

# [PDF] A Midsummer Night's Dream

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## Description:

### Review

This edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is wonderfully lucid and thoughtful, offering supporting material that will appeal to readers from high school students to scholars. The introduction is especially thoughtful, offering, in addition to expected discussions of love, magic and imagination, an exploration of the theatrical history. The bibliography and filmography are both detailed and helpful, and the questions guide students to consider the play from many viewpoints without ever forcing an interpretation onto them.

- Annalisa Castaldo, Widener University

Even as the New Kittredge Shakespeare series glances back to George Lyman Kittredge's student editions of the plays, it is very much of our current moment: the slim editions are targeted largely at high school and first-year college students who are more versed in visual than in print culture. Not only are the texts of the plays accompanied by photographs or stills from various stage and cinema performances: the editorial contributions are performance-oriented, offering surveys of contemporary film interpretations, essays on the plays as performance pieces, and an annotated filmography. Traditional editorial issues (competing versions of the text, cruxes, editorial emendation history) are for the most part excluded; the editions focus instead on clarifying the text with an eye to performing it. There is no disputing the pedagogic usefulness of the New Kittredge Shakespeare's performance-oriented approach. At times, however, it can run the risk of treating textual issues as impediments, rather than partners, to issues of performance. This is particularly the case with a textually vexed play such as *Pericles: Prince of Tyre*. In the introduction to the latter, Jeffrey Kahan notes the frequent unintelligibility of the play as originally published: "the chances of a reconstructed text matching what Shakespeare actually wrote are about 'nil'" (p. xiii) But his solution — to use a "traditional text" rather than one corrected as are the Oxford and Norton *Pericles* — obscures how this "traditional text," including its act and scene division, is itself a palimpsest produced through three centuries of editorial intervention. Nevertheless, the series does a service to its target audience with its emphasis on performance and dramaturgy. Kahan's own essay about his experiences as dramaturge for a college production of *Pericles* is very good indeed, particularly on the play's inability to purge the trace of incestuous desire that Pericles first encounters in Antioch. Other plays' cinematic histories: Annalisa Castaldo's edition of *Henry V* contrasts Laurence Olivier's and Branagh's film productions; Samuel Crowl's and James Wells's edition of (respectively) 1 and 2 *Henry IV* concentrate on Welle's *Chimes at Midnight* and Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*; Patricia Lennox's edition of *As You Like It* offers an overview of four Hollywood and British film adaptations; and John R. Ford's edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides a spirited survey of the play's rich film history.

The differences between, and comparative merits of, various editorial series are suggested by the three editions of *The Taming of the Shrew* published this year. Laury Magnus's New Kittredge Shakespeare edition is, like the other New Kittredge volumes, a workable text for high school and first year college students interested in film and theater. The introduction elaborates on one theme — Elizabethan constructions of gender — and offers a very broad performance history, focusing on Sam Taylor's and Zeffirelli's film versions as well as adaptations such as *Kiss Me Kate* and *Ten Things I Hate About You* (accompanied by a still of ten heartthrobs Heath Ledger and Julia Stiles). The volume is determined to eradicate any confusion that a first time reader of the play might experience: the dramatis personae page explains that "Bianca Minola" is "younger daughter to Baptista, wooed by Lucentio-in-disguise (as Cambio) and then wife to him, also wooed by the elderly Gremio and Hortensio-in-disguise (as Licio)" (p.1). Other editorial notes, based on Kittredge's own, are confined mostly to explaining individual words and phrases: additional footnotes discuss interpretive choices made by film and stage productions. Throughout, the editorial emphasis is on the play less as text than as performance piece, culminating in fifteen largely performance-oriented "study questions" on topics such as disguise, misogyny, and violence.

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**From the Back Cover** Appropriate for all level of Shakespeare courses, including courses on Shakespeare, or drama, or Renaissance drama as taught in departments of English, courses in Shakespeare or drama taught in departments of theater, Great Books programs where individual volumes might be used, or high school level courses.

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