

“I WOO’D THEE WITH MY SWORD, / AND WON THY LOVE DOING THEE INJURIES”:
THE EROTIC ECONOMIES OF *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM*

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In a footnote to his introduction to the 1979 Arden edition of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Harold Brooks notes of the Bottom/Titania subplot that:

. . . though the humour resides partly in contrast between his animal form and her ‘airy spirit’, even a controlled suggestion of carnal bestiality is surely impossible: jealous Oberon would not have cast his spell to cuckold himself. Her dotage is imaginative and emotional.¹

Brooks’ dismissal is understandable; the idea that “jealous Oberon” might “cast his spell to cuckold himself” as a means of punishing his wife is jarring, and potentially troubling in the extreme. Indeed, the mere suggestion has the potential to undercut the play’s comic effect, at least for a modern audience. Of course, whether it would have done so for an early modern audience is by no means certain.

In this essay, I propose that Oberon has indeed “cast his spell to cuckold himself,” using erotic desire as a weapon to humiliate his rebellious wife and enforce her submission. He does this in order to reassert his position at the head of his family and, by extension, the state as embodied in the fairy kingdom, while at the same time restoring order to the natural world by remedying the domestic and political chaos which has infected it with “contagious fogs” and “progeny of evils.” In his chastising of Titania, and Titania’s acceptance of it, we see a clear example of the erotic dominance and submission which underpin the domestic, social, and political economies of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a play famously concerned with the nature of erotic desire, and perhaps for this reason it is one of Shakespeare’s most perennially popular comedies, performed in various (sometimes truncated) forms since the late sixteenth century.² The play’s engagement with that desire has been central to critical inquiry for nearly as long. Even Samuel Pepys, one of the play’s earliest (and harshest) critics, remarked in his diaries that it showcased “some handsome women.”³ More recent criticism, while no less engaged with the play’s treatment of erotic desire, has also tended to comment upon the play’s gender dynamics, reading the play in the context of gender relations of the late Elizabethan period in which it was written. Shirley Nelson Garner notes that despite the “renewal” which is promised in the conclusion, the play “recognizes the tenuousness of heterosexuality.”⁴ Critics such as David Marshall have noted the ways in which the comedy’s female characters are marginalized,⁵ while Louis Montrose reads the play as a kind of cultural artifact whose treatments of gender and social relations must be understood in relation to the Elizabethan court.⁶ Jonathan Crewe built upon this reading, arguing that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’s “sexual politics” were both complex and “historically specific.”⁷ In *Things of Darkness*, Kim Hall reads the comedy as a gyno/xenophobic study in which

“threatening female sexuality and power” are displaced into the literal and rhetorical darkness of the forest.⁸ More recently, Bruce Boehrer has undertaken a study of the play’s “economies of desire,” noting the parallels between the play’s “bestiality motif” and its “various references to same-sex communities.”⁹

While all of these studies are informative and illustrative in various ways, Boehrer’s study is particularly to my purpose. I propose here a new reading of the play’s “economies of desire,” or “erotic economies,” as I term them.¹⁰ As critics have long noted, the play is focused on the power dynamics of gender relations, and all of the play’s representations of erotic desire emanate from this focus. Arguably the most conspicuous feature of erotic desire as it is depicted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is its close linking with control. Indeed, in the Oberon/Titania/Bottom plot, erotic desire is inextricable from control; it is, in fact, a form of control.

The erotic economies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are predicated upon gendered dominance and submission, upon (to paraphrase Theseus) love won by the doing of injuries. Pointedly, however, it is not only the male characters, or dominants, who eroticize their roles. The female characters of the comedy, who are chastened, humiliated, and forced to submit, eroticize their own roles as well. To find humor in the degradations visited upon Hippolyta, Titania, and Helena, and their willing acceptance of them, requires a present-day audience to suspend, in the best comic tradition, virtually all notions of equality and decorum. This is perhaps not surprising; comedy has always been engaged in the business of subverting notions of equality and decorum, from the comedies of Aristophanes to the comedies of Judd Apatow. In early modern comedy, however, and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in particular, this comic subversion works not to undermine traditional domestic, social and political systems, but rather to reinforce them. Indeed, the comedy in the play works because the characters eroticize their roles in the domestic, and by extension the social and political, economies.

