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"Textual and sexual anxieties in Michael Hoffman's film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*". (Shakespeare On Film)(Critical Essay) Buhler, Stephen M.

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Bringing Shakespeare to mass-market motion picture audiences is never a safe proposition. At times, **film** makers and producers have attempted to hedge their bets by offering moviegoers implicit--and nearly explicit--contracts suggesting that immediate entertainment rewards will accrue in return for their dollars and time. Most of these contracts have not been successful: the 1936 MGM *Romeo and Juliet* promised both star power and pageantry; instead, it confirmed the Hollywood notion that Shakespeare was box-office poison. A few proposals, however, have worked exceptionally well: Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *Romeo+Juliet* promised star power and a completely up-to-date milieu and presentation; it attracted exactly the youthful audiences to which the **film** reached out. For his 1999 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, director Michael Hoffman tried to follow in this tradition, with a few extra safety nets set in place. The resulting **film** provides recognizable stars, but also promises familiarity in approach: this is, allegedly, Shakespeare according to Kenneth Branagh (with, perhaps, a little Merchant-Ivory thrown in). Among the many elements that Hoffman does borrow from Branagh is a keen desire not to offend, especially where gender is concerned. Rather like Bottom and the other Mechanicals in the play, Hoffman is anxious about aspects of the comedy "that will never please" (3.1.10; Hoffman 47). Instead of reframing those aspects, he attempts to remove them.

The indebtedness of Hoffman's *Dream* to Branagh's *Much Ado* has been widely noted; initial reviewers marked the connection both approvingly (Gantz) and disapprovingly (Bemrose, Carr). The most obvious influence is the Tuscan setting at or near the turn of the previous century; more complex negotiations have been traced by Mark Thornton Burnett (186-89). A deeper connection, I would argue, is the employment of avoidance strategies: neither Hoffman nor Branagh wish to give audiences any further excuse to stay away from Shakespeare. Stanley Kauffmann, in his *New Republic* review, opines that what Hoffman hoped to avoid was the perception of "being dull" (32)--an anxiety from which Branagh, the reviewer believes, generally does not suffer. I would argue that both directors would rather

be dully inoffensive than controversial: they want to forestall possible criticism of the plays and of their films not for being dull, but for being sexist, for perpetuating unenlightened views of women. They are anxious, first and foremost, that women in the potential audience will not be alienated from seeing their motion pictures; to avoid this, they take pains to present the principal male characters of the plays--and, by extension, the plays themselves and their playwright--as exceptionally nice, sensitive guys. This strategy, however, reveals more than it conceals. The plays depict male anxieties about authority, affection, devotion, and duty; they present the sexual, social, and personal politics involved in ways that invite analysis and critique. The films, in their haste to prevent any distaste, even if it might prompt audiences to participate in such critique, effectively enact male anxieties. To borrow from the title of Courtney Lehmann's fine essay (260), they seek to take "the rage out of feminism" preemptively by eliminating from the plays male attitudes and behaviors that could provoke justifiable outrage.

At the heart of Hoffman's and Branagh's shared anxiety is an attitude that Douglas Lanier has termed "the burden of the text" ("Drowning" 191)--a sense that the "monumentality of the Shakespearean book," along with the "textual authority" represented by the plays, must be confronted and challenged as part of "the perennial struggle of Shakespearean cinema to free itself from the constraints of bookishness" (192). Lanier is accurate in his description of the attitude; Burnett astutely points out its applicability to the intertextual resonances at work between Hoffman's *Dream* and Branagh's *Much Ado* (194). In this essay, I want to complicate matters further by interrogating the attitude itself. Filmmakers regularly experience a source text as formidable as one of Shakespeare's plays as monumental and constraining. Along with being an occasion for their own artistry, any example of Shakespeare's art is felt as imposing: it threatens to overshadow as much as inspire one's creativity; "a static artifact," in Lanier's phrase ("Drowning" 192), the play text carries with it a fixed meaning. Such perceptions are communicated in several filmmakers' handling of the task of translating a play into the cinematic medium. But the perceptions, along with the assumptions upon which they are based, warrant investigation. Is it the case that literary texts are static? Do they indeed delimit meaning in ways that demand contestation? Finally, does the authority of literary texts automatically align with other forms of authority, including those (such as masculinist authority) depicted in the texts? Hoffman's and Branagh's films suggest affirmative answers to all three questions, which provides a rationale for the liberties they take with their source materials. In practice, however, the directors themselves become "imposing": their alternative meanings, crafted and controlled through careful editing, allow other existing forms of authority to go largely unquestioned, unchallenged.

