nuns, which provide important but academically neglected evidence of female performance in the medieval period. The tradition of convent drama existed in England but little evidence survives: there is more evidence from France and the Low Countries, and the project examined this in order to illuminate the English medieval tradition. Our archival searches, and the relationships that we built with convents to facilitate these, revealed the surprisingly vibrant role of drama in the lives of many female religious, both historical and current. Plays were staged on significant feast days, particularly Easter and Christmas, with nuns performing in public, sometimes alongside priests, albeit in very controlled liturgical time and space; plays were probably also performed, then as now, privately among nuns for enjoyment and to build community. Scripts written and performed by nuns give great importance to female characters such as Mary Magdalen, and indeed import female characters into scriptural narratives -- for example, a Sybil, Mary's mother and sisters, and female shepherdesses appear in the Huy Nativity plays (Cheung-Salisbury, Dutton and Robinson 2019). Male roles were sometimes filled by priests, evidence suggests that they were also sometimes filled by women in prosthetic beards: nuns may have played male figures of divine authority and in the process gaining access to sacred objects and spaces generally reserved for liturgical use by male priests (Robinson and Dutton 2019).

We have produced 'performance scripts' of these plays, editions that incorporate translation and full music cues for the actors. As part of our project we have staged nuns' plays with particular attention to the use of sacred space and song: our first production was in collaboration with the Oxford girls' choir, Frideswide's Voices, at New College, Oxford (February, 2017); we have since produced a fifteenth-century convent play of the Nativity, in medieval French, for performances in Fribourg Ursuline and Carmelite convents and at the University in Fribourg (December 2017) ; the Latin Easter plays of Barking Abbey, which we staged at the Cistercian house in Fribourg (March 2018), and the Latin/French Origny Easter play in April 2019. We will revise our editions in the light of performance and publish them with TEAMS, submitting our manuscript in July 2025: this publication will raise the profile of convent drama and facilitate future research and performances. The final performance output of the project will be a film adaptation of a medieval French allegorical play, written by the nuns of Huy and based on Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pelerinage de Vie Humaine*: this film, currently in post-production, will be freely available on the project website and will encourage interest in convent drama among medievalists more generally, because of its connection to Deguileville's well-known poem; it will be subtitled in modern English, to facilitate wider international access.

In a shorter research project, funded by an SNSF Scientific Exchanges grant, I have worked with Prof. Dr Racha Kirakosian (then Uni Harvard, now Uni Freiburg-im-Bresgau) on a comparative study of medieval drama and medieval visionary texts, in English and German: the study focused particularly on the functions of clothing and costume in these texts. Our collaboration has resulted in a short monograph, *Dramatic Wardrobes*, published in the series 'Mediävistische Perspektiven' (Zurich: Chronos, 2023). I am also currently working with Mark Dornford-May on a book for OUP, provisionally entitled *Both/And*, that discusses the Cape Town Theatre Company, Isango, founded by Dornford-May in 2000. Isango has developed an international reputation, and won numerous awards, for productions that adapt works from the history of European theatre – including the Chester Mystery Plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bizet's *Carmen* – to a South African aesthetic, deploying the multilingual resources of South Africa. Our book discusses these adaptations as bridging a historical divide, but also explores numerous points of connection between the rehearsal and performance practices of Isango and those of medieval and early modern European theatre.

A final important strand of my work in the last five years has been the Multilingual Shakespeare project, which was partly inspired by Isango's work. It began as an event to celebrate the 125th Anniversary of the University of Fribourg: with students, undergraduate and graduate, from a wide range of disciplines, I developed and directed an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* that was performed on tour in the canton (with sponsorship from the Jubilee Committee, May 2014). The production incorporated original translation of Shakespeare's script into six different languages, reflecting Swiss linguistic diversity, and drew on Swiss culture and history for its humour. Subsequent sponsorship from Fribourg's Institute of Multilingualism funded a film adaptation, shot on location around the city of Fribourg. We then adapted and staged *The Merchant of Venice* (with sponsorship from the University of Fribourg and local business Scout24 (May 2015) and *Henry V* (Dec 2018). Our *Multilingual Shakespeare Mash-Up* was performed at the invitation of, and with sponsorship from, King's College, London as part of the Shakespeare400 celebrations and at Lausanne Shakespeare Festival (June 2016). Our current production is a *Pericles* that sets Shakespeare's problem play in the heyday of the Grand Tour and explores the experience of the outsider and the refugee. At the invitation of colleagues at the University of Roma Tre, we took this to Rome, as well as performing in Fribourg and Biel. These productions, which have built an interdisciplinary creative community among the students, have drawn the attention of scholars working on European Shakespeares and Shakespearean adaptation and translation: I have presented papers on them at the Institute of Modern Language Research, London (by invitation, June 2014) and at the European Shakespeare Research Association conferences in Worcester (July 2015) and Gdansk (July 2017); and our project has stimulated publications (Flaherty,¹ Dutton 2021a, 2022).

¹ Flaherty, Jennifer and Craig Callender, 'Languages of Love: The Swiss Stage Bards' *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Arrêt sur scene/Scene Focus* 10