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category (courtly, laudatory, catechetical, political, or personal) and music category (chanson-style, through-composed, round-chanson, or serpentine) as well as by the rhyme scheme and source number, and contrafacta are identified when appropriate.

Her translations are faithful and elegant and allow the songs themselves to shine—and what lyrics! Along with some well-worn metaphorical conceits on virginity and motherhood, spring and budding flowers, we find great attention paid to the body of the mother and child and to popularization of more learned references to light and impregnation (#34), as well as a menagerie of symbolic animals (#37) and literary heroines (#25). Some of the songs have been anthologized before but none conveys the collective force of these lovely lyrics as well as Epstein's anthology. Anyone interested in medieval lyric will find it an invaluable addition. Epstein's attention to the interplay between genres, rhetorical registers, court and church, lady and virgin leads us toward new areas of inquiry and to reevaluation of others.

William Burgwinkle
University of Hawaii


Not merely "a stage history," this beautifully produced book sets out to identify the cultural contexts in which A Midsummer Night's Dream has been produced (or in which it has not seemed worth producing). Beginning with the hypothetical first performance (which, Gary Jay Williams argues firmly, was not intended for an aristocratic wedding) and working up to productions as recent as 1996, Williams goes on to describe a remarkable range of interpretations: the Purcell Fairy Queen (with orange trees appearing in the final scene as a tribute to Queen Mary II and her husband, William of Orange); the nineteenth-century habit of casting Oberon as a woman and Puck as a child; the radical experiments of the twentieth century, from Granville Barker's "aesthetic" interpretation and Reinhardt's explorations of folklore to Peter Brook's gymnasium setting—which, Williams notes, seems an unconscious fulfillment of Barker's 1915 statement that "What is really needed is a great
white box" (152). Even as the stage was beginning to make the *Dream* into something much more problematical, and many editors were becoming interested in theories of the destabilized text, opera and ballet versions provided a continuation of the "neo-romantic" tradition. Moreover, as Williams points out, this was precisely when the BBC Shakespeare series began to appear, offering conservative productions intended for schools, with a "timeless" international appeal. There is no end to the war between those who want Shakespeare to transcend contemporary culture and those who recognize that directing Shakespeare always means an encounter with contemporary culture; rather, each side has found new worlds to conquer. But in the end there is no conquest. Professor Williams's thesis, like that of the series in which his book appears, is that no one production is truer than another to the spirit of Shakespeare's play; all productions are mediated in some way, and "we do not go to definitive theatres; we go to the theatres of our times" (159).

*A Midsummer Night's Dream,* on the face of it one of Shakespeare's most lightweight works, seems to lend itself admirably to pretty, comic productions, often aimed at children. But, like other fairy tales, it also offers dark undertones. Twentieth-century readers may be disturbed by, for instance, the treatment of the working-class actors at the hands of the aristocrats, the subservient role of Hippolyta with her husband and conqueror Theseus, the treatment of Hermia by her father and Theseus, and the sexual implications of Oberon's treatment of Titania and his desire for the changeling boy. Productions from an earlier era which do not confront these issues may seem incomplete, reduced in description to a series of visual effects like Charles Kean's view of Periclean Athens or Beerbohm Tree's rabbits. Inevitably, as a cultural critic himself, Williams is more sympathetic to the post-modern than to what preceded it and sometimes falls into the trap of representing pre-postmoderist theatre as somehow "lacking." The unarguable fact that productions are a combination of circumstances suggests that productions are a conscious conspiracy. He describes Garrick's adaptations as "naturalizing and nationalizing" Shakespeare (66), Samuel Phelps's highly praised version as "bourgeois," Beerbohm Tree's as "imperialist" (110–11). In particular, I feel that he is unfair to Garrick, who may have been the object of immense admiration in his lifetime but was also on the receiving end of a good deal of vilification and envy. While Archer in *The Beaux' Stratagem* was indeed Garrick's "signature" role (65), Williams weakens his argument about Garrick's sentimentality by confusing this character with Aimwell, the play's sentimental hero. In fact, Archer is a charming scoundrel in the Restoration tradition; Garrick's achievement was in making the audience take him for a gentleman.
That the nineteenth-century theatre offered spectacle for its own sake (at least to the extent that it was advertised as an attraction in itself and described by sympathetic audiences as hypnotic or enchanting) is something that a modern critic finds difficult to understand without falling back on Brecht. I suspect we need something besides contemptuous references to Disney to explain the kind of pleasure given by technology, or indeed to understand pleasure at all. Williams is critical of productions that are merely “a rite of reassurance” (110), but also of those, like Granville Barker’s controversial 1914 *Dream*, that are ahistorical and elitist. Undoubtedly, audiences like spectacular and beautiful productions, but wasn’t Peter Brook’s equally spectacular in its own way, and equally reassuring, though about different things?

