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1

Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the queer problematics of gender, sodomy, marriage and masculinity

I

Before helming Warner Brothers' 1935 film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, co-director Max Reinhardt had staged the play many times in live-theatre venues in Germany and Austria and on the east and west coasts of America.¹ Thus, even though cinema provided a new medium in which to work, he was no neophyte to Shakespeare in performance. The movie Reinhardt and his colleague William Dieterle made offers audiences as much spectacle as Shakespearean comedy: sumptuous sets and intriguing special effects; remarkably

innovative cinematography for the time of its making and a *mise-en-scène* that reward careful attention; a range of ebullient music and dancing; and finally, acting that varies from the downright annoying (a young but woefully miscast Mickey Rooney overplays Puck as little more than a screeching primate)² to the surprisingly good (James Cagney – a then enigmatic young actor well known and well liked for playing hyper-masculine gangster characters – as Bottom makes the role of the hammy weaver who wants to act every part in ‘The Most Lamentable Comedy and Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe’ uniquely his own).³ But for much of its eighty-year existence Reinhardt and Dieterle’s *Midsummer* has been both celebrated and disparaged by critics and movie audiences alike. To that point, Russell Jackson provides a solid overview of the film’s mixed reception in the popular and the trade press following its premier in the US and UK in 1935. In these outlets the picture was in equal measure heralded as a great success, thought to appeal to only a very limited audience of Shakespeare specialists and aficionados, and dismissed outright as nothing but the most ridiculous nonsense.⁴ More contemporary critical assessments of the movie are just as contentious. Jack J. Jorgens describes it as a ‘bold effort to interpret and translate Shakespeare in cinematic terms’ that makes ‘an important contribution to the interpretation of Shakespeare in performance’⁵ while Scott MacQueen claims that ‘the modern viewer raises an eyebrow as high art collides with high camp’ in a production that ‘is absolutely bereft of taste, starved for respectability’.⁶ There is, as these examples reveal, no single, widely shared consensus on the merits, or lack thereof, of Reinhardt and Dieterle’s *Midsummer*. Nevertheless, as only the second Shakespeare play to reach the screen in full-length feature form after the introduction of sound technology to the industry, the production is a significant one in the overall history of Shakespearean cinema. Indeed, given its particular place in the historical continuum, Reinhardt and Dieterle’s *Midsummer* proves the ideal adaptation with which to start the larger project of queering the Shakespeare film.

It must be acknowledged at the outset, however, that Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*, like most of Shakespeare's original play itself, seems to present an immediate problem as far as the overarching aims of this book are concerned because it is a cinematic text that lacks any obvious gay or homosexual representation. How, then, can it be queered? The work of Madhavi Menon provides a way of navigating through this interpretive crux. She writes that 'if no homosexuals existed in the Renaissance, then did queerness? Thus formulated, the query collapses homosexuality and queerness so that the queer is grounded in specific bodies and acts', such as men who have sex with other men.⁷ The result is that '[h]omosexuality and its historical placement [as a discovery/invention of the nineteenth century] become synonymous with the queer' in a way that automatically precludes queerness as a possibility in the early modern period by virtue of appeal to the strictures of teleology.⁸ For Menon the solution is one that 'takes queerness away from its primary affiliation with the body and expands the reach of queerness beyond and through the body to a host of other possible and disturbing configurations.'⁹ Thus situated, it shall be shown in this chapter that the queer obtains in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* in four signifying registers: those of gender, sodomy, marriage and masculinity, all of which, in this instance at least, have nothing to do with genital homosexuality *per se* in any form.

II

Though grounded in Shakespeare's original playtext, the opening scenes of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* are inflected with a certain kind of queerness, particularly as far as the characters of Theseus and Hippolyta are concerned. This queerness manifests first of all in the style of Hippolyta's costuming and more especially in the disdainful way the former

queen of the Amazons acts toward Theseus. Explication of this assertion begins with noting that as the film proper starts to unfold, the trumpets roar, announcing the return of Theseus (Ian Hunter) to Athens with the conquered Hippolyta (Verree Teasdale). The couple walks separately but side-by-side as the throng of Athenian citizens that surrounds them cheers in order to make their joy known to one and all. Hippolyta wears a silver dress with a matching stylized head covering, both of which gleam as the light catches their respective surfaces. At the same time these garments manage to conceal almost the whole of Hippolyta's body, effectively robbing her of the individuality of her gender. It is almost as if she has been unsexed. And that unsexing, contra the fondest wishes of Lady Macbeth, has left Hippolyta powerless.¹⁰ Indeed, she does little more in these moments than stare at the ground with her lips pursed in what comes across as the most severe manner possible. Her defensive posture is only heightened since she keeps her chest covered with her right arm, making it seem like she expects to be assaulted at any moment. But by far the most striking feature of Hippolyta's appearance is the ornamental black snake she wears draped around her arms, shoulders and bosom (see Figure 1). The snake resonates not unlike Hester Prynne's 'A' in Hawthorne's celebrated 1850 Romance *The Scarlet Letter*. Given the rather unsubtle Christian allusion, it brands Hippolyta as a transgressive creature – a serpent, specifically – that has been defanged and compelled to occupy the proper chaste, obedient and silent¹¹ position all women are 'supposed' to inhabit in Western patriarchal society whether they will or no.

Meanwhile, C. W. Griffin explains that, in four representative twentieth-century film adaptations of *Midsummer*,¹² 'it is often Hippolyta's costume that serves as a potent signifier of her relationship to Theseus, suggesting degrees of compliance with his wishes in concordant versions and degrees of resistance in discordant ones'.¹³ The Hippolyta of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* is an example of the latter. According to Griffin, this discordance in costume is complemented by Hippolyta's

FIGURE 1 *A downcast Hippolyta (Verree Teasdale) with a black snake wrapped around her bosom, shoulders and arms. A Midsummer Night's Dream, dir. Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle, 1935.*

'looking disgusted with the whole operation' that has brought her to Athens under Theseus's control.¹⁴ The observation is an accurate one. Hippolyta is, for instance, unable to bring herself to look at Theseus when he insists with a condescending laugh that chills rather than humours that he 'woo'd' her with his 'sword' and by doing her 'injuries', and then goes on to proclaim that he will 'wed' her 'in another key, / With pomp, with triumph and revelling' (1.1.16–19).¹⁵ According to A. B. Taylor, these words and

lines would have met with the approval of an Elizabethan audience imbued with patriarchal values: rebellious and disruptive womanhood, in the person of a warrior queen

who had tried to overthrow one of the oldest civilisations, has been forced to submit to the 'natural' order and is in the process of being returned to the civilised fold through marriage.¹⁶

Still, only moments later, Hippolyta merely smirks as Theseus is crowned with laurels in recognition of his success in conquering the Amazons and the crowd sings an anthem of praise to the duke's greatness. The specificity of this acrimonious gesture on Hippolyta's part makes it plain that she has little if any respect or admiration for Theseus, much less love for him. In feminist critical terms, the film thus participates, albeit *ex post facto*, in the long-standing interpretive tradition whereby, in the words of Tom Clayton, 'Hippolyta has been aggrandized, Theseus demonized'.¹⁷ As all of the evidence suggests, this approach to the interpretation of these characters is not unmerited, despite Clayton's scepticism of its validity.