The gender dynamics of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the degradations visited upon the young lovers in this comedy, are very much of a piece with its time. As Montrose notes:

Idealizations of married love tend to downplay the authoritarian and misogynistic aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that have proven an embarrassment to enlightened modern sensibilities. The play’s dominant—although by no means uncontested—perspective on wedded bliss is in harmony with prevailing Elizabethan doctrines regarding marriage and the domestic economy: the household is a hierarchically organized social institution, analogous to the body politic, and based upon the reciprocal obligations of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants; harmonious marital partnership is predicated upon the wife’s obedience to her husband.¹¹

The comedy serves to reflect the larger culture of Elizabethan England, specifically those “doctrines regarding marriage and the domestic economy.” Pointedly, “marriage and the domestic economy,” governed as they were by erotic desire, were not

only “analogous to the body politic,” they also bled into the body politic, or political economy. The Virgin Queen famously used erotic desire, and the domestic possibility which it represented, as both a weapon (in her negotiations with foreign powers) and as the preferred currency of exchange at her court, where courtiers were encouraged (to a point) to flirt and play the role of suitor.¹²

Erotic desire is privileged in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a currency of exchange in the various economies, domestic, social, and political, because the play's characters exchange power through the experience of that desire. In turn, the integrity of those various economies, that is to say, the acceptance by the play's characters of their roles, is dependent upon how they eroticize them. Indeed, if the characters did not eroticize their inequalities, the play could not function as comedy. The eroticizing of roles provides the characters with motivation to fulfill those roles, even when those roles require them to relinquish power or submit to humiliation. The domestic economy, and by extension the social and political economies, thrive on, indeed require, the eroticizing of roles, as closer examination of the comedy will demonstrate.

Elizabeth was the head of the English state, but she was also potentially a bride and a mother, and these various roles, embodied as they were by the same woman, were inextricable from one another. Thus, in the early modern monarchy, the domestic economy not only reflected the social and political economies, it subsumed them. The practical result of this was that all three economies were defined, at least in part, through erotic desire. This bleeding together of the domestic and political economies, eroticizing as it does the appurtenances of state authority, generated considerable anxiety in the period. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* evinces some of this anxiety over gender relations and their bearings on the political economy in the reign of Elizabeth, particularly in the later years of that reign when it had become obvious that the monarch's aging body would never produce an heir, and that her impending death would necessitate a breach in succession. The play presents a collection of characters of various statuses seeking to resolve their erotic, and by extension social, conflicts. It presents a transition from conflict to resolution, and that resolution is predicated upon notions of erotic exchange and submission.

The play begins with a clear articulation of the role of power in both the domestic and political economies in the exchange between Theseus, the reigning Duke of Athens, and his wife-to-be, Hippolyta, the defeated Queen of the Amazons. Immediately, the playwright represents the lingering conflict between conqueror and conquered, superimposed upon the erotic union of betrothed lovers. The Duke opens the play with a reminder to his “fair” betrothed that they are to be married within four days, lamenting “how slow / This old moon wanes.” He underscores his impatience in the language of right and inheritance, noting how the moon “lingers my desires / Like to a step-dame or a dowager / Long withering out a young man's revenue.” Hippolyta answers her conqueror/betrothed with (faint) defiance, telling him that “Four nights will quickly dream away the time” until “the moon, like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven” will “behold the night of our solemnities” (1.1.1-10).

From the opening lines of the comedy, our characters are defined. Theseus is the conqueror/lover who recognizes his conquered betrothed as “fair” and is eager

to consummate his desire for her. Hippolyta is the conquered Amazon who, while grudgingly accepting of her new role, has not entirely abandoned her martial nature. She retains a lingering devotion to the hunter goddess Diana and, implicitly, the chastity which that goddess represents. This, as much as her military defeat, places her in opposition to her husband and the new role which he has imposed upon her.