Earlier stage historians used to make fun of the scenic effects of previous generations in the name of fidelity to Shakespeare’s text. Though Williams does not believe that such fidelity is possible, his indications of the amount of text cut from different productions suggest that he would agree in this as a basic measure of how far the director intended, at any rate, to respect the original work. It’s worth considering the fact that, in England at any rate, a production emphasizing words rather than spectacle is probably more generally intelligible now than it would have been in the nineteenth century: actors have access to much more thoroughly annotated editions; audiences have studied the plays as part of an A-level course, which emphasizes the close reading of single texts. By contrast, of course, productions in modern foreign-language translations will be still clearer than those in English, sometimes ironing out ambiguities that cannot be preserved in translation. Karin Beier’s Dusseldorf production of 1995–96, with actors playing in nine languages and often “resorting to pantomime” in an attempt to communicate, sounds like an attempt to give the audience an equivalent sense of difficulty, but in the end was “seldom subtle,” emphasizing only the “cruel sexuality” which is evidently the play’s lowest common denominator at present (154).

Ironically, in view of Williams’s distrust of spectacle, the book will be enjoyed, in part at least, for its own wealth of illustrations (57 in black and white and 17 in color). But of course it also offers much more fascinating information and speculation. Here are a few items chosen almost at random. Williams remains open on the question of whether Theseus and Hippolyta were meant to double as Oberon and Titania, but suggests that possibly the Folio’s replacement of Philostrate by Egeus and Lysander in Act V was a creative comic response to a shortage of actors. The Indian boy gets a surprising amount of attention: we learn that Queen Mary II actually had a Javanese
dwarf among her servants (54) and that the role was equally interesting to
ten­teenth-century audiences, when their queen was also Empress of India.
The treatment of the amateur actors of Athens has ranged from farcical, to
picturesque (authentic Athenian tools in Quince’s shop), to a reading empha­sizing
Bottom’s class sensitivity almost as much as his sexuality. I am
intrigued by the theatrical association of high voices with the nonhuman, as
shown in the use of a female voice for Oberon in the nineteenth century and
a counter-­tenor in Benjamin Britten’s 1960 opera. Usually associated with a
homoerotic subtext, this device would be worth exploring further, and outside
the Western tradition. In Japanese kabuki theater, the romantic male lead is
sometimes played by an actor traditionally associated with female roles,
because such andro­gynous figures are thought to convey a softer, more
romantic image. Williams’s ideological approach may be dated, but the infor­mation
he provides will be useful and pleasurable for a long time.

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Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England, ed. James Fitzmaurice,
Josephine A. Roberts, Carol L. Barash, Eugene R. Cunnar, and Nancy A.

Even though the editors of Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century
England claim that “bits and pieces of their [authors’] poetry, fiction, and
drama have been in print continuously for the last three hundred years” (i), it
is always exciting and gratifying to see the appearance of yet another volume
devoted to women writers of the early modern period. The very fact that I am
able to say “yet another” volume shows both that there were many women
writing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England and there
are now many (mostly women) scholars working to bring these writers’ texts
into print in modern scholarly editions. Major Women Writers of Seventeenth­Century England takes its place among an important body of texts whose
overt political purpose—bringing to light previously un­ or little-known
women-authored texts—is at least as important as its literary or scholarly one.
But this anthology also serves an important pedagogical purpose. Anyone
who has ever tried to construct a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century literature