Though Clayton goes on to claim that Theseus and Hippolyta's is 'on the showing, a civil(ized) relationship of "mutual love and good liking"' because they are 'social and personal – and military – equals of partly shared background: mythic nobility from different countries of the classical and post-classical mind [about to be] joined in late-Renaissance (or Early Modern) English-poetical matrimony',¹⁸ things are no better between Theseus and Hippolyta not long thereafter when, at the ducal palace, he comes up behind her without alerting her to his presence. Now wearing a black dress with a high collar and a white snake framing her bosom, she is startled out of a reverie in which Griffin claims she is 'recalling her Amazonian past', presumably in all its glory and with its attendant freedoms for women, rather than dreaming of the future, such as it may be, that lies before her in Athens with Theseus.¹⁹ The duke is rather taken aback by Hippolyta's frightened reaction to his unexpected appearance at her backside. But he covers his dismay by launching into his poetic complaint about the interminable passage of the time:

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
Another moon: but O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires ... (1.1.1-4)

Viewers cannot fail to note that these lines have everything to do with only Theseus's desires and not those of Hippolyta. It seems in fact that Theseus assumes his desires are exactly the same as hers. As such, Hippolyta responds in a way that, albeit subtly, makes it clear that she can wait for the fulfilment of his desires:

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities. (1.1.6-11)

In addition, as Theseus speaks to Hippolyta, he can barely refrain from pressing his body against hers and from bestowing kisses on her person.

More than once during this curious exchange Hippolyta makes a show of trying to push Theseus away with her hand even as she also seems to welcome his attentions; this is, contra Clayton, another unmistakable sign of her general discomfort with her husband-to-be. And to confirm the point, though she invests the first three-and-a-half lines of her answer to Theseus with more than a hint of excitement, when Hippolyta mentions how the moon 'shall behold the night / Of our solemnities' she turns her eyes away from Theseus, drops her chin to her chest, and once again stares at the ground in defeat. It is as if she is confronting, inwardly and one last time, the certain knowledge that she cannot escape the fate of becoming the wife, the possession, of the man who destroyed completely her previous, supposedly idyllic, way of life among the race of Amazon women.

Since it refers to what David Halperin describes as 'whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant',²⁰ another word for the discord Griffin explores in various cinematic versions of *Midsummer* like the one directed by Reinhardt and Dieterle under consideration here is queerness. In accord with the dictates of the regimes of the normal – with the normal understood, in this instance, as the heterocentric – Hippolyta should be far less equivocal about her forthcoming marriage to Theseus. Indeed, she ought to be downright ecstatic that Theseus saved her from an 'abnormal' life in a female-ruled society in which the need for men was at the utmost minimum; she ought to be grateful for her deliverance. As such Hippolyta's actions and words in this early part of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* are queer in the sense that they are 'at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant'. She is resisting, insofar as she can, the straightjacket of what Adrienne Rich very aptly labelled 'compulsory heterosexuality'.²¹ In this instance, compulsory heterosexuality takes the form of an enforced marriage – and all of its attendant responsibilities, such as house-running and childbearing – for Hippolyta to a man who violently abused her and her people (and then attempted to make a joke out of such misogynistic cruelties by using 'woo'd', 'sword' and 'injuries' as crude innuendos designed, presumably, to both seduce her and excuse his prior behaviour toward her), a man she does not seem to like, much less love, and a man she has not chosen to couple with of her own accord just because the proscriptions of an arbitrary normality demand that she do so. Given their individual and collective resistance to the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality it is not overstating the point to suggest that some queer audience members can possibly recognize at least something of a kindred spirit in Reinhardt and Dieterle's conformity-resisting Hippolyta.

It should be noted, too, that Reinhardt and Dieterle's representation of Hippolyta in their *Midsummer* is an interpellation that, if it exists at all, exists only in the subtext of Shakespeare's play. Griffin points out that a 'major problem

attends any discordant performance of the Theseus–Hippolyta opening scene: because Shakespeare’s script doesn’t show us the process by which Hippolyta is changed, her transformation by the last act [of the play] into a willing bride seems unmotivated’.²² Griffin claims, however, that Reinhardt and Dieterle grapple with this problem ‘squarely – by presenting at least a portion of Hippolyta’s transformation, partly through reorganizing the script and partly through a costume change’.²³ By the time Hippolyta and Theseus discuss their impending marriage in Reinhardt and Dieterle’s *Midsummer* – something that happens in the very first lines of Shakespeare’s *Midsummer* – Griffin discerns this transformed Hippolyta in the queenly style of her dress and in the fact that ‘although she seems to take a good deal more pleasure in the thought of the approach of the new moon than she does in that of their (hers and Theseus’s) solemnities, she nevertheless does seem quietly resigned to her fate’.²⁴ In contrast, Shakespeare’s Hippolyta seems to have accepted her plight from the initial moments of his *Midsummer*. In fact, she seems to be just as eager as Theseus is for their wedding to take place. That being the case, her transformation into a willing bride, as Griffin characterizes it in relation to Reinhardt and Dieterle’s film, needs no motivation; she is that willing bride from the outset of Shakespeare’s play. There is no small amount of irony then in the fact that, though designed to provide viewers with the background deemed necessary for them to understand the dynamics at work in Theseus and Hippolyta’s relationship, the discordant interpretation of these characters that Reinhardt and Dieterle make central to the opening moments of their cinematic production of the play also brings to the foreground the queerness – as measured, at least in part, by the force of Hippolyta’s resistance to the imperatives of compulsory heterosexuality – inherent in such a representation. Arguably, that queerness would have remained more or less unintelligible had Reinhardt and Dieterle chosen not to employ such a specific expository strategy in their adaptation of *Midsummer*.²⁵

The repeated depictions of Hippolyta's resistance to compulsory heterosexuality apparent in the first third of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* come to seem even more queer in light of what occurs in the last third of the film, the part that corresponds with Shakespeare's fifth act in which 'The Most Lamentable Comedy and Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe' is performed before the newly married duke and duchess and their court. Gone completely by this point in the movie is the angry, resisting woman warrior Hippolyta that had to be forced to walk through the streets of Athens led by the one that conquered her and her people. In her place is a relaxed and content Hippolyta who is 'entirely at home in the Athenian court'²⁶ and wears a genuine smile while walking hand in hand with Theseus through the ducal palace to the places of honour where they will sit as their nuptials are celebrated with mirth and revelling. She now wears a bright, elaborate and heavily bejewelled gown devoid of any accessory resembling a serpent. After questioning Theseus about the strangeness of the tales Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius have related regarding their experiences in the forest outside Athens, Hippolyta listens intently to her husband's speech about the similarities in the natures of lovers, madmen and poets (5.1.1–22). Though she responds with 'But all the story of the night told over, / And all their minds transfigur'd so together, / Tells more to us [More witnesseth] than fancy's images' (5.1.23–5), suggesting that she is convinced there is actual substance to the young lovers' stories, she also accepts Theseus's explanation without argument, as would be expected of the dutiful and subservient wife of a powerful man. Furthermore, it should be noted that Hippolyta's newfound equanimity toward her husband does not dissipate as the film concludes.

All of this accords with Shakespeare's text. Nevertheless, audiences might well wonder what happened to the irate and defiant Hippolyta that was presented to them earlier in the film and mourn her loss. In New Historicist terms, any subversive

qualities she once had have been contained and she has been rendered docile by the dominant patriarchal forces from which she is unable to escape. Yet the queer reading being performed here must register suspicion with the presumed happily-ever-after ending Reinhardt and Dieterle, following the original play, as it were, depict as the ultimate conclusion to Theseus and Hippolyta's story in their *Midsummer*. Even in its cinematic form, that happily-ever-after is easily disrupted given that, in the words of Louis Adrian Montrose, the 'play ends upon the threshold of another generational cycle, in which the procreation of new children will also produce new mothers and new fathers. Within this ending is a potential for renewing the forms of strife exhibited at the opening of the play.'²⁷ Peter Holland makes a similar point when he writes that *Midsummer* 'leaves entirely open the question of what the issue or outcome of this marriage of Athenian and Amazon will be, describing and blessing the future without directly stating what might or rather *will* happen (*will* because it is already accomplished, already fixed unalterably in the Theseus mythology)'.²⁸ Holland adds that in 'any version of the Theseus story Theseus does not stay with his Amazon bride ... and the next person on the Theseus list of seduced, raped and abandoned women seems usually to have been Phaedra', whose lust for Hippolytus, Theseus and Hippolyta's only child, will lead to death and destruction.²⁹ Marriage, in this case between a man and a woman, Theseus and Hippolyta, does not lead to the kind of stability and bliss many believe is the inevitable, ordained and final result of such unions. As Montrose and Holland both make clear by their references to classical Greek mythology, Hippolytus, the son of Theseus and Hippolyta, will engender all sorts of additional strife in his own life and in the lives of his father and mother.³⁰ Queer interpretation does not shy away from recognizing and accepting the fact that the notion of a relational happily-ever-after like that suggested by Shakespeare's and Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummers* is, at times, a simplistic, if not an outright dangerous, fiction.