In *Much Ado*, Branagh aims at eliminating nearly every questionable element of Don Pedro's and Claudio's characters. Claudio's readiness to believe the worst about Hero in connection with other men is almost completely contained within Robert Sean Leonard's expressions of sincere devotion. Branagh finds it necessary, then, to provide an entirely external motive for his cruel shaming of Hero in front of the altar (and even here he softens the scene, by making the wedding semi-private). Far from simply seeing what he thinks is Hero talking "with a man out at a window" (4.1.309), Claudio is presented with what seems to be the ocular proof that Iago denies Othello: Claudio's gaze and the camera catch Boraccio in flagrante delicto. The avoidance of presenting one problem, Claudio's dubious status as a romantic lead (much less an acceptable husband), leads directly into the creation of another problem: male concerns about female fidelity are given emblematic expression. The logic of the play also requires that male aggression offer some kind of threat, which originally is presented by Claudio and Don Pedro, so Branagh displaces the violence onto Michael Keaton's Dogberry (Buhler 133-34). This strategy is also in keeping with Branagh's generally benign view of hierarchical social orders; where Shakespeare permits his aristocrats to pull rank arbitrarily, Branagh insists on meritocratic principles, embodied here by Denzel Washington as Don Pedro. There is a contradiction between the idealized egalitarianism that Branagh's presentation celebrates (Crowl 117-78)--as seen in *Henry V*, as

well as the later films--and the quietism toward degree that his interpretations insist upon (Breight 96-97, 106-08; Lanier, "Cultural Politics" 161-64). As Megan Matchinske has recently argued, Michael Hoffman's approach to Shakespeare insistently removes all potential class tensions at work in Shakespeare's *Dream*, so that only commoners, functionaries, and spouses are allowed to mock the Mechanicals' artistic aspirations. This displacement is frequently achieved by means of rewriting the play's gender politics: "to allow social equanimity across status lines, condescension and conflict have in this instance been shifted to the 'usual suspects'--to women and the domestic" (Matchinske 46).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hoffman rewrites the play with an eye toward gender inoffensiveness from the very beginning. As we hear the reassuring strains of Mendelssohn's incidental music, we read rifles setting the scene in the Tuscan village of Monte Athena, rather than Athens, and at the waning of the nineteenth century. This is a time, we are told, during which "Parents are rigid" and "Marriage is seldom a matter of love." The play, however, depicts a world in which Fathers demonstrate cruel rigor with full support of the law; by using the supposedly gender-neutral term "Parents," the **film** immediately transfers a rather unfair amount of the blame onto the Mothers of Monte Athena. This play (unlike *All's Well That Ends Well*) presents the practice of negotiated marriage as primarily a problem for daughters, due to their subordinate status both as women and as children; instead, Hoffman's **film** mostly elides women's concerns and emphasizes what loveless marriages might mean for the menfolk. The **film** suggests that even slightly liberated women (thanks, in part, to the bicycle) are, as Lehmann observes, "simply too hard to love--let alone marry" (268). The motive for this emphasis, however, seems again to be one of avoidance: Hoffman does not want to share with his audience the clear view of harsh custom and ideology that Shakespeare presents, for fear that they see the playwright as promoting Egeus's and Athens's version of patriarchy. The result, similar to what occurs in Branagh's *Much Ado*, is the deployment of other anxieties. Here, men are worried about displacement--so their concerns take center stage--and they also are worried as to whether their sensitivities, both emotional and artistic, are compatible with male identity. This makes for some painful gaps in presentation, strikingly paralleled by the inept cuts in Mendelssohn's score that accompany the opening credits and the visual establishment of Tuscan local color.

David Straithairn's Theseus shows no arrogance or even (from some perspectives) justifiable pride in being Hippolyta's conqueror and prospective spouse; Sophie Marceau's Hippolyta is initially reconciled to the marriage. Any real sense of the primal myth of the War of the Sexes that Shakespeare deploys at the play's beginning is for the most part erased. It is only after Egeus claims "the ancient privilege of Athens" (1.1.41; Hoffman 3)--and after Theseus reluctantly affirms that he is within his rights under the law--that Hippolyta's affections are in any way estranged. Throughout the scene, Theseus is portrayed as empathetic and solicitous, expressing deep concern about Hermia's suitability for the veil and deciding to remonstrate privately with Demetrius and Egeus in response to Hippolyta's clear displeasure. Even Bernard Hill's Egeus invites some credit from the audience by showing genuine shock at the revelation that Demetrius had been betrothed previously to Helena.

