

Film, Fantasy, and the Bard

Assignment C

Paragraphs in response to Michael Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Answer four of the following questions in a well-developed paragraph. One of your paragraphs must address one of questions 1-4, another paragraph answer one of 5-8, and a third, questions 9-12. You may choose from any of the remaining questions for your final paragraph. Remember that a paragraph, like an essay has a beginning, middle, and end. You can find answers to the sample question on Blackboard in *Writing Resources*.

Sample:

Consider the implications of an upstairs/downstairs schema in the film. In the opening shots, we literally go downstairs to watch kitchen workers, etc. prepare for a wedding banquet. The camera cuts off the workers' heads to focus on their hands. Later, when two boys pour wine onto Bottom, he retreats to his "proper" place beneath some scaffolding. Contrast this with the Duke, first shown on a balcony, and Titania's raised bower. Consider how physically Bottom is raised to Titania's bower and how he descends back to his station in life. What does this opposition reveal about the different socio-economic groups and their mobility?

1. Something about the use of statuary in the court scenes as comment on the characters and action of the film.
 2. Is the stage on which *Pyramus and Thisbe* is performed, as an elevated location containing lower-class actors, capable of transcending this binary (see sample question)? How does this presentation of the play influence the meaning of Puck's final speech?
 3. When the film moves to the forest, the audience moves from panoramic views of the Tuscan countryside to fairly self-conscious artificial studio scenery. How does this choice influence our understanding of the forest, of the fairies' world, of the dream?
 4. When the players see Bottom after his transformation into an ass, they say that he has been "translated" and "transported." Likewise, the film has relocated the play from Athens to Monte Athena, a fictional turn-of-the-century town in Italy where bicycles are popular. Does the play benefit from this change, or does translation always mean a negative shift, with gimmicks like bicycles added in the manner of donkey ears? Is the plot more or less plausible in this new context?
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5. This film displays very particular attitudes toward women. What is that attitude and how is it displayed in the character of Hippolyta? Pay special attention to her reactions to Theseus before and after he passes sentence on Hermia both in the beginning and toward the end of the film.
 6. Much of the meaning of film is in visual details. How do the women's hairstyles throughout the film reflect the personal liberation and the social conformity of the individual characters? How is this related thematically to the play as a whole?
 7. There are many references to Bottom as an ass throughout the play. How has the film taken these devices of repetition and foreshadowing and made them visual in the film?
 8. What do the varying states of undress reveal about the lovers? What is the visual progression thereby created throughout the film and what thematic statement does it make?
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9. There is one important added character in the film -- Bottom's wife. Although she has no lines (at least in English), her presence affects how we view Bottom and his relationship with Titania. What does

Bottom's wife affect our knowledge of Bottom. Do you agree with her insertion into the script and why?

10. Puck is usually envisioned as a mischievous youngster, yet a balding man in the film plays him. How does this casting of Puck change his role in the play? Think, for example, about whether Puck is an innocent figure or a cynical one, whether Puck's little horns imply a devilish connection, and whether Puck's drunken lechery affects his motivations in interfering with the Athenian lovers.
11. Shakespeare needed to use long soliloquies to show what his characters are thinking, or to explain actions that take place outside the play's framework. Yet with film, the viewer can watch many of the things that could not be shown on stage. Flashbacks, for instance, can visually demonstrate what Shakespearean characters often had to say explicitly. In what ways is the Hoffman film innovative or conservative in its presentation of Shakespeare? Think about how the text is abridged for a 2-hr film, how film techniques can replace lines of dialogue.
12. The presentation of *Pyramus and Thisbe* is generally one of the comic highlights of the play, yet this production chooses to have it take a distinct turn to the serious. Why do you think the director made this choice? How does it affect how we view the scenes that follow? Consider especially the crosscuts to the three sets of lovers in their wedding beds (another directorial choice, one that would be impossible in a staged version).