III

Exactly what Oberon wants to do with the young boy Titania is keeping from him is a subject that has exercised critics of Shakespeare's *Midsummer* for some time. Richard Rambuss describes the circumstances as follows: 'What has really set Titania and Oberon at odds is the changeling boy. Titania holds on to the Indian prince, fetish-like, as a keepsake of his dead mother, pampering him in a precious, feminized world of flowers, sweets, and serenades, while Oberon wants to masculinize him' instead.³¹ Beyond the issue of custody, though, this is a particularly queer matter where Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* is concerned, in large part because the directors opted to feature the child as a character that actually appears on-screen rather than leaving him as a figure that is only spoken about by Oberon, Titania and Puck, but never 'seen', as in the original playtext. This queerness reveals itself when eroticism and sexuality are factored in to the interpretative milieu that surrounds both the play and the film. As Shirley Nelson Garner points out, the playwright provides two related but distinct reasons that explain the fairy king's and queen's respective obsessions with the changeling boy. On Oberon's side the reason is that Titania has stolen the boy from an Indian king and therefore does not deserve to keep him since she obtained him by nefarious means. On Titania's side the reason is that she is rearing the boy because she feels an overwhelming responsibility to the deceased votaress of the fairy queen's order, who was the boy's mother and Titania's bosom confidant.³² Clayton, trying to rehabilitate Oberon's misogynistic reputation, claims that:

while Oberon begs Titania to give him the boy, she withholds him, not for *his* [the boy's] sake but for the sake of his deceased mother, her late votary. The loyalty part of the sentiment is creditable but the rest and the effects are not: withholding the boy is made a willful refusal to yield

responsibly and sympathetically to Oberon's begging: it has no evident benefits for the boy, the boy's deceased mother, herself [Titania], or Oberon, now or hereafter.³³

More problematically however, Garner goes on to insist that both Oberon's and Titania's emotional investments in the changeling boy are charged with eroticism. Of the latter she writes, 'Titania's attachment to the boy is clearly erotic'; of the former she explains, 'Oberon's passionate determination to have the child for himself suggests that he is both attracted to and jealous of him' in equally erotic terms.³⁴ Though informed by the best insights generated by psychoanalytic theory as applied to the study of literature, this is dangerous territory – this is queer territory – given the prevalence of modern and postmodern anxieties associated with children, adults and sexuality.

Garner's repeated use of the term erotic in her essay is troublesome because it lacks definitional specificity. Drawing on its Greek etymology, the *OED* equates the erotic with the sexual as far as meaning is concerned.³⁵ But if there is in fact any kind of a sexual component to Oberon's and Titania's respective 'attractions' to the Indian boy, Garner does not make that clear in the course of her analysis; her readers are left to fend for themselves on the interpretation of this point. In either case both erotic and sexual are words that can be further divided into subcategories. These include, among others, the physical and the non-physical, the genital and the non-genital, and the romantic and the platonic. It can be inferred of course that Garner means only for erotic to be understood in its non-physical, non-genital and wholly platonic sense. In that case what she seems to be attempting to describe in relation to Oberon, Titania and the changeling boy is the idea of desire sans either the erotic or the sexual. To be sure, conceding that the possibility exists that Oberon's and Titania's interests in the youth may cross the line between the appropriately parental and the disturbingly criminal forces an entirely discomfiting confrontation with one of the darkest

sides of humanity – the abuse of children perpetrated by adults who are afflicted with a deformity in mind, character and spirit as devastating as it is repulsive.

Nevertheless it is one thing to contemplate such disturbing ideas in the comparatively safe realm of textual criticism; it is quite another to do so when concrete visual representations of Oberon's and Titania's erotic desires for the changeling boy are available as in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*. The changeling boy (Sheila Brown)³⁶ first appears in the film as Puck (Mickey Rooney) regales the fairy in Titania's service (Nina Theilade) with the story that the child was stolen by Titania from an Indian king and that Oberon wants the youngster for himself so that he can be a '[k]night of his [Oberon's] train' (2.1.1–42). Dressed in shiny silver clothing, the boy looks very much like a miniature turbaned raja. Bruce Babbington claims that the boy is 'doubly contradictory; clearly masculine, yet highly feminised; and speechless, which makes him a literal infant, yet a perfectly coordinated child' who 'provides identification for both male (Oberon) and female (Titania) oedipal trajectories within his masculinity'.³⁷ For the most part, the boy seems to be at home in the forest just outside Athens: he attempts to catch a firefly or two, he is entranced by a group of fairy musicians performing in the tree branches above, and he longs to fly like the fairy children who come to frolic with him in the wood. Clearly there is something very special about this changeling boy; he is at the centre of all the attention and the adoration. He is the object of everyone's desire within and without the film.

When Titania (Anita Louise) finally appears, the fairy queen and the boy run into one another's arms as if they have been parted for an interminable period of time. Babbington describes this portion of the scene in the following way: the changeling 'is ecstatically reunited with the mother [Titania] in a sequence of breathtaking consummation, with the two running towards each other and the camera, so that the audience is alternately positioned with the points of view of mother and child'.³⁸ The overdetermined effect here is a highly emotional one despite

the obviously manipulative qualities that bring the effect to life. As the entire company proceeds to dance its way around the forest Titania takes every opportunity to shower light, feathery kisses on the face of her beloved little boy, the child of her devoted votaress. Before long the fairy queen and the changeling boy are led by the dancing company of her subjects to her bower where she and the child will rest. After placing a wreath of flowers on the boy's head Titania kisses him again four times in a row, once on the nose, once on the cheek and twice on the lips. Then mother and child lie down to sleep in a state of perfect contentment right next to one another. While singing as requested, a few of the fairy queen's subjects cover their monarch and her boy in a blanket woven of fresh flowers, leaves and vines. And for the briefest of moments at least, all seems right in the fairy world. But these interactions between a mother and a child, depicted on-screen as they are in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*, call particular attention to the fraught erotic component inherent in such relationships. It was Freud who claimed that 'sexual love and what appears to be non-sexual love for parents are fed from the same sources; the latter, that is to say, merely corresponds to an infantile fixation of the libido'.³⁹ In other words, a child's erotic desire for a parent is merely another manifestation of the child's innate desire for a parent's care and nurturing that is part and parcel of the human developmental experience. Drawing on the work of Freud and Julia Kristeva, Aranye Fradenburg describes the dynamics in operation here as follows:

when we are young, we are in love with people a lot older than we are, and they with us, and we all 'know' it, if not consciously. We cannot become a human subject without taking in how our parents feel about us; the adult's passionate love for the child is also in the child and in the adult she [or he] will become. This love is readily eroticized on both sides. It is not just 'tenderness' but 'in-loveness'; it has a passional quality and is manifested through extraordinary bodily intimacy.⁴⁰

From the initial embrace of Titania and the Indian boy, to the kisses they share, and to the fairy bed they slumber so closely together in, the eroticized 'in-loveness' Fradenburg details in her work is made plain in the images of the fairy queen and her charge that Reinhardt and Dieterle present in this section of their film. Individually and collectively these interactions between Titania and her votaress's son make the passionate quality of their relationship readily apparent. And it is a queer imperative to interpret them as such.

