

Secondary Sources - *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Mario DiGangi

Issues of authority, sex, and resistance in this beloved comedy center on women's sexual and emotional autonomy in relation to fathers, husbands, rulers, and suitors. The play opens with Egeus complaining that his daughter Hermia refuses to marry the man of his choosing; Duke Theseus gives Hermia the choice of obedience to her father, death, or life in a convent. Theseus himself anticipates his marriage to Hippolyta, the Amazonian warrior he "wooed" with his "sword." At the same time, the King and Queen of fairies, Oberon and Titania, are feuding over Titania's refusal to relinquish to her husband a young boy, the son of a dead Indian votaress that Titania had dearly loved. The texts below explore modes of patriarchal and political authority in the play, as well as strategies of dissent and resistance used by women and commoners.

Bailey, Amanda. "Personification and the Political Imagination of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." In *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, Race*. Ed. Valerie Traub. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 400–18. Bailey uses Bottom's transformation in the context of early modern legal texts to address the politics of consent in the play.

Boehrer, Bruce. "Economies of Desire in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Shakespeare Studies* 32 (2004): 99–117. Boehrer argues that marriage in the play is defined against both cross-species eroticism (e.g., Titania and the ass-headed Bottom) and same-sex eroticism (e.g., Titania and the votaress).

Kehler, Dorothea, ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*. New York: Routledge, 1998. A useful collection of essays that includes traditional and more contemporary approaches, including essays on gender, sexuality, status, and power.

Floyd-Wilson, Mary. "The Habitation of Airy Nothings in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." In *Geographies of Embodiment in Early Modern England*. Ed. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 243-61. Floyd-Wilson connects the invisible fairies of the play to early modern beliefs about the presence of spirits who could affect human beings.

Hendricks, Margo. "'Obscured by Dreams': Race, Empire, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47 (1996): 37-60. Hendricks argues that through its representation of India the play contributes to the emergent racist ideologies of English imperialism.



Loomba, Ania. "The Great Indian Vanishing Trick—Colonialism, Property, and the Family in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." In *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. 2nd ed. Ed. Dymna Callaghan. Oxford: Blackwell, 2016. 263–87. According to Loomba, the fairies' conflict over the Indian boy represents a gendered struggle over colonial resources.

Schwarz, Kathryn. *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000. Schwarz addresses how Hippolyta's identity as an Amazon affects the politics of gender hierarchy and marriage in the play.

Traub, Valerie. *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Traub analyzes how the same-sex bonds of Hermia and Helena and of Titania and the Indian votaress are undone by the women's impending marriages and by Titania's submission to her husband.