These two identities, of queen/virgin and prisoner/wife, are forcibly conflated in the Duke's address to his betrothed:

Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,
And won thy love doing thee injuries;
But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling. (1.1.16-20)

In these lines Theseus brings the erotic economy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into sharp relief and foreshadows the action which is to follow. The political and domestic economies of this comedy hold as their currency of exchange power that is wrought through erotic violence. They are economies in which "woo[ing]" is undertaken with the sword and "love" is achieved through the "doing [of] injuries." Erotic desire and martial conquest are collapsed into one another in the Duke's language. Even when the impending wedding changes the "key" to "pomp" and "reveling," the notion of "triumph" remains central. This is a comedic universe in which marriage, and the society which it supports, is inextricably linked with erotic dominance and submission.

This case is made even more plainly later in the same scene when, lamenting her own impending marriage to Demetrius, Hermia discusses the nature of "true love" with her beloved, Lysander, who famously declares:

For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
But either it was different in blood –
.....
Or else misgraffed in respect of years –
.....
Or else it stood upon the choice of friends. (1.1.132-37)

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the course of true love cannot "run smooth," because opposition is what gives it its force. From a dramatic standpoint, this is obvious; if there was no impediment for the lovers, the comedy would cease to be. In the dramatic universe of this particular comedy, however, it is also true from a thematic standpoint. The play repeatedly demonstrates inequality to be a central component of erotic desire, as well as of the unions, both domestic and political, that result from it. In this comedy, inequality is the natural order of "true love"; in order for true love to flourish, in order for marriage and, in the world of the play,

the state, to exist in harmony, one party must dominate and one party must submit.

Helena provides an object lesson in this inequality in 2.1 when, having followed her own beloved, Demetrius, into the forest, she entreats his favor in language that cannot but strike a present-day audience as masochistic. After Demetrius has commanded her to “get thee gone, and follow me no more,” Helena persists, referring to him as a “hard-hearted adamant” who “draw[s]” her toward him. Demetrius’ “hard-hearted” (2.1.194-95) nature compels Helena to follow him; pointedly, the playwright shows us that this compulsion is not against her will.

Demetrius underscores the inequality of his relationship with Helena when he asks her, “Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair? / Or rather do I not in plainest truth / Tell you I do not, nor I cannot love you?” (2.1.199-200). Helena builds upon this inequality to explain her attraction to Demetrius when she replies:

And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you.
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worser place can I beg in your love—
And yet a place of high respect with me—
Than to be used as you use your dog? (2.1.201-10)

The nature of love in this comedy is made clear in Helena’s response. Helena loves Demetrius not in spite of his cruelty, but because of it. His cruelty is central to his attraction. She is drawn to his cruelty to the extent that “the more he beat[s]” her, the more she “fawn[s] on” him. It is Demetrius’ cruelty, in his “spurn[ing]” and even his physical violence, his “striking,” which entices Helena. She finds her fulfillment in degradation.

In most contemporary productions of the play, Helena’s lines are either glazed over or played for absurd comedy.¹³ This is perhaps understandable for a twenty-first century audience, but for a sixteenth-century audience, there is no reason to assume that the lines would be treated in such a way. In a social world in which men aggress and women submit, it is not difficult to understand Helena’s reaction to Demetrius’ abuse. She not only accepts the role of victim, she eroticizes it.

Garner says of this scene that “[Helena’s] masochism undercuts her power.”¹⁴ This is true, and it is troubling if one assumes that the character desires power or is entitled to have it. It is unlikely that the play’s original audience would have made such an assumption. In the rigidly hierarchical world of sixteenth-century England, Helena’s role is to submit, and for her to eroticize that role is perfectly natural and appropriate insofar as that world is concerned. Indeed, almost all of the characters eventually end up eroticizing their social roles, be they aggressors or submitters.