Though represented quite differently, Oberon's (Victor Jory) erotic attachment to the changeling boy in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is no less intense than Titania's. Upon their initial confrontation under the moonlight in the forest a menacing Oberon reiterates to Titania that she alone has the power to bring their quarrel to an end. To this he adds: 'I do but beg a little changeling boy / To be my henchman' (2.1.120–1); then he makes a sudden grab for the boy that is unsuccessful because the child is so well protected by the queen and her coterie of fairies. Once Titania has explained to the fairy king why she will not give the boy up to him, Oberon inquires as to how long she intends to stay in the woods. In a rather sly, taunting, high-pitched voice, she answers:

Perchance till after Theseus' wedding-day.
 If you will patiently dance in our round,
 And see our moonlight revels, go with us;
 If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts. (2.1.139–42)

Oberon's not unexpected response is: 'Give me that boy, and I will go with thee' (2.1.143), which causes Titania to flee with the child wrapped firmly in her arms so that Oberon cannot take him from her by force. But when Titania later abandons the changeling boy in favour of the ass-headed Bottom, Oberon rushes into the clearing where the child lies on the ground in tears, and utters a primal scream of triumph as he sweeps the boy into his embrace. With a deep-throated laugh he proclaims 'This falls out better than I could devise'

(3.2.35); then he retreats, with the changeling finally in his sole possession as he wanted all along, back into the forest. Thus what Montrose describes as ‘Oberon’s attempt to take the boy from an infantilizing mother and to make a man of him’ proves successful and, not incidentally, simultaneously ensures the continuation of his vision of the patriarchy.

It should be noted however, that Montrose’s summation of the circumstances involving Oberon’s acquisition of the changeling and what it means – that Oberon will be able ‘to make a man of him’ now that the boy has been wrested away from Titania’s overwhelmingly feminine influence – is only unproblematic from a traditional patriarchal perspective. Clayton provides the reminder that

it is not very common for critics to discuss the *boy’s* interest ... According to the social norms implicit in the relations between the principals, it must be about the time that the boy would be fairy barmitzvahed and join the men – or elder fairies – if he is ready to be a ‘henchman.’ So, in the patriarchal fairy culture, *his* interests are best served by joining Oberon.⁴¹

And indeed, throughout much of Western history, male children were separated from women, particularly their mothers, as a matter of course once they had reached a certain age. This was done so that these youths could be schooled properly in the ways of masculinity as they grew from boys into the men who, among other important tasks, would govern, fight for and produce the foodstuffs and goods that would ensure the survival of their respective societies. The assumption behind this separation of boys from women was built on the ideology that women were incapable of raising true men; only men who had themselves been through the transition from boy to man could bring about such an important metamorphosis successfully. There can be no doubt too that the curriculum for boys on their way to becoming the men they needed to be encompassed

formal and informal instruction in sex in its procreative and non-procreative forms. These conventional associations are not at all unexpected as far as Montrose's 'to make a man of him' statement is concerned. But significant complications arise here anyway because of the unavoidable fact that Oberon is perhaps the queer figure of all queer figures in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*.

Christy Desmet notes that the changeling boy 'comes equipped with a maternal lineage [by virtue of being the offspring of Titania's votaress] as ward to the fairy queen that prevents him from being absorbed easily into another Ovidian plot, playing Ganymede to Oberon's Jove'.⁴² The myth of Jove's sudden, intense passion for the mortal youth Ganymede – a desire so strong it led Jove to transform Ganymede into the immortal cup-bearer of the gods – is well known. It is also a myth that gay men in particular have claimed as one of their own foundational identitarian stories. Hence Oberon's queer desire for the Indian boy in Shakespeare's and Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummers* is alluded to intertextually. But Oberon's queerness also reveals itself through the character's potential bisexuality. Following the tumultuous night-time events in the forest outside Athens the fairy king tells Puck as a new day begins: 'But we are spirits of another sort / I with the Morning's love have oft made sport' (3.2.388–9). Most glosses on this passage note that the 'Morning's love' is a reference to Aurora, the mythological goddess of the dawn that makes way for the sun to shine every morning, while 'sport' is a long-standing euphemism for sex. The logical assumption then is that Oberon and Aurora have enjoyed multiple erotic romps together and will quite likely continue to do so in the future. Interestingly, Stephen Greenblatt, editor of *Midsummer* for *The Norton Shakespeare*, adds in a parenthetical aside in the footnote to the lines cited here the following information: 'or Cephalus, a brave hunter, Aurora's lover'.⁴³ Considering the fact that the 'love' in question is linked grammatically by possession to the 'Morning', Greenblatt's gloss makes a great deal of interpretive sense. More to the point it suggests that

Aurora may not have been Oberon's only object of desire; the fairy king's 'oft made [sex] sport[s]' could have involved the brave male hunter Cephalus exclusively, alternately, or perhaps even simultaneously. It is clear from this evidence then that Shakespeare did not box the character of Oberon into a conventional heterosexual role; his sexual object choices among Aurora and Cephalus are enough to make him queer in a very basic if not exactly revolutionary sense.

Thus a rather heady situation now emerges in relation to Oberon and the changeling boy the fairy king has taken possession of from Titania in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* so that Oberon can make him a 'Knight of his train' (2.1.25), his 'henchman' (2.1.121) and, as Montrose puts it, 'to make a man out of him'. The idea that presumptively heterosexual men inevitably take over the upbringing of boys from women in Western society once they are of a certain age underlies Montrose's thinking. But the fact that Oberon is a queer man assuming charge of the Indian boy's development complicates this normative trajectory in intriguing ways. For some the idea of a queer man being in charge of a young boy's transition to manhood might be anathema of the worst sort. Such individuals may think that the Indian boy's upbringing ought to be left to one like the unmistakably masculine, martial and heterosexual Theseus rather than the to-be-feared queer Oberon who would most certainly damage the child beyond all repair. There is something remarkable then in the fact that Reinhardt and Dieterle – following Shakespeare but punctuating him with specific visual clarity – leave their audiences with the certainty that the changeling boy is going to be raised by the queer Oberon. From a presentist perspective rather than a strictly historical one tied to the mid-1930s or the late sixteenth century, this representation pulses with resonance because Western society has evolved to the point where – as proven by the increasing empirical evidence produced by scientific, sociological, psychological and educational studies – it recognizes and accepts, in most quarters at least, that queer people of all kinds are just as capable of and successful at raising children

as their straight counterparts. Like many things associated with queer people, their ability to be decent parents has been hidden from history for far too long. That is no longer the case.

It should be noted too that the eroticism Garner identifies as a constituent part of Oberon's and Titania's individual relationships with the changeling boy is also, as detailed here, presented in stereotypically gendered terms. Titania's interest in the boy comes across as at once intimate and nurturing; Oberon's, on the other hand, seems intimate and aggressive. The words motherly and fatherly could also be used as adverbial descriptors in these particular circumstances with only some pause. However, what ultimately disturbs the rigid male/female binary Reinhardt and Dieterle construct in their interpretation of the Oberon/Titania conflict over the changeling boy is the fact that the king's and the queen's respective desires are in the end displaced from the child and on to another, age-appropriate, though certainly no less problematic, figure: Bottom, the hapless weaver and amateur actor compelled by naïve, but no less sincere, dreams of grandeur.

After Titania spurns him yet again over the changeling boy and disappears into the forest with the child folded tightly against her chest, Oberon vows revenge: 'Well, go thy way; thou shalt not from this grove / Till I torment thee for this injury' (2.1.146–7). He then sends his gentle Puck off in search of the 'love-in-idleness' (2.1.168) flower, the liquid of which he plans to use to bring Titania to heel. The fairy king envisions his vengeance taking the following form:

And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies.

