

LOOKING LIKE A CHILD – OR – *TITUS*: THE COMEDY

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Twenty lines in to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when 'merriments', 'mirth' and 'pomp' have been ordered up to close off and reconcile with sportive 'triumph' the memory of the 'injuries' inflicted in the pre-history of the play by 'triumph' of a martial kind, Egeus comes crashing in upon Theseus's pre-marital tête-à-tête, fuming, spluttering, 'Full of vexation . . . with complaint / Against my child, my daughter Hermia' (1.1.22–3). Stubborn Hermia has dug her heels in, is refusing to marry her father's choice. She has eyes only for Lysander. Retaliating, the child-changed father demands 'the ancient privilege of Athens', to 'dispose' of what is 'mine' 'either to this gentleman' (Demetrius) 'Or to her death, according to our law' (41–4). 'What say you, Hermia?' asks Theseus (46). She answers: 'I would my father look'd but with my eyes' (56). But Theseus counters: 'Rather your eyes must with his judgment look' (57). That exchange, in a nutshell, formulates the impasse this most optically challenged (and challenging) Shakespeare play is going to explore, setting up a contest of looking strategies that the *Dream* is never to reconcile, only, finally, to finesse. The child Hermia wants her father to look like a child, with 'eyes' that metonymically figure desire, fancy, doting, the 'quick bright things' that dazzle and prevail upon sensible, impressionable youth (56, 149). But the father looks different, with judgment: that is, in terms the OED gives us, with 'deliberation', 'discretion', the 'faculty of judging', connecting 'judgment' back to its primary site of meaning located in the judicial, in the law. Looked at like this, their stand-off is more than a stand-off of perspective, of point-of-view; it's a

stand-off of generic positions. Simply put, looking like Egeus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* looks like tragedy; looking like the child, like comedy. We understand what the elders are objecting to: child-sight is giddy, as changeable as taffeta, as unsettled as a gad-fly, anti-authoritarian, anarchic. But it's also forgiving, restorative (both reconstructive and medicinal), saving: looking like a child is what the New Testament instructs us to achieve in order to understand grace – and salvation, the new dispensation built on the ruins of the old, codified law. Culturally, looking like a child is liberating: breaking the rules means improvising, experimenting (in what Louis Montrose would call an 'anti-structural space'¹) with alternative cultural possibilities that just might promote cultural change. It's here that looking like a child aligns itself with theatrical looking.

Alas, poor old Egeus never does come round to Hermia's way of seeing.² When, on the morning after the night before, the runaways are discovered asleep in the woods and wake (seeing 'double') to talk 'amazèdly', finding their 'minds transfigured', their rivalries transformed (4.1.189, 145; 5.1.24) their sick appetites restored to health, loathing

¹ 'The Purpose of Playing: Reflections on a Shakespearean Anthropology', *Helios*, n.s. 7 (1980), p. 64. The term is borrowed from the anthropologist Victor Turner in *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca, 1974).

² But see the Folio, where it's Egeus, not Philostrate, who, playing Master of the Revels, brings on the 'mirth' in Act 5, perhaps signalling a truce with comedy if not a reconciliation with his daughter.

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turned to loving, in short, their world utterly changed, Egeus' world looks just the same: still stuck in Act I, still the *senex iratus*, still utterly rigid – and still saddling the play with a death-wish, clamouring, 'the law, the law' (154). Ironically, he, like Bully Bottom rehearsing 'Pyramus and Thisbe', seems to have no idea what kind of play he's in. Stranded inside an Ovidian narrative, but ignorant, evidently, of Ovid, he doesn't know how to read 'the plot', is unprovided with the key classical text that would inform him on the saving subject of transformation, the imperative 'change or die'. He's without a *Metamorphosis*. Now, that's just where the Roman father, Titus Andronicus, has the edge over his Athenian counterpart. I take it that *Titus* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are companion plays, Shakespeare as pseudo-Plutarch setting up Andronicus and Egeus as parallel lives (*Titus* has the death of Pyramus on its mind at 2.3.231). One difference is that Titus owns the better library. We may think he's slow on the up-take, that he should have thought about Philomel in Act 3, but when his copy of the *Metamorphosis* finally falls violently open at his feet in 4.1, its 'leaves' 'quote[d]' to him in the urgent actions of his daughter, he demonstrates that he knows his Ovid (45, 50). He's willing to look different. Earlier, he refused to 'see. O see' what he'd done, killing his son, Mutius (1.1.338). But confronted with the appalling metamorphosis-by-mutilation inflicted upon Lavinia, Titus 'Will . . . see it', forcing Lucius's look back when Lucius turns away: 'Faint-hearted boy, arise and look upon her' (3.1.61, 65). To Lavinia Titus says, 'Had I but seen thy picture in this plight, / It would have maddened me' (3.1.103–4). Then asks, rhetorically as he thinks, because she cannot answer, 'What shall I do / Now I behold thy lively body so?' (3.1.104–5). What Titus does is what Lavinia teaches him – to look like a child, to concentrate on seeing how Lavinia looks and reading 'all her martyred signs', to 'wrest an alphabet' to decipher what she needs him to see (3.2.36, 44). Bizarrely, Hermia's wish, 'I would my father look'd but with my eyes', comes good in Titus – and launches the black retributive comedy of the final act where Tamora's boys, the awful

children Chiron and Demetrius, bound, gagged, able to communicate only with their eyes, become their looks, a grotesque refiguration of 'looking like a child', served up by Titus 'trimmed' to make their mother look at them anew.