Demetrius is thus also not immune to the pressures of his social role. He eroticizes his own aggression in response to Helena’s entreaties when he warns her to “tempt not too much the hatred of [his] spirit” and declares:

You do impeach your modesty too much
 To leave the city and commit yourself
 Into the hands of one that loves you not,
 To trust the opportunity of night
 And the ill counsel of a desert place
 With the rich worth of your virginity. (2.1.214-19)

Demetrius' threat is clear; if Helena will not obey him, he will rape her, literalizing his power over her in the most brutal way. Once again we see erotic desire conflated with power, although in this instance the erotic desire is essentially an afterthought; the proposed rape would be more an act of violence than an act of sex. Demetrius' threat has little if anything to do with erotic desire; he confesses to Helena that he "loves [her] not." His rape of her would be an act of pure aggression, but one that is pointedly wrapped in the trappings of erotic desire. He will dominate her and she will be forced to submit, and once again we see the power economy constructed in erotic terms. Helena, for her part, is not terribly frightened by the prospect, declaring to her would-be attacker that "Your virtue is my privilege" (2.1.220). She accepts totally his role as aggressor and her own role as submissive.

Of course, for any audience, the lovers' inversion of their expected social and domestic roles is what makes the comedy effective. Demetrius is an apparently reluctant aggressor in this scene, while Helena desperately wants to submit to him. Demetrius flees and Helena pursues; they play against their gender roles in much the same way as do Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis, and their playing has much the same effect on an audience. The scene, then, is superficially subversive (the lovers are playing against expected gender roles) while, at the same time, fundamentally normative (Demetrius eroticizes aggression while Helena eroticizes submission).

Each of these instances, illustrative as they are of the comedy's erotic economies, are essentially preludes to the centerpiece of the play in which Oberon bewitches his queen, Titania. Their conflict is established earlier in 2.1 when the two meet in the forest and quarrel over the ownership of the "little changeling boy." While their quarrel is nominally over the child, the language in which they express their quarrel is charged with erotic aggression and recrimination. Titania announces in 2.1.62 that she has "foresworn his bed" and Oberon condemns her in the following line as a "rash wanton," with the implication that she is sexually inconstant. Titania meets this accusation with a similar charge against Oberon, accusing him of "playing on pipes of corn, and versing love / To amorous Phillida" and having only returned to "fairy land" so that he might bless the wedding feast of his "buskin'd mistress," Hippolyta. Oberon meets this final accusation with the declaration that "I know thy love to Theseus," a declaration which Titania dismisses as "the forgeries of jealousy" (2.1.67-81).

The source of these erotic recriminations is, of course, the changeling boy, who is himself an object of exchange in an economy of erotic desire. As Garner writes:

Titania's attachment to the boy is clearly erotic. She "crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy," according to him the same attentions as those she bestows on Botton when, under the spell of Oberon's love potion, she falls in love with the rustic-turned-ass. She has "foresworn" Oberon's "bed and company" (II.i.62). Whatever the child is to her as a "lovely boy" and a "sweet" changeling, he is ultimately her link with a mortal woman whom she loved. Oberon's passionate determination to have the child for himself suggests that he is both attracted to and jealous of him.¹⁵

The root of the conflict between Oberon and Titania, a conflict that has cast the natural world into chaos, is erotic jealousy. This is perfectly logical when we consider that erotic desire is the ordering principle for the domestic, social, and political economies in this play. Titania's transgression involves denying erotic satisfaction to her lord ("foreswear[ing] his bed") and establishing herself as a rival to him by her usurpation of a phallus.¹⁶

We see in Act 2 the stage set for Oberon's vengeance, which will restore order to the disordered world of the comedy. Indeed, Oberon ends the exchange with Titania with the ominous declaration that "thou shalt not from this grove / Till I torment thee for this injury" (2.1.146-47). The torment which Oberon inflicts is poetic; he punishes Titania's unnatural erotic denial through the enforcing of an unnatural erotic desire. His incantation while applying the juice of Love-in-Idleness to Titania's eyes underscores the nature of his punishment:

What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take;
Love and languish for his sake.
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wak'st, it is thy dear.
Wake when some vile thing is near. (2.2.26-33)

Oberon makes his intentions clear in these lines. He wants to control Titania's erotic desires as a means of enforcing her obedience to him. He wants her to "love and languish," suffering the erotic torment that he has suffered. At the same time, however, Oberon wants to inflict a further injury on his wife. He specifically entreats her to "wake when some vile thing is near," so that her desire will be not only unnatural, but also degrading. There is little doubt in these lines that, contrary to Brooks' assertion, "jealous Oberon" has indeed "cast his spell to cuckold himself." It is the price he is willing (and, it seems, eager) to pay to avenge his wife's disobedience.