.....

The next thing then she waking looks upon

.....

She shall pursue it with the soul of love.

And [before] I take this charm [off from] her sight

.....

I'll make her render up [this boy] to me. (2.1.257–8, 179, 182–3, 185)

Though not technically needed to understand what is going on and why in this part of the film, it is nevertheless rather strange that Reinhardt and Dieterle chose to leave out Oberon's list of the various kinds of creatures he imagines Titania experiencing an immediate erotic attraction to. In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this roster includes lions, bears, wolves, bulls, monkeys and apes, as well as lynxes, cats, leopards and boars (2.1.180–1; 2.2.29–30). According to Jan Kott, '[a]ll these animals represent abundant sexual potency, and some of them play an important part in sexual demonology'.⁴⁴ Bottom of course is transformed by Puck into an ass, a beast that, Kott explains, '[f]rom antiquity up to the Renaissance ... was credited with the strongest sexual potency and among all quadrupeds was supposed to have the longest and hardest phallus'.⁴⁵ Beneath the comedy of this plotline then there lies something altogether darker and more troubling. Taylor points out that 'it is not lust of which Oberon is curing his wife: he is exploiting her sensual nature to cure her of the most fundamental fault of all in marriage, the fault from which all others spring, a wife's disobedience of her husband'.⁴⁶ But in order to make Titania pay for her transgressions against him, Oberon is doing everything within his power to create the circumstances in which he will have the 'pleasure' of seeing his wife coupling romantically and, presumably sexually, with an animal rather than another anthropomorphic fairy of her own kind. From this perspective Oberon is unable to escape the charge of being little more than a sadistic panderer of bestiality – a practice so far beyond the pale of 'the normal, the legitimate, [and] the dominant' that it cannot be anything other than queer as well.

Due largely to the efforts of Thomas Cromwell, 'An Acte for the punysshement of the vice of Buggerie', also known in its short though unofficial form as the Buggery Act, was passed into law by the English Parliament in 1533, well

into the nearly forty-year reign of King Henry VIII. The act criminalized the 'detestable and abominable Vice of Buggery committed with mankind or beast'⁴⁷ in the civil and ecclesiastical juridical realms. This was a legal proscription that curiously enough had never been effected in Europe prior to the early sixteenth century. According to the act, those who committed the crime of buggery and 'being herof convict by verdict confession or outlawry shall suffer such pains of death and losses and penalties of their goods chattels debts lands tenements and hereditaments as felons do according to the Common Laws of this Realme'.⁴⁸ Put another way, those found guilty of buggery forfeited all of their worldly goods to the crown and their lives to, it is a safe assumption, the vengeful Christian God of the Old Testament. Where semantics are concerned, it is clear from the text of the act itself that buggery and bestiality are for all intents equated as one and the same within the linguistic confines of the new law Cromwell shepherded through Parliament and that, a generation later, Queen Elizabeth I reinstated (it having been repealed in 1553 under the reign of her half-sister, the staunch Catholic Queen Mary), in perpetuity this time, in 1563.

Although the legal framework for prosecuting those suspected of committing buggery was in place in England by 1533, Bruce Thomas Boehrer reveals that '[d]ocumented cases of bestiality are rare in early English records'.⁴⁹ He adds that:

This is not to deny that real people were tried, punished, and even executed for bestial buggery; they most certainly were. Yet the miniscule numbers of such trials; the extreme inconsistencies of sentencing, which could range from a virtual slap from the church courts to hanging under the common law; the massive contrast between the heated language of Renaissance moralists and legal theorists and the trickle of prosecutions for buggery of any kind; and the occasional way in which bestiality charges were tacked on to other, more serious accusations as a kind of judicially

unnecessary lily-gilding – all these suggest that the rhetoric of bestiality was in some basic ways more important than the crime itself.⁵⁰

In other words, merely discoursing about bestiality took more prominence in 1530s England than the commission of the actual acts associated with bestiality.⁵¹ Even so, with his representation of the sudden love affair between Titania and the ass-headed Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare seems to be flirting recklessly with the spectre of out-and-out criminality, albeit theatrical criminality, whether viewed from a sixteenth- or an early twenty-first-century perspective. Regardless, there can be no doubt that Titania and Bottom's relationship in the play, and Reinhardt and Dieterle's film version of it, violates both the word and the spirit of Cromwell's Buggery Act. But if the rhetoric of bestiality – the words, the treatises, the laws, the arguments, the literary treatments, in short, the overall discourse, of bestiality – was, as Boehrer explains, of more interest than the actual crime itself to the authorities in early modern England, then Shakespeare was likely on safe ground where this particular dramatic fiction of bestiality was concerned since it was, apparently, just another cog in the larger discursive nexus associated with these transgressive types of behaviour.

Still, the very real slipperiness of terminology – the tension between the signifier and the signified – is only magnified when modern words for sexual acts and identities are placed into conversation with their early modern English counterparts. As Alan Bray explains, it

[...] was not until the 1890s that the term homosexual first began to be used in English, and none of its predecessors now survive in common speech: ganymede, pathic, cinaedus, catamite, bugger, ingle, sodomite – such words survive if at all in legal forms or deliberate obscenity, or in the classical and theological contexts from which they were drawn.⁵²

That being the case, Bray goes on to question whether a more historically accurate term for homosexual existed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He writes that '[o]nly two of the possible candidates, bugger and sodomite, were in general use and neither was synonymous with homosexuality alone. "Buggery" could be used with equal ease to mean bestiality as homosexuality', and so could sodomy.⁵³ So not only were buggery and bestiality synonymous in early modern England, but sodomy was equal to both, and all three could be used to signify what individuals in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries conceive of as homosexuality.

But layered on top of this impreciseness is even more impreciseness. Bray reveals that the 'Elizabethan "sodomy" differed from our contemporary idea of "homosexuality" in a number of other ways also. It covered more hazily a whole range of sexual acts, of which sexual acts between two people of the same sex were only a part.'⁵⁴ Elizabethan sodomy was 'closer, rather, to an idea like debauchery. But it differed more fundamentally also in that it was not only a sexual crime. It was also a political and a religious crime and it was this that explains most clearly why it was regarded with such dread.'⁵⁵ Elizabethan sodomy was also a crime that anyone could commit at any time in their lives; it did not carry the monolithic identitarian force that the concept of the homosexual does today. No one in early modern England would have referred to him- or herself as a sodomite, whereas millions of people the world over have, do and will continue to refer to themselves as homosexual (or gay, queer, bisexual and so forth) in the present and the future. Given this morass of definitional problems, it is not at all surprising that Foucault described sodomy as 'that utterly confused category' in his groundbreaking three-volume history of sexuality.⁵⁶ It is an utterly confused category indeed.

So what from a queer perspective can be inferred from this utter confusion about sodomy in relation to Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*? The answer is, a great deal. In his work on bestial buggery in the playtext Boehrer asserts from

the outset that Shakespeare's comedy 'is patently about bestiality'.⁵⁷ He adds that, '[o]n the most immediate level, Titania's animal passion for the asinine Bottom climaxes the play's fairy subplot. In the process, this passion tests the bounds of Elizabethan theatrical decorum'.⁵⁸ The same two points can be made about Reinhardt and Dieterle's film, with the latter morphing into something like: Titania's drug-induced desire for Bottom the ass pushes the envelope of twentieth-/twenty-first-century cinematic appropriateness. Movie depictions of simulated bestiality – like the allusive performances of simulated bestiality must have been on the theatre stages of early modern England – make it difficult if not impossible to ignore or to dismiss the literal fact that such activities between humans and other species do occur in the material world and have likely done so since the beginning of time. In Reinhardt and Dieterle's adaptation the representation of the simulated bestiality between Titania and ass-headed Bottom is very subtly done but nonetheless troubling considering what it conveys in its specificity and immediacy: that is the physical manifestation of bestiality itself, a set of sexual acts and behaviours that the vast majority in Western society find abhorrent.