Despite the palpable unfairness of the Athenian law that he chooses to uphold, Theseus is troubled that Hippolyta remains upset with him later in the play; she apparently doesn't appreciate how difficult all this is for him. During the hunt that begins their wedding day, his invocation of harmony through the hounds does not inspire a similar (or trumping) story from Hippolyta. Leaving her sullenly silent, Hoffman has cut these splendid lines:

I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,  
When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear  
With hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear  
Such gallant chiding; for beside the groves,  
The skies, the fountains, every region near  
Seem'd all one mutual cry: I never heard  
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder. (4.1.112-18)

She and we lose the symbolic invocation of a harmonious discord, which in the playtext will help inspire Theseus's decision to witness the Mechanicals' play and which hint at alternative models of concord and cooperation. Instead, Theseus (now for no good reason) starts to praise his hounds as being "bred out of the Spartan kind," by which "their heads are hung / With ears ..."--trailing off incoherently as Hippolyta rides away (4.1.119-21; Hoffman 80). At that point the lovers are discovered, in fairy-engineered undress, and Theseus finds in them an opportunity to win his bride's approval. His overruling of Egeus and his arbitrary dismissal of Athenian law--which, he had previously claimed, "by no means" might he "extenuate" (1.1.120; not in Hoffman's screenplay)--is presented as an act of reconciliation with Hippolyta, a supreme wedding gift. He decides, however, to hedge his own bets but consulting with her before doing so. When they ride back to the assembly and announce what is now marked as their decision, he begins tentatively but builds in confidence and enthusiasm. All subsequent scenes with Hippolyta are characterized by amity and, it is suggested, mutuality. Theseus has, at least for the moment, avoided the problem of a loveless marriage.

The two other couples in the strictly mortal realm also begin their marriages with deep affection. Hoffman assigns lines, as well as significant business, to Anna Friel's Helena and Calista Flockhart's Hermia during the Mechanicals' performance so they can be seen as mutual partners with their spouses; this way, he can avoid the play's potentially unsettling depiction of these characters being silenced by their new status as wives. Even so, Helena and Hermia have not been treated equally in Hoffman's edits. Their past history has been removed: where the play presents their emerging rivalry as the shadow side of a long, intimate friendship, the **film** reduces it to merely mud-wrestling over men. Helena's plaintive, conflicted call for solidarity and, indeed, sisterhood with Hermia is reduced to:

Is this all the counsel that we two have shared,  
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,  
When we have chid the hasty-footed time  
For parting us--O, is it all forgot?  
And will you rent our ancient love asunder  
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?  
It is not friendly; 'tis not maidenly.  
(3.2.198-201, 215-17; see Hoffman 66)

Although Hoffman will keep Helena's later reference to Hermia being a "vixen when she went to school" (3.2.324; Hoffman 71), he drops other important accounts of the women's shared experience. He suppresses exactly what Helena accuses Hermia of forgetting:

All school-days friendship, childhood innocence?  
We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,  
Have with our needles created both one flower,  
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,  
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,  
As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds,  
Had been incorporate. So we grew together,  
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,  
But yet an union in partition;  
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;  
So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart;  
Two of the first, [like] coats in heraldry,  
Due but to one, and crowned with one crest.  
(3.2.203-14)

These lines are deemed unnecessary, because what matters in this **film** are male feelings. The textual treatment is replicated in the visual presentation, as Lehmann notes: the camera does not ever "privilege Helena's perspective on the events" of the play (267).