The enforcing of obedience through erotic humiliation was not without precedent. Boehrer cites as a precedent of the comedy's "bestiality motif" 2:10 of Aelian's *De Natura Animalium*, which describes the process by which the horse might be mated to an ass so as to produce a mule. According to Aelian, the horse is "a proud creature" who "scorns to be covered by an ass." Accordingly, she must be humiliated

before she will allow the ass to mate with her. This humiliation is achieved by shearing the mare's mane (the supposed source of her pride) "in a haphazard fashion," after which, "though ashamed at first," she will submit to "her present ignoble mate."¹⁷ As Boehrer writes:

More than merely a practical act of animal husbandry, the process of cross-mating emerges from this description as something like an exercise in attitude adjustment: a calculated "humiliation" that corrects the mare's prideful contempt for otherness. Given the equine metaphors that occasionally apply to Shakespeare's feminine characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the correspondence between this act of corrective humiliation and the embarrassment of Titania's infatuation with Bottom may almost seem deliberate.¹⁸

We see strong evidence of the "equine metaphor" in this plot. Ass-headed Bottom is a prodigy; he is a hybrid monster, an image of man degraded by bestial appetite, a harbinger of a disrupted state. Why, then, does Titania embrace him? She has been bewitched, but there is also a tradition of reading the character as drawn to Bottom of her own volition. The case for this reading is perhaps most famously made by Jan Kott, who declares that in Bottom Titania has "the lover she wanted and dreamed of." According to Kott, "in this nightmarish summer night, the ass does not symbolize stupidity," since from "antiquity up to the Renaissance the ass was credited with the strongest sexual potency and among all quadrupeds was supposed to have the longest and hardest phallus."¹⁹ Bottom represents raw sexual energy. While Kott suggests that Titania achieves liberation through her congress with Bottom, however, the text suggests that this is only part of the story. She finds her true liberation in the acceptance of her social role. After the magic night (or "nightmare," to borrow Kott's phrase) in the forest, "Jack [has] Jill" and "naught [is] ill" (3.2.461-62) because inequality, which is essential for exchange of power, has been eroticized. However, it has not been eliminated.

Bottom represents degradation, and Titania is drawn to degradation in the embrace of her social role. Whether or not the "equine metaphor" which Boehrer points out is deliberate, it speaks to a specific understanding of the natural world, an understanding in which even animals are prone to rebellious pride and must be humiliated in order to preserve the natural order. The fact that the mare's pride, and subsequent humiliation, are delineated in sexual terms only serves to underscore the extent to which that humiliation could be, and was, eroticized. This was true in the third century when Aelian authored the *De Natura Animalium*, and it was true in the rigidly hierarchical society of sixteenth-century England, in which the visual signifiers of class status were ubiquitous. Public punishments of the sixteenth century, such as the stocks, brandings and mutilations, exploited this ubiquity as a means of preserving the social order.

The means by which the aggressors of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* enforce order through dominance and humiliation is certainly interesting from a historical perspective, but perhaps even more interesting are the ways in which their victims

react. In 4.1, Oberon consents to remove the charm from Titania, addressing her tenderly as his "sweet queen." Titania awakens as if from a nightmare, crying out for her husband and declaring "My Oberon! What visions have I seen! / Methought I was enamoured of an ass." Oberon responds to her calmly, without exclamation, "There lies your love" (4.1.74-77), thus bringing the full force of his vengeance to bear upon her.

Titania's response is significant. She offers no recrimination to her husband, but speaks in harmony with him, finishing his line with her question: "How came these things to pass?" and underscoring her own punishment with the declaration: "O how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!" Oberon, for his part, is in no hurry to answer his wife. Rather, he commands Titania to "music call," and she obeys. He follows this with another command to "take hands with me / And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be." Titania obeys this command as well, prompting Oberon to declare them to be "new in amity" (4.1.78-86).²⁰ Titania's degradation has chastened her and, as the dance indicates, re-installed her in the social world.