As Bottom sings in order to hold fear at bay after his fellow amateur thespians have left him alone in the forest audiences of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* are provided with a lingering shot that features Titania sleeping in her bower with the changeling boy by her side. When she stirs, her thoughts are focused on the source of the singing: 'What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?' she asks (3.1.124). Her votaress's son is, it seems, no longer of interest to her. Having left the child behind, Titania approaches Bottom; when she is near enough to his ass/person, she cannot keep her hands, or much of the rest of her body, for that matter, off his.⁵⁹ Before long the fairy queen swears in Bottom's ear 'I love thee' in a voice infused with breathless passion (3.1.136). Moments later Titania repeats the fact that she loves Bottom and, while doing so, she strokes and kisses his muzzle before embracing the

creature fully and then curling up against his chest (3.1.147–50). Thus, in the words of Michael P. Jensen, a certain kind of strangeness is made apparent in the film, and that ‘mostly because of its implied perversity’, given the all-too-obvious fact that Titania and Bottom are two different species on the verge of coupling.⁶⁰ Titania clearly wants for physical and emotional intimacy with the ass-headed Bottom. Indeed Kott claims, bluntly, that the ‘slender, tender, and lyrical Titania *longs* for animal love ... This [Bottom the ass] is the lover she wanted and dreamed of; only she never wanted to admit it, even to herself.’⁶¹ She instructs her fairies to fashion ‘night-candles [tapers]’ out of the ‘waxen-thighs’ of ‘humble-bees’ so that there will be enough light for her ‘[t]o have my love to bed’ where she proceeds to ‘dote’ on him in a pronounced state of ecstasy (3.1.164, 162, 161; 4.1.44). That ‘dote’ is little more than a euphemism for sexual activity is made clear by Gail Kern Paster, who writes:

Bottom’s languor at his appearance with Titania in act 4, scene 1, his passivity and apparent bodily contentment at being scratched petted, and adorned, may well suggest the postcoital. We are free to assume that in the interval since their first encounter in act 3, scene 1, the monstrous [i.e., bestial] mating has occurred – an action manifestly unstageable but not unimaginable.⁶²

A monstrous mating of this kind is also unfilmable but not unimaginable. But the implication of its occurrence is unmistakable and impossible to ignore in the film. Jensen explains that ‘[w]hile the scene is handled chastely, they *are* embracing in Titania’s bower. Freud would have loved this scene’, he adds,

especially when Titania winds him [Bottom] in her arms and sings to him of their physical contact, then encourages him to sleep. Reinhardt and [music composer] Korngold took a song that is in Shakespeare, but repeated the lines

about their physical contact ['I will wind thee in my arms' (4.1.39)] again and again, cutting most of the others. Adding to the perversity, Oberon and Puck look on approvingly.⁶³

It ought not to go unnoticed that the Indian boy, following the lead of Oberon and Puck, is also looking on at the intimacies taking place between Titania and Bottom, increasing the perversity of the moment Jensen remarks on exponentially by invocation of a decidedly queer primal scene.

While the dialogue cited above is spoken in Reinhardt and Dieterle's production, the visuals that accompany them also make it very clear that Titania and Bottom are, both before and as they slowly make their way to her bower for what remains of the night, being united in the state of holy matrimony. Titania's fairy attendants craft the queen a veil and train from the silky webs of the forest's spiders while they also spiff Bottom up and provide him with an oversized sunflower boutonniere for the impromptu ceremony. Even the soundtrack is made to participate in the signifying equation of this particular matrimonial performance, especially when the triumphant, celebratory strains of Mendelssohn's ubiquitous 'Wedding March' can be heard. Given the fact that these circumstances involve respectively a fairy and an ass/man rather than the traditional human man and woman, they demonstrate the fact, as Arthur L. Little, Jr. insists, that 'no Shakespeare play succeeds more than *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in trafficking in the possibility of queer marriage'.⁶⁴ Indeed, *Midsummer's* participation in the multiple possibilities of queer marriage is on full display in Reinhardt and Dieterle's film; this is most evident in the directors' depiction of the very queer, quasi-marital relationship between Titania and Bottom.

The wedding of Titania and Bottom in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* is also queer because it is an event that does not actually occur in Shakespeare's playtext. For Shakespeare, it is enough that Titania and Bottom love each other; in the playwright's view, nothing else is required

to authorize their sexual relationship. So then what is the significance of the fact that Reinhardt and Dieterle chose to show Titania and Bottom marrying immediately prior to the commencement of their physical intimacies? The specificity of such a representation makes it seem like the marriage between Titania and Bottom is effected in one example of early twentieth-century Anglophone Shakespearean cinema for the sole reason of serving heteronormative and patriarchal ideological ends. Although Titania and Bottom are not real personages, they are fictional approximations of real personages. They can be considered then as figures that were part of the Elizabethan fascination with what Boehrer describes as the rhetoric of bestiality as opposed to the actual manifest reality of the crime of bestiality. In addition the statistics Boehrer provides in his work suggest that, had they been living, breathing beings, Titania and Bottom likely would not have been prosecuted or convicted for participating in acts of bestial buggery in early modern England. Since it was, as Bray writes, a social, a political and a religious offence rather than merely a sexual offence, it does not seem at all likely either that Titania and Bottom would even be suspected of committing sodomy in the circumstances Shakespeare and Reinhardt and Dieterle present them in where their respective versions of *Midsummer* are concerned. It seems that because they are presumptively heterosexual, they get a pass as far as their other (adulterous, bigamous and, potentially, child abusive) behaviours are concerned.

By cloaking the queerness of bestiality in the banal respectability of heterosexual marriage, even one that transforms Titania into a bigamist because she is also still married to Oberon, Reinhardt and Dieterle almost succeed at rendering the bestial buggery enacted by Titania and Bottom in their production of *Midsummer* unnoticeable, or at least easier to dismiss as unimportant. Elision of this exact kind has been put forth in studies of Shakespeare's playtext. For instance, Deborah Wyrick claims that 'the dalliance between the ass and the Fairy Queen is one of amusement' and nothing more.⁶⁵

In this reading, comedy trumps the bestial so decisively that the bestial disappears. Similarly, Joseph H. Summers insists that: 'As almost every audience recognizes, the scenes between Bottom and Titania do not descend to nightmarish bestiality.'⁶⁶ Thus without taking the historical record into account like Boehrer and other scholars have done, Wyrick and Summers seem to attempt to eradicate any hint of the bestial in Shakespeare's *Midsummer* by rhetorical fiat alone. Although Shakespearean film critics have to this point in time not commented explicitly on the subject of bestiality in relation to the characters of Titania and Bottom in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*, it is not at all impossible to surmise that some of them might be inclined to engage in the same kind of disavowals that Wyrick and Summers do in their respective studies. Still, given the fact that the vengeance Oberon takes on Titania serves the needs of patriarchal and heteronormative ends, presumably no real harm is done in these circumstances and, in fact, the 'natural' order of things with the man once again in control of the woman is restored by the time all is said and done between the fairy king and queen. On this point Garner writes that '[s]ince he cannot persuade Titania to turn the [Indian] boy over to him, he humiliates her and torments her until she does so. He uses the love potion not simply to divert her attention from the child, so that he can have him, but to punish her as well' for her transgression against him and his superior, masculine authority.⁶⁷ Oberon's actions toward Titania function as a sharp reminder that as her husband Oberon is also her lord and master and that she must submit to all of his whims, desires, demands, orders and so forth – no matter how unfair, demeaning, disrespectful, outrageous or degrading.