We are invited, however, to identify completely with Dominic West's Lysander and

Christian Bale's Demetrius. Lysander is utterly vulnerable in his improvised loincloth--or oversized diaper--made from one of Hermia's petticoats; his passionate, new devotion to Hermia under the influence of the love-flower intensifies the sense of vulnerability. As he blubbers out the line about how "Scorn and derision never come in tears" (3.2.123; Hoffman 63), he is surprised at openly he expresses his emotions. Demetrius, for his part, is exceedingly gentle in his attempts to shake off Helena in the wood. Later, after Helena has repeatedly fallen off her bicycle and cut her knee, Demetrius tends to her wound so attentively that she begins to believe that his recent protestations of love might be true; Hermia's rage intrudes on this potential reconciliation. Later, after Helena has emerged from her wrestling with Hermia, Demetrius helps to wipe some of the mud from her face and she again responds to his ministrations; this moment of trust is interrupted by Lysander's challenge, which in Hoffman's presentation is at least partly inspired by the impression that Demetrius is making on Helena. The point in this version is not what has happened to Helena before entering the wood to make her so suspicious of their statements, but rather what has happened to Demetrius and Lysander within the wood that makes it so important that their statements be believed. The system of male self-assertion and female self-abasement depicted in the play is largely unconsidered and never tested. "We'll try no manhood here" is one of Puck's diversionary taunts to the male lovers as they attempt to settle their dispute over Helena "man-to-man"; the phrase can also stand as a challenge to Hoffman's entire **film**. The strategies of avoidance may have been prompted by concerns over saving Shakespeare from himself or from his times; they may be rationalized as resistance to textual authority; the results, however, constitute a retreat from the uncertainties of Hoffman's own time, as well as from those within the play text.

The fairy realm employs other avoidance tactics. Oberon is presented as absolutely secure in his power, seated upon a throne that is carved into the rock and decorated with rays: he is the Sun King to Titania's Moon Goddess. In Rupert Everett's portrayal, he is comfortable--almost careless--with power. The unseasonable weather described by Titania no longer results from their mutual estrangement; here Oberon conjures up a storm, which Titania hastens to calm. "Am not I thy lord?" (2.1.63; Hoffman 22) is not said as this **film's** Theseus might, with either hesitation or a measure of pleading, but instead with quiet, confident authority. If he is languidly at ease with himself, this Oberon is nevertheless a beneficent deity, genuinely solicitous of Helena and absolutely tender in his insistence on the boy, in his casting of the spell that will lead to Titania's desire for Bottom, and in his awakening of Titania. Casting Rupert Everett, readily recognizable as a gay man in **film** roles and personal life, allows Hoffman to reinforce further a sense that this Oberon is "above it all" because he presents detachment from the heterosexual pairings that the play problematizes and the **film** agonizes over. Hoffman, in the published screenplay, strongly suggests that Titania is sexually inexperienced: she and her attendants are so surprised by Bottom's erection that, Hoffman observes, they are "(as HERMIA says) amazed and know not what to say" (59). The **film** implies that despite the problems that ensue because of "The love he cannot provide his fairy consort" (Hoffman vii), Oberon must have things easier than the play's other males, because he doesn't have to care what females think.

By contrast, Michelle Pfeiffer's Titania does care about what is going on with the males in her life--Oberon, the changeling boy, and eventually Bottom. Unlike the assured Oberon, she is shifting and uncertain: her identity as a lunar deity is underscored by her having to move onto the scene, carried by attendants, to confront the securely established solar presence of the Fairy King. Dependent upon others' varying responses, she is already marked as a likely candidate for the love-flower's effects. In keeping with her decidedly secondary status in this **film** and with Hoffman's general practice with the women's roles, significant lines are cut. This Titania is not permitted to join in casting the concluding spell that is meant to bless the marriages and the children produced by these unions:

First, rehearse your song by rote,  
To each word a warbling note:

Hand in hand, with fairy grace,  
Will we sing, and bless this place.  
(5.1.397-400)

Even four lines were apparently considered too much of a diminution of Oberon's authority.