Titania's obedience, her willingness to join with her husband in the immediate aftermath of his humiliation of her, is thematically of a piece with the rest of the comedy. This is not only a play about erotic aggression, it is also a play about willing submission and the eroticizing of social roles. Titania does not resist her husband's dominance of her; rather, like Helena in 2.1, she accepts and, as her joining in the dance indicates, eroticizes it. This eroticizing of submission would have been perfectly natural for a sixteenth-century audience, however a twenty-first century audience might perceive it. Titania's experience is, to borrow Theseus' observation of 5.1.58-60, "Merry and Tragical," depending on one's viewpoint.

We see the parallel of the Oberon/Titania relationship in the interactions between Theseus and Hippolyta later in the same scene. As the pair approaches the sleeping lovers, Theseus offers entertainment to his betrothed, declaring that "My love shall hear the music of my hounds" and directing his "fair queen" to the "mountain's top" where she can mark the "musical confusion" of the baying dogs. Hippolyta's response here is telling; like her fairy counterpart, she too has submitted to her husband. She follows his declaration with a reminiscence of the "gallant chiding" of the hounds of "Hercules and Cadmus" which made "So musical a discord, such sweet thunder" (4.1.105-117).

This "musical discord" and "sweet thunder" is an apt metaphor for her relationship with her lord, and indeed for the other relationships in the comedy's erotic economies. The world of this comedy is rigidly ordered, and that order is brutally enforced. Men dominate women in the comedy, and women not only accept this domination, they eroticize it. The dominance which Theseus imposes upon Hippolyta, like the dominance which Oberon imposes upon Titania, is a "musical . . . discord," a "sweet thunder." From this point in the play until its conclusion, the lovers are "in amity" (4.1.86), jesting together at the rude mechanicals' pageant as they prepare to consummate their marriages.

This reconciliation of the lovers, this masochistic acceptance and even embracing of humiliation, can leave contemporary audiences, and critics, unsatisfied. Indeed, Boehrer notes:

If Hippolyta is reconciled to Theseus, one feels that it can only be by the same mechanism that reconciles Titania to Oberon and Demetrius to Helena: the gratuitous and super-rational intervention of magic. In this sense, one could say that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ultimately lacks faith in its own festive conclusion, suggesting, thus, the darker tone of Shakespearean comedies to come.²¹

There is a real difficulty in accepting the female characters' masochism, their cheerful embracing of degradation. It flies in the face of all contemporary, twentieth and twenty-first century notions of equality and appropriate gender relations.

The strict domestic order of this comedy, enforced as it is through humiliation and implicit violence, is potentially troubling for a contemporary audience, but we ought to note that this is not necessarily the case. There is (perhaps surprisingly) a critical tradition of condoning the play's social vision. Brooks writes of Oberon that "what he does is benevolent from the first in intention, and eventually in result." He describes Oberon as "a mentor" to his wife, one who "takes charge of her experience in order to guide her into a change of attitude," and declares that Titania "is principally at fault" and that "her obstinancy has to be overcome." He explains in a footnote that "the parallel with Hippolyta directs" that the fairy queen "ought to be judged as a rebel wife."²²

Given the contributions made by feminist (and other gender-based) criticism in the past several decades to our understanding of the comedy, Brooks' sentiments may strike a discordant note. Nevertheless, his understanding of the play is much closer to the ways in which its sixteenth-century audience would have likely understood it. The political economy under Elizabeth bled into the social and domestic economies, and all of them were colored, indeed underpinned, by erotic desire. The application of that desire in the service of the pitilessly hierarchical world was a commonplace in early modern England, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reflects this commonplace. The play is a reflection of the Elizabethan state and it offers a commentary on the erotics of power, but it does so through the privileging of dominance and submission. The erotic economies of the comedy are all power-based. Love, such as it is, is constructed in this comedy expressly in terms of power relations.

