

THE POUND OF FLESH

EARLY IN *A MIDSUMMER Night's Dream*, Oberon squeezes magic love juice onto the eyelids of a sleeping Titania. When Titania wakes up, the juice makes her fall madly in love with the first creature she encounters: Bottom, the weaver who has been transformed into an ass. Because Shakespeare's text does not provide an explicit answer, directors who adapt the play often ask themselves what happens next: Does Titania have sex with Bottom?

When the director Stuart Canterbury was developing his recent film adaptation, he had no trouble deciding what to do about the Titania-Bottom sex question—they would have sex, lots of it. And Canterbury didn't stop there. Demetrius and Helena would have sex, too. So would Titania and Oberon. So would Lysander and Hermia. And, in an opening scene nowhere to be found in Shakespeare's text, so would five writhing female fairies overseen by a feather-waving Titania.

The film in question is *A Midsummer Night's Cream*—tag line: “What (Horny) Fools These Mortals Be!”—and it's merely one recent example of a growing genre of Shakespeare adaptation: Shakespeare porn. Nominated for ten 2001 Adult Video News Awards, including a best actress nomination for the porn legend Nina Hartley as Titania, Canterbury's film joins *Romeo and Julian* (1993), *Hamlet: For the Love of Ophelia* (1996), *Taming of the Screw* (1997), and dozens of other works in this expanding canon.

Shakespeare scholars of a more traditional sort might dismiss these X-rated adapta-



A PUBLICITY STILL FOR THE PORN FILM 'TROMEO AND JULIET' (1996)

“By adding Shakespeare to anything, you automatically class it up,” says porn star Nina Hartley, who essays the role of Titania in the film *A Midsummer Night's Cream*.

tions as nothing more than video-store giggle fodder. But Richard Burt, a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, sees a lot more going on here. In *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares: Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture* (St. Martin's, 1998) and in a number of articles he has published in recent years, Burt argues that these porn adaptations, along with other “dumbed-down” versions of Shakespeare, can provide insights into not just the plays themselves but also the larger workings of American culture in the post-Cold War world. He says a prime motivating force behind these unorthodox renditions is “a new form of cultural imperi-

alism in which Shakespeare is regarded as a native export, as if the United States could claim anything as its own.”

“If you're going to think about Shakespeare adaptations, which is something that I think about,” says Burt, “then why not Shakespeare porn? It's one kind of adaptation. It's a phenomenon, it's out there, it's part of the culture, so why not study it?” Burt's project is made easier by the fact that he's an avid porn fan. His Web site, www.naughtyprofessor.com, features a page called “Porn Stars I Have Known” and photos of himself with Nina Hartley and pro-porn feminist Annie Sprinkle. He's even written a screenplay called *Shrew You!*, which he believes is the

first lesbian adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew*. And he's not the only scholar studying Shakespeare porn: The April conference of the Shakespeare Association of America in Miami featured a seminar titled “Pornographic Shakespeare.” Though most of the participants focused on bawdy elements of the original plays, David Linton, a professor of communication arts and the chair of the humanities division at Marymount Manhattan College, presented a paper about *A Midsummer Night's Cream* and a recent gay-porn version of the same play.

Shakespeare porn varies widely in production quality and in faithfulness to the original texts. Many of the higher-

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budget productions seem to be using Shakespeare partly as bait for the female and couples markets. “By adding Shakespeare to anything,” says Hartley, who also appeared in the porn director Paul Thomas’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1987), “you automatically class it up. Certainly it helps to get you onto cable.” A lot of the lower-budget productions use the plays as little more than skeletons on which to hang the flesh of the requisite sex scenes. According to Burt, the earliest known example of Shakespeare porn is *The Secret Sex Lives of Romeo and Juliet*, a soft-core film made in 1968. Not long after, Roman Polanski directed a version of *Macbeth* that was produced by *Playboy* and featured topless witches and a naked, sleepwalking Lady Macbeth. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is apparently the first porn film to take much of its script from Shakespeare’s original text; other films, such as *Taming of the Screw*, contain virtually none of the Bard’s language. Still others, such as *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996)—in which Tromeo masturbates to an interactive porn CD-ROM called *As You Lick It* and Juliet calls 1-900-FUL-STAF for phone sex—use the plays as mere jumping-off points. (Burt freely acknowledges the “relative tastelessness and absence of formal complexity” of most of these so-called Shakespeare spoils.)