The Mechanicals have their own problems with identity and authority. For Lysander and Demetrius, considerable anxiety has been triggered by a perception that emotional sensitivity is necessary and uncomfortably exposing. For Nick Bottom especially, anxiety is triggered by a personal call to artistic sensitivity that meets with disdain from the general community and especially from his wife. Kevin Kline's Bottom first appears onscreen in the white suit of the dandy, the aesthete--a symbol that becomes a target. As Bottom demonstrates the range of his acting abilities in the town square, two boys of Monte Athena climb some scaffolding above him with bottles of red wine. They pour the wine onto him, inspiring gales of laughter from most of the onlooking villagers. Some consolation is offered within the artistic community, with Roger Rees, as Peter Quince, evincing deep concern at his friend's humiliation here; later, the entire acting troupe is tearfully joyful when Bottom returns to town minus his donkey's ears. The kinship among the Mechanicals recalls the "homosocial bonding" demonstrated by the male actors in Branagh's *A Midwinter's Tale* (In the Bleak Midwinter) through which "the men can express their mutual affection without becoming maudlin" (Lanier, "Cultural Politics" 155). Such camaraderie and male-bonding only serve to accentuate the lovelessness of his marriage. At our very first glimpse of her, Mrs. Bottom--who speaks only in Italian--describes her husband (in subtitles) as "that worthless dreamer." Hoffman is not entirely original in placing Bottom in an unhappy marriage: Russell Jackson (40) has noted that drafts of the script for the 1935 Warner Brothers *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle, also present a disapproving Mrs. Bottom; this may be a consequence of casting the most important male star, in that instance James Cagney, in the role and supplying him with further dramatic conflict. The Warner Brothers *Dream* did not stay with that version of the screenplay, however, and Hoffman's **film** also deviates from earlier drafts. The published screenplay indicates that Signor and Signora Bottom have an infant child, whose cries go unattended by either parent (Hoffman 17); that degree of physical intimacy and mutual responsibility did not survive either the actual filming or the final edit. In the screenplay, Hoffman goes so far as to label Bottom's wife a "shrew" (17), which in the Shakespearean context should have at the least registered as a questionable term. Also, Bottom was originally to have been not doused with wine, but rather dumped on with donkey manure (16). The change to wine allows for a different kind of emblematic statement. Donkey droppings (in both senses) would have foreshadowed Bottom's transformation into a monster that combines the human with the animal. Hoffman seems to have decided that Bottom's engagement with the fairy realm is more imaginative, even artistic, than elemental: the stain from the red wine dries to pink. Bottom retreats to his home, trying to avoid his wife's notice. Even though he removes his jacket, she sees the rose pink stain on his waistcoat; she turns away silently, dismissively. He's no real man, in her view.

Bottom's no young man, either; he's dealing with age none too confidently. His vanity betrays him twice. When, in our first view of him, he looks at his own reflection in a shop window, it is to reassure himself that he is still attractive to the young women of Monte Athena. After he is doused with wine, only one of his supposed admirers even registers regret, much less sympathy. He doesn't learn from the episode, however, since he admires himself--and a distracting top hat--in the magic mirror that Puck provides on the top surface of a tree trunk; while his head is covered by the elegant hat, the donkey's ears and hair can sprout relatively undetected. (There is an interesting parallel with Oberon's ability to distract Titania's lone sentinel by handing her a mirror.) Bottom's--and Kevin Kline's--graying body hair are not transformed, but clearly the love-flower is being credited with Viagra-like properties. His grand arousal certainly impresses Titania and her train, inspiring unaccustomed ardor in her. As they make love, she asserts herself, starting on top, and

keeping him inarticulate. During this encounter in the forest, he need no longer rely on his ability to perform on stage; he performs admirably elsewhere. Afterwards, in a world where age and disappointment call for imaginative compensations, he finds his manhood confirmed by the "Dream" which turns out to have actually occurred. Hoffman's **film** supplies Bottom with a fairy crown that survives his translation back from monstrous form; in its now reduced size, it can serve as a ring. Hoffman's published screenplay makes the significance explicit: originally, Titania was to have appeared at Bottom's window in human dimensions and slipped the crown onto his finger, "like a wedding ring" (114). While the finished **film** limits her appearance, it still provides the reassurance of her visit; Bottom clearly understands now the reality and importance of his previous encounter with Titania. Now, as director Hoffman has said, Bottom's "life is touched by magic and love, and there's a sense at the end of the **film** of a real longing after that" (LoMonico 10). No hint of reconciliation with Mrs. Bottom is offered, however: the vision of marital existence offered here strangely parallels Early Modern anxieties (such as those dramatized by *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love's Labors Lost*) evident, as Mark Breitenberg describes it, in "the way in which romantic love is construed by patriarchal thinking in terms of loss and fear" (147). Whereas Shakespearean playtexts regularly problematize such thinking, Hoffman's **film** utterly identifies with its latter-day equivalents. There are, inevitably, loveless marriages--if only for men--but there remain affirmations for such menfolk, apparently, in the "creative" realms. Bottom is, after all, wedded to the Fairy Queen.