With the work of Boehrer and Garner being two on a shortlist of notable exceptions, traditional criticism of *Midsummer* – as a play and in its Reinhardt and Dieterle cinematic incarnation – has remained largely silent on the issues of bestiality and adult/child eroticism, not to mention male and female homoeroticism, that the comedy wrestles

with. Indeed, Rambuss notes that the forest in which the bulk of the action of the play (and the film) takes place is a 'dreamscape lush with sexual possibilities: not only the homoeroticism that sometimes encumbers, sometimes oils the marriage machine of Shakespearean comedy, but also child-love, anality, and bestiality'.⁶⁸ Still, as far as Reinhardt and Dieterle's treatment of the fairy king, the fairy queen, the changeling boy and the ass-headed man is concerned, a queer reading like the one carried out here discerns a rather striking hypocrisy. Oberon and Titania, the straight couple, are the transgressors *par excellence* when it comes to bestiality and adult/child eroticism. Regarding the former, Boehrer, with pithy bluntness, describes Oberon as a 'king and semideity who acts like a peeping Tom with a taste for animal fornication'.⁶⁹ Because of Oberon's spiteful machinations, Titania indulges in the pleasures of bestiality and becomes technically speaking a bigamist in the process. Furthermore, both Oberon and Titania are adulterers and both harbour barely repressed, quasi-inappropriate erotic desires for an underage boy. Yet in previous criticism of Shakespeare's play and Reinhardt and Dieterle's cinematic adaptation of it, neither Oberon nor Titania is held accountable for their individual and collective violations of propriety and/or outright law-breaking. It is as if the fact of their heterosexuality alone absolves them of any wrongdoing. They are certainly not made to suffer like their queer brethren are and have been for centuries for their supposed emotional, psychological and spiritual deformities, and their resulting behavioural, emotional and physical 'lapses' outside of the realm of the 'normal'.

IV

The treatment of masculinity in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* is also demonstrably queer in at least one sense because it does not offer a unified representation of what it

means to be a man nor of how men should ideally comport themselves in the world of Athens and its environs. Take, for instance, Theseus, a character that first appears in the film dressed in the manner of an ancient Greek warrior. His uniform includes the traditional short soldier's tunic of the period with a fan of metal strips to shield his waist, as well as a gleaming silver breastplate designed to protect his upper body from harm and which accentuates his muscular chest. An armoured helmet with martial feathers both crowns his head and frames his handsome face, a face that is marked by large, lively eyes, a well-shaped nose and a neatly trimmed beard. The tights Theseus wears only highlight and draw attention to his long, well-developed and shapely legs. Though it may very well push against the boundaries of critical decorum to say so, some audience members might find this Theseus an attractive figure, including those whose desires are queer and encompass members of the same sex as themselves. However, it must be remembered, too, that at this early point in the movie, Theseus is leading Hippolyta – as the prisoner of war he conquered by force rather than consent – through the centre of the city like he might lead a dog on a leash. The talk of his desire to marry Hippolyta in another key, '[w]ith pomp, with triumph, and with revelling' (1.1.19), rings hollow considering the fact that, in light of Theseus's success in defeating Hippolyta through violent means, he has managed to restore the 'natural' patriarchal order to the Western world in which men rule over women given the former's assumed innate superiority, wisdom and prowess.

Following Shakespeare, Oberon and Egeus are shown in the film acting similarly to how Theseus acts toward Hippolyta as regards 'their' women. When Titania steadfastly refuses to part with the Indian boy her votaress gave birth to, Oberon moves decisively and vindictively to humiliate Titania into submission so that he can take the child for himself. And Egeus is so determined to marry his daughter Helena off to Demetrius, even though she loves Lysander, that he is willing to see her dead and buried or relegated to a convent for the

rest of her life just because she is choosing to deny him his paternal right to 'dispose of her' (1.1.42) as he sees fit and without consideration of her feelings, wishes or desires in the matter. The actions of Theseus, Oberon and Egeus thus confirm the fact that the world they inhabit is one in which men are the masters and women no more than their subordinate subjects. Their deeds reflect their understanding of the normative when it comes to how relations between men and women are supposed to work in a well-ordered, properly functioning, male-dominated society.

Yet there is another significant representation of masculinity in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* that warrants comment in the present context; it is to be found in the film's depiction of Lysander (Dick Powell) and Demetrius (Ross Alexander). Whether they were directed to do so or chose to do so of their own accord, Powell and Alexander play Lysander and Demetrius, respectively, as foppish, effete buffoons. Often their exaggerated mannerisms border on the effeminate with Powell's Lysander the more egregious of the two as far as such acts are concerned. Early in the film, for instance, as Theseus is being feted by the citizens of Athens for his victory over the Amazons, Demetrius rolls his eyes around in his head when he catches sight of Helena (Jean Muir) waving at him from across the square and then dissolving into tears because of Demetrius's cruel disdain for her. Seconds later, however, Demetrius is nothing but smiles when his attention falls on Hermia (Olivia de Havilland) who, ironically (and not unjustifiably), turns her back on him. When Lysander and Demetrius spar over which one of them should be allowed to take possession of Hermia from her father, Lysander speaks with a pronounced falsetto, waggles his head on his shoulders, and puckers his lips in a disdainful – and decidedly unmanly – fashion. This is particularly evident when Lysander tells Demetrius, 'You have her father's love ... Let me have Hermia's; do you marry him' (1.1.93–4). Indeed, Lysander seems to have no shame whatsoever when it comes to his treatment of Demetrius here; it is as if Lysander is

deliberately trying to provoke the other young man into some kind of reaction regardless of what consequences may issue from such foolhardiness.

Lysander is also presented as fond of skipping and hopping as opposed to merely walking or even running like a man might be expected to do when he needs to move about. He is shown gambolling in such a manner twice in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*. The first occurrence happens when he follows after Hermia as she flees from the presence of her father and the duke upon hearing the latter's pronouncement that she must do as Egeus demands and marry Demetrius rather than Lysander. 'The course of true love never did run smooth' (1.1.134), Lysander coos into Hermia's ear once he has skipped and hopped up behind her and has taken her into his arms. Later, transformed by Oberon's magic love juice because of Puck's having 'mistaken quite, / And laid the love-juice on some true love's sight' (3.2.88–9), Lysander is seen prancing through the forest wide as he pursues Helena, with whom he is now completely enamoured because of the fairy king's and his sprite's inadvertent machinations. Toward the end of the forest madness section of the film, and once Oberon and Puck have sorted out the convoluted business that has taken place between the two couples and night has given way to day, Hermia and Lysander and Helena and Demetrius individually, then collectively, pantomime their reactions to all that befell them in the preceding hours. Soon Hermia and Helena and Lysander and Demetrius are paired in this impromptu dumb show. What is significant about the male couple's interaction here is that it includes the spectacle of Lysander falling repeatedly into Demetrius's arms along (see Figure 2) with Demetrius catching Lysander before Lysander can fall to the forest ground. It is striking that Lysander seems to have no qualms about being held by another man and, conversely, that Demetrius has no qualms about holding another man so closely to his own person. Lysander's penchant for skipping, hopping and seeking out the embrace of other men as he does in Reinhardt and Dieterle's film is problematic because such

FIGURE 2 *Demetrius (Ross Alexander) and Lysander (Dick Powell) falling into each other's arms. A Midsummer Night's Dream, dir. Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle, 1935.*

actions fall into the same classification of effeminate gestures as limp wrists, sashaying with hands poised on hips, speaking with a lisp and assuming a falsetto instead of a normal voice in speech, among others – all of which have been linked negatively, in the West in particular, with specifically male homosexual behaviour and identity since at least the mid- to late nineteenth century.⁷⁸