The fast-forward button has long been a handy tool for porn viewers, but Burt is perhaps the first person in history to fast-forward through the sex scenes to get to the dialogue. He did this recently when treating an interviewer to his analyses of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Taming of the Screw*—a contemporary retelling of the play

in which the head of a law firm offers his employee Pete (a.k.a. Petruchio) a house in Bel Air, partnership in the firm, and \$100,000 if Pete will marry his “bitch” of a daughter, Kate. Though *Taming of the Screw* is badly shot, horribly acted, and relentlessly misogynist, Burt says he finds it much more interesting than the comparatively sophisticated *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, partly because in *Taming* “the sex and the plot are relatively well integrated.” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is hardly bereft of interpretative élan, however. Hartley says she was particularly impressed that Kyle Stone, the actor who plays Bottom, brayed loudly during his orgasm. This spontaneous bit of artistry received loud applause from the rest of the cast once the cameras stopped rolling. “In our line of work,” Hartley says, “actors don’t usually get a chance to express themselves like that.”)

Amid all the raunchy sex in Shakespeare porn, one person never has any luck with the ladies: Shakespeare himself. The Bard appears as a character in a number of Shakespeare porn films, but, according to Burt, he never once gets any action. (Yes, Burt concedes, Shakespeare has sex in *Shakespeare in Love*, but it isn’t explicit.) When asked what this Shakespearean celibacy might mean, Burt says he thinks it has to do with “some relation between Shakespeare and the sacred”—some unspoken rule against overt sexualization of the godlike Shakespeare. Allowing Shakespeare to get down and dirty, he says, would be an ultratransgressive act akin to making Bible porn—and that, at least, is one genre the porn industry has yet to develop.

ANDREW HEARST

RESEARCH FILE

TWO PSYCHOLOGISTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA HAVE found that sad workers are “more productive” than happy workers. In a series of experiments intended to study the “effects of experimentally induced happiness versus sadness on work productivity,” as a press release put it, the researchers found that unhappy people devote energy to various tasks “in order to distract themselves from their sad feelings.” Conversely, happy people tend to perceive work as “something that might detract from their present feelings.”

Looking to study the habits of cockroaches, an assistant professor of entomology at Penn State planned to introduce a colony of German roaches into an abandoned house two miles from campus. The plan was scuttled when neighbors complained. “Cockroaches tend to send shivers up people’s spines,” the professor told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, “and we don’t want to do that.”

A survey of museum goers conducted this spring by Rome’s Institute of Psychoanalytical Psychiatry revealed that art museums can “stimulate the erotic senses.”

The *Times* of London reported that at least 20 percent of the two thousand respondents “had been so excited by what they saw that they either had a ‘fleeting but intense erotic adventure’ with someone they had not met before, or—if already accompanied—had experienced an ‘amorous upsurge’ involving ‘unexpected experimentation.’”

In a recently released study, the former president of the Association for the Study of Dreams asserts that “Republicans are nearly three times as likely as Democrats to experience nightmares when they dream.” According to United Press International, the study found that Republicans’ nightmares are characterized by “aggression, misfortune, and physical threats” and that Democrats’ “kinder, gentler bad dreams” are populated by “familiar settings and friendly characters.”



OUT OF FREIBURG, INTO THE FIRE

GIVEN MARTIN HEIDEGGER’S well-known involvement in Nazi politics, it would hardly seem possible to tarnish the philosopher’s good name any further. But a new volume of Heidegger’s complete works, edited by none other than his son, reveals that Nazi ideol-

ogy had a deeper hold on Heidegger’s thinking than even his critics knew. Not only did Heidegger play a vanguard role in Nazi academic life during his rectorship of Freiburg University in 1933–1934, the volume suggests, but the celebrated author of *Being and*