We see in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that erotic desire has become both the foundation of conflict and its resolution. It permeates the action in the forest, where Titania uses erotic desire as a weapon, and Oberon in turn uses it as his weapon of vengeance. The end result is the resolution of their conflict and the restoration of the harmony of the natural world, which had been violently disrupted by the breach in their relationship. The wilderness is, or becomes, a reflection of the patriarchally ordered court. The conflict between Oberon and Titania has cast the natural world into chaos. The natural world reflects the disordered family, and by extension the disordered state. Pointedly, when order is restored, the submissive parties are cheerful in their submission. We see in this comedy none of the bitter defeat of Katherine's final speech in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Rather, we see here Titania joining her husband in a dance and Hippolyta sharing a jest with her husband over a play. *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream concludes with an image of erotic inequality through which order is preserved and the state is set in harmony.

Notes

1. Harold F. Brooks, Introduction, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Arden Second Series, ed. Harold F. Brooks (Suffolk: Methuen, 1979), xxi-cxliii, cxv. All references to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are taken from this edition.
2. For a more thorough unpacking of the play's early performance history, see F. E. Halliday, *A Shakespeare Companion 1564-1964* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1964).
3. Quoted in Dorothea Kehler, "A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Bibliographic Survey," in *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler (New York, Garland Publishing, 1998), 3-76, 6.
4. Shirley Nelson Garner, "A Midsummer Night's Dream: 'Jack shall have Jill: / Nought shall go ill,'" *Women's Studies* 9 (1981): 47-63. Rpt. in Kehler, 127-144, 127.
5. David Marshall, "Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *English Literary History* 49 (1982): 543-75, 550.
6. Louis Adrian Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 151-178.
7. Jonathan Crewe, "Epilogue: The Way Forward," in *Hidden Designs: The Critical Profession and Renaissance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1986), in Kehler, 130-151, 139.
8. Kim E. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 22.
9. Bruce Bohrer, "Economies of Desire in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Studies* 32 (2004): 99-117. For a more detailed overview of the play's critical history, see Kehler, "A Bibliographic Survey."
10. The economies with which I am concerned involve not only matters of desire, but also matters of domestic and civic authority. For this reason I term them "erotic economies," referring to the various economies of the play which are governed by erotic desire.
11. Montrose, 110-111.
12. On the eroticism of power at the Elizabethan court, see chapter 10 of Montrose, "The Imperial Votaress," 151-178.
13. Witness the 1999 film of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Michael Hoffman (Fox Searchlight Pictures), in which Calista Flockhart's delivery of the line never fails to draw an incredulous laugh from my students.
14. Garner, 138.
15. Garner, 129.
16. This usurpation has long been a common concern of psychoanalytic criticism of the play. See also Gerald F. Jacobson, "A Note on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*," *American Imago* 19 (1962): 21-26.

17. Boehrer, 112.
18. Boehrer, 112.
19. Jan Kott, "Titania and the Ass's Head," *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York: Doubleday, 1964). Rpt. in Kehler, 107-126, 118.
20. While neither the Quarto nor the Folio provides a stage direction indicating a dance, I hold with Dover Wilson and Harold Brooks that the characters must logically dance together at this point in the play. See *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, New Cambridge Shakespeare, ed. Dover Wilson and Arthur Quiller-Couch (London: Cambridge UP, 1924).
21. Boehrer, 114-115.
22. Brooks, cvi-cviii.

Rosemary Dunn Moeller

THE FAULTS OF FAIRIES

So we can blame it all on Oberon,
the heat, the storms, the warming world of floods,
and hurricanes, the droughts and hail, the dry
ice days when winter fog invades the house.
I envy those who lived when answers came
as simply as a faith in fairies' faults,
for now our summer bakes our fields to dust
and rumors of worse winters are the norm.
Perhaps Shakespeare was right to blame this fate
on excess of frivolity and greed.
Like Oberon, Titania no restraint
would show in travel, taste or meddling.
They fought about a pet like squabbling parents
while all around their world was withering.
Like us they didn't focus on the need
for measured conservation of their powers.