Though innocent in and of themselves, the effeminate behaviour and actions of Lysander and Demetrius remarked on here resonate on a queer level precisely because of the boundless heterosexist zeal, operative from the moment the homosexual was according to Foucault discovered some 145 years ago, to categorize such behaviour and actions as deviant, as non-normative and as unacceptable for 'real' men

to engage in if they were intent on maintaining the unquestioned status of their masculinity. At the same time, it must be conceded that Reinhardt and Dieterle's representation of Lysander and Demetrius is anachronistic, although only partly ahistorical. To that end, Stephen Orgel reveals that in early modern England 'the most persistent line of medical and anatomical thought from the time of Galen had cited homologies in the genital structure of the sexes to show that male and female were versions of the same unitary species'.⁷⁰ That being the case, the 'female genitals were simply the male genitals inverted, and carried internally instead of externally'.⁷¹ Because both men and women were thought to bring about the genesis of life via ejaculation, the logical extension of this idea was that 'male and female seeds are present in every fetus', while 'a fetus becomes male rather than female if the male seed is dominant, and generates enough heat to press the genital organs outward'.⁷² Given such an understanding of 'anatomical history, we all begin as female, and masculinity is a development out of and away from femininity'.⁷³ Orgel goes on to point out though that the 'frightening part of the teleology [of gender] for the Renaissance mind' was its possible reversal.⁷⁴ This very real fear was fuelled by the 'conviction that men can turn into – or be turned into – women, or perhaps more exactly can be turned *back* into women, losing the strength that enabled the male potential to be realized in the first place' in the womb by the formation of outward-facing genitals.⁷⁵

The way early moderns attempted to circumvent this, to them, horrific possibility had much to do with the child-rearing philosophies of the era. As was customary at this time in history, male children were, by the age of seven, removed from the care and nurture of their mothers and placed in circumstances intended to encourage the development of their masculinity to its fullest realization. Indeed, once he had reached that critical age, 'for a [growing] man to associate with women was felt to be increasingly dangerous – not only for the woman, but even more for the man: lust effeminates,

makes men incapable of manly pursuits' like hunting, war and so forth.⁷⁶ In slightly different terms, what made a man effeminate in early modern England were his affection, desire and love for a woman and nothing but his affection, desire and love for a woman.⁷⁷ Some 500 years or so later almost the exact opposite is true: a man's affection, desire and love for a woman are, today, some of the key aspects that constitute the bulk of his masculinity.

With their representation of Lysander in particular and, to a lesser extent, of Demetrius, Reinhardt and Dieterle, most likely unwittingly, succeeded in manifesting – albeit in fictional cinematic form – the worst fears of the early modern English people where gender and masculinity are concerned: a man beset by effeminacy because of his romantic interest in a woman. The main difference between Reinhardt and Dieterle's depiction and actual fifteenth-/sixteenth-century epistemology, as Orgel makes clear, is that the latter gave full credence to the incredible idea that a man's being effeminized would result in the literal evisceration of his penis, which would, because of the loss of the original strength and heat that pushed his genitals outward in the first place, morph back into the form of a vagina solely on account of his non-masculine behaviour, itself engendered by nothing more than his attraction to a woman. But it is crucially important to understand that what Reinhardt and Dieterle also succeeded in depicting in their *Midsummer*, especially through the character of Lysander, is the late nineteenth-/twentieth-/early twenty-first-century stereotype of the male homosexual. This stereotype, and all of its cognates, was built on the idea – explored by, among a number of others, the English sexologist Havelock Ellis – of sexual inversion: the view that male homosexuals were really women trapped in men's bodies that appropriated feminine behaviours in the areas of, for example, apparel, mannerisms, voice control and, most particularly of course, sexual desire for members of their own biological gender. So Reinhardt and Dieterle's Lysander, who takes delight in hopping, skipping and often speaking in falsetto, is coded effeminate in a

specifically contemporary way because of those behaviours rather than because of his love for Hermia as would have been the case during the Renaissance in England. And that is a queer representation indeed.

V

Though not as extensive as the studies derived from Shakespeare's original playtext of *Midsummer*, a substantial body of criticism of Reinhardt and Dieterle's cinematic adaptation of the play does exist. A survey of this work reveals that critics have been particularly good at historicizing the film; considering how faithful it is to its source material; comparing it to other kinds of movies – screwball comedy and musicals most notably, as well as to other directors' film or television versions; assessing the performances of the actors and actresses, many of whom were well known for their successes in very different types of roles before their respective appearances in Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*; and accounting for the fact that Warner Brothers turned to Shakespeare in order to make a prestige picture that the studio hoped would raise both its cultural and economic profiles. However, only a few of these essays, articles and book chapters direct attention of any kind to the issues at the heart of this study – and even they are rather perfunctory treatments.

For example, Babbington explains that

Bottom's seduction by Titania, of which it may be said that whereas Titania's relationship with the Boy eroticises the mother-child relationship, Bottom's relationship with her de-eroticises the adult relationship or, rather, diffuses its eroticism within the primal pairing as Bottom becomes an infantile seeker of polymorphous pleasures and Titania loves him more like a mother than a lover.⁷⁸

Of course, Babbington's interpretation remains well within the safe ground of Oedipal epistemology, safe because, in Freud's version of psychoanalysis, the Oedipal conflicts Babbington mentions will eventually sort themselves into the proper heterosexual categories. In a darker view of things, Robert F. Willson, Jr considers Titania's 'idyll with the ass-headed Bottom ... an example of grotesquerie in the play' and by extension in Reinhardt and Dieterle's film.⁷⁹ As these quotes make clear, though aware of the eroticism that attends Titania and Bottom's drug-induced dalliance, neither Babbington nor Willson choose to develop their pronouncements beyond statements of informed analysis. The result is that the erotic aspects of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer* are glossed over in favour of other matters – quite possibly because of the queerness – the '*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant', to cite Halperin yet again – inherent in the representations these critics single out for analysis.

Finally, Jorgens, in what Babbington characterizes as the first entirely sympathetic contemporary critical appraisal of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsummer*, writes, '[a]longside the innocent playfulness, genial humor, and cotton-candy fantasy in Shakespeare's dream play are numerous undercurrents which are unfestive, grotesque, erotic'.⁸⁰ He adds that in contrast 'to the dominant comic movement are moments of murderous hatred, jealousy, threatened rape, sexual humiliation' threaded throughout the film, none of which are normally associated with feel-good comedy.⁸¹ Interestingly, though Jorgens acknowledges the presence of the erotic in the movie, he does not find the erotic in the relations between Oberon, Titania and the changeling boy, or in the fantastical love affair that takes place between Titania and Bottom. For him the 'eroticism of the play has been transferred to still another couple who dance an allegorical conflict between Moonlight and Night to Mendelssohn's "Nocturne"'.⁸² In a description that accompanies a still from the film that features Moonlight and Night in the midst of their intricate ballet, Jorgens refers to it as the 'erotic conquest of Moonlight by

Night',⁸³ a scenario that mirrors Theseus's erotic conquest of Hippolyta and Oberon's erotic conquest of Titania. There can be no denying that eroticism does infuse the stylized dance of these ethereal figures. Given the obvious genders of the dancers, as well as the black/masculine, white/feminine colour motif that pervades the movie, this eroticism is coded, specifically, heterosexual. This is all well and good, but it should be noted that the 'transference' of eroticism from *Midsommer*'s usual suspects to the dancers Moonlight and Night that Jorgens argues is key to Reinhardt and Dieterle's cinematic production of the play allows him to elide any mention whatsoever of the far more problematic eroticism evident between the fairy king and queen and their changeling boy, or the bestial eroticism evident between Titania and Bottom. Thus Jorgens renders these troubling forms of eroticism unintelligible in the critical discourse – a situation the reading of Reinhardt and Dieterle's *Midsommer* performed in this chapter seeks to complicate.