He is also, by that time, an honored performer. Much in the Branagh vein, Hoffman makes his aristocrats gentle rather than arrogant. The men are well-disposed to the Mechanicals, keeping any unkind comment about the performance sotto voce (although Bottom does hear one or two, without taking offense) and making sure to include their new wives in the conversation: the playtext, by contrast, features constant heckling of the actors and conspicuous silences from all the brides but Hippolyta. In the **film**, the transferred lines are prefaced by a reassuring wink from Hermia, aimed at Snug. The entire wedding party is intent on reassuring the Mechanicals, who suffer debilitating stage fright. The line announcing that "our play is preferred" (4.2.39) is given to Quince, who almost faints at sharing the news; Bill Irwin's Snout, as Wall (in a clever bit), almost climbs the walls in attempting to escape; Gregory Jbara's Snug goes so far as to remove his lion's mask, so as not to offend the ladies. Along with general anxiety provoked by the conditions of performance, Hoffman emphasizes the anxiety that Sam Rockwell's Flute experiences at playing "the woman" and that others may feel at playing with a man who plays the woman. As Flute struggles to sustain a high-pitched falsetto in the face of audience laughter (especially the reaction shots of Demetrius and Lysander), he also stumbles over the line about kissing "the wall's stones." At the same time, the **film** shows Snout looking very worried about Pyramus's sword, which is aimed directly at Snout's crotch--all of which is unbeknownst to Bottom in his ecstasy of overacting.

The Mechanicals' play resolves and succeeds by virtue (if I may say) of Flute asserting his male identity. During Thisbe's final speech, he gradually returns to his natural voice and removes his wig. The quiet delivery of the lines as a male commands immediate respect and empathy from the audience, despite the patent ridiculousness of what his character actually says:

These lily lips,  
This cherry nose,  
These yellow cowslip cheeks,  
Are gone, are gone:  
Lovers make moan;  
His eyes were green as leeks.  
(5.1.330-35; Hoffman 107)

But it doesn't much matter what men say in this **film**, as long as they say it with sufficient sensitivity and sincerity.

It also doesn't much matter what the playtext says, either. Hoffman's anxieties about the verbal text of the play figures prominently in the first "audience" with Theseus. With the help of a secretary, Theseus consults a folio volume in order to support Egeus's initial demands. The book, for Hoffman, emblemizes the law, stern and harsh (Buhler 185)--and likely upsetting to audiences. It's no wonder, then, that Hoffman never has Theseus return to it or any other text. In the published screenplay, Hoffman somewhat paradoxically associates any written text with deep discomfort: "Theseus glances at the book--not his favorite part of the job" (3). The playtext, too, is clearly thought to be limiting, binding, off-putting; with such an interpretive framework, it's no wonder that Hoffman endeavors either to "sweeten" the play (no onions or garlic, please) or to contradict it outright. But in so doing, Hoffman ignores how the playtext opens itself and the dynamics it depicts to critique. Referring back to it is not necessarily a "forestalling" or "privileging" move, although some scholarly critics, as well as **film** makers, have recently suggested as much. Terence Hawkes's salutary suspicion toward an unduly "text-based" approach to the play is, at times, curiously uncritical in its valorization of what Robert Weimann terms "disfigurement": performance strategies that "may produce a special kind of 'deformative' effect by somehow adding to, interfering with, or 'bending' the text so that it begins to impart a different, perhaps almost contrary, sense to that which it overtly proposes" (Hawkes 112; see also Weimann 83-88). Hawkes here presumes that such interference is necessarily liberating, an "explosive, propulsive conjunction" (113) of practices and meanings. Moving from performance to pedagogy, Laurie Osborne has judged factoring shooting scripts and published screenplays into classroom considerations of **film** excerpts as "another form of privileging text over **film**" (230), rather than seeing the multiplicity of texts as conducive to a multiplicity of interpretive perspectives. In a similar vein, C. W. Griffin (99) takes issue with Catherine Belsey's distinction (152) between the openness of verbal texts such as Shakespeare's plays and the relative fixity imposed by a cinematic interpretation. Griffin is right to point to the subsequent openness of the **film's** text to interpretation, but he somewhat misses the point that Belsey makes: what leads to the **film's** text, at least at times, is an arbitrary decision about what is going on in the source text. Belsey may be overstating her case in suggesting that filmic readings of source texts are necessarily delimiting, just as directors such as Hoffman (and at least a few academics, at least some of the time) are wrong in fearing the text itself to be fixed: it is, I would suggest, possible to create a **film** that establishes a dialogue between a playtext's openness and a **film's** own capacity for inviting multiple readings.

In the case of Hoffman's **film**, the visual text seeks either to dominate the verbal text or at least to distract the audience from it. The visual echoes from other films tend not to draw viewers back toward the text, but away from it. The disjunctions between what's said and what's shown continue in the same vein. There are numerous visual echoes in casting: Christian Bale appeared as the Tavern Boy in Branagh's *Henry V*; Dominic West was Richmond in the Richard Loncraine and Ian McKellen **film** of *Richard III* (in which emblematic nakedness was also deployed); John Sessions, who plays Philostrate here was Branagh's Macmorris in *Henry V* and the flamboyantly cross-dressing Terry DuBois in *A Midwinter's Tale*. There are several visual echoes in setting, beyond the Chiantishire of Branagh's *Much Ado*: the vision of the Changeling Boy on horseback derives from the Warner Brothers *Dream*, as do many of the fairies that have their origin in Henry Fuseli's eighteenth-century illustrations (and who co-exist very uneasily with the pixies of Sir John Waterhouse). There are visual and conceptual borrowings from Adrian Noble's production of *Dream* for the Royal Shakespeare Company and for Britain's Channel Four: visually in the presentation of Titania's bower and the use of fin de siecle details; conceptually in the focus on questions of male identity, which were far more appropriate in Noble's staging given its use of a boy-child's perspective as the frame of reference. The associations with *Ally McBeal* that the casting of Calista Flockhart necessary invoked at the time of the **film's** release similarly drew attention away from the play's interrogation of women's place in Early Modern (or present-day) society (Lehmann 267).

Elsewhere, the **film's** visuals can contradict the playtext. Puck is instructed that he will recognize Demetrius "By the Athenian garments he hath on" (2.1.264), but Puck then mistakes Lysander for Demetrius even though he's taken all of his Monte Athena clothing off. Add to all this--or, rather, subtract from it all--the passages that focus on women's concerns and the ways in which male authority is exercised. What results and remains is a filmic text that in practice distances itself as much as possible from Shakespeare's play, even as Shakespeare's name is reverentially invoked in the official title of the **film**. Kenneth Rothwell's recent defense of the **film** focuses on how "Hoffman and Kline re-envisioned Bottom for their movie," suggesting that their collaborative reworking of materials should be compared with the practices of Shakespeare and Fletcher: "If their choices were not text-bound, they were at least trans-textual in drawing on the ranges of possibility" that Shakespeare and others exploited (Rothwell, "[Trans] Textuality"). He presents us with something of a false distinction when he argues that his "view can be spun as either heretical or liberating," because the impulses and effects of breaking away from a text can themselves be dreadfully orthodox and restrictive. One should also consider whether the **film** itself seems substantially heretical or liberating: Hoffman's *Dream* might have been both a truly provocative work and a richer Shakespeare **film** had it been less defensive toward its source text and less deferential toward its intended audiences.

Hoffman's practice can be instructively contrasted with Julie Taymor's dialogue and debate with patriarchy in *Titus*, her **film** version of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (see also Lehmann 273-77). Far from shrinking away from the play's presentation of arbitrary rule, blind adherence to patrilineal succession, cultural projection of savagery onto the Other, and narrow sexual (as well as racial) prejudice, Taymor accepts the playtext's invitation to confront and to contemplate such contradictions--and foundations--at work in supposed civilization. Richard Burt has criticized Taymor's **film** for "toning down the violence and making it a generational issue" (309), thereby missing the connection between violence and patriarchal systems that Taymor discovers in the play. In this case, genuine analysis of such dynamics rather than their perpetuation is judged tantamount to suppression or elision. The differences between Taymor's approach and that of Hoffman (and, often, Branagh) can call the validity of such an equation into some dispute. In addition, Christine Edzard's refiguring of Noble's RSC *Dream* in **film**, featuring an all-children cast, demonstrates how visual and conceptual echoes can lead to new engagements with both the text and its cultural associations (and baggage), rather than to revisitations of the familiar. In both these cases, returning to the playtext has revitalized the filmic enterprise and experience. In the case of Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, returning to the play helps us to identify the anxieties that Hoffman tries to assuage and also those, from our own cultural moment, that he imposes upon Shakespeare's playtexts.

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