All across his work, at points of generic watershed – points where, generically, the play could go either way – Shakespeare puts a child on stage to look, to be looked at, to focus what's at stake: my 'looking like a child' is of course a double entendre, not just what the child looks like to spectators, his image in performance, but what he's looking at, including how spectators look at him looking.³

³ Shakespeare's scripted children are the best refutation I know of the argument advanced forty years ago by the historian of mentalités, Philippe Ariès, in *Centuries of Childhood* (London, 1962) and taken up by Lawrence Stone in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London, 1977) that the idea of 'childhood' was unknown in early modern European culture and that parents were affectionless because 'the very high infant and child mortality rates' made it 'folly to invest too much emotional capital in such ephemeral beings' (Stone, *The Family*, p. 105). Linda Pollock in *Forgotten Children* (Cambridge, 1984) and Keith Thomas in 'Children in Early Modern England' (in Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs, eds., *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie* [Oxford, 1989]) use contemporary documents to correct Stone's misconceptions, Thomas observing, 'Far from there having been no medieval conception of childhood, we now know that doctors, lawyers, and religious writers in the Middle Ages all recognized infancy and youth as a vulnerable, fragile period of diminished responsibility. Far from infant mortality deadening parents' sensibilities, we know that the loss of young children frequently drove them distraught [here, we might remember Ben Jonson's 'best piece of poesy' and John Chamberlain's letters]. Far from there being no affection between early modern parents and their offspring, we know that most of the moralists who urged the strict treatment of children did so because they thought that their contemporaries were spoiling them by coddling them unduly' (p. 46). 'Childhood' was an elastic concept in the period, stretching from infancy to marriage and frequently failing to distinguish childhood from youth, not, as C. John Sommerville observes in *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England* (Athens, GA, 1992, p. 15), because Shakespeare's contemporaries 'recognized no difference', but because 'To them childhood was a more gradual and even a longer process'. Hermia, then, is both a child and a young woman; Tamora's rapist sons are still 'boys'. This capaciousness means that Marjorie Garber is simply wrong when she remarks in *Coming of Age in*

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So Edward IV holds up a baby, his heir, to show that, after three plays and fifteen acts of slaughter, the Wars of the Roses are done – then invites his twisted brother Dicky to give the infant hope a kiss (*Richard Duke of York* 5.7.33). Banquo stands in the dark, the moon down, praying the ‘Merciful powers’ to ‘Restrain’ in him ‘the cursèd thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose’ (*Macbeth* 2.1.6–9), the thoughts, that, acted, would make his life, like Macbeth’s, tragic ‘nothing’; beside him stands his boy, holding his sword. Coriolanus, determined to burn Rome ‘all into one coal’ and to pack cards like a turncoat with the enemy to do so (4.7.145), faced with his child, blesses the boy’s future, praying that he will be the kind of soldier who will ‘stick i’th’wars / Like a great sea-mark standing every flaw / And saving those that eye thee!’ (*Coriolanus* 5.3.73–5). Leontes, already feeling the killing ‘infection of my brains’, scans Mamillius’s ‘welkin’ face for the antidote, the medicine, the ‘childness’ that ‘cures . . . / Thoughts’ that ‘thick [the] blood’ (*The Winter’s Tale* 1.1.138, 147–8, 171–2). Cleopatra draws attention to the strange baby she suckles, that, consuming her, saves her life from tragedy as Caesar’s spoil by turning her death into comic apotheosis: ‘Peace, peace. / Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?’ (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.303–4).

Recent film – film is, after all a ‘looking medium’, a medium that, as Ingmar Bergman has said, ‘begins with a face’⁴ – shows directors picking up Shakespeare’s cues, and even elaborating them, inventing supplementary performance texts that, privileging children, invite the spectator to look like a child. Consider these film clips. First, the long tracking shot that follows Branagh’s Henry V (1989) striding across the blood-mudded battlefield of Agincourt carrying over his shoulder the body of the dead baggage boy as ‘Non Nobis’ builds from a single voice to a wall of sound, effectively hijacking the image to translate, to incorporate child slaughter into the larger heroizing project of martial masculinity and manly sacrifice, ‘dulce et decorum est . . .’ Next, the sequence opening Richard Loncraine’s *Richard III* (1996) that, following on from the credits where the title is written in

machine-gun fire, wipes out the brutal memory of war in happy images of the Yorks at play. The camera catches the little princes, naked and delightedly shrieking, chased by a nanny holding out a towel – a sequence set up to rhyme with one later that puts the younger prince in tight close-up, concentrating on the model train track running round the palace floor while behind him, voices off, the adults talk politics. Suddenly, a gigantic black jackboot comes down through the frame, the camera cutting from the child’s enquiring frown to the rancidly smiling brown-shirt murderer, Tyrell. The train stops in its tracks. Next, from Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), the pull-back from the close-up on Juliet’s open, childlike face, almost a woman’s, waiting for night, waiting for Romeo, to show her sitting on her bed in a little girl’s room, her shelves lined with dolls, what passes for a prie-dieu set in front of a teen-angel Madonna flanked with baby-pink cherubs; a sequence that strangely rhymes with one just before, the death of Mercutio, when the camera

Shakespeare that ‘there are very few children in Shakespeare’s plays’ (1981; London, 1997), p. 30. Counting only the York princes in the tower, Macduff’s and Coriolanus’s sons, and Mamillius, she sees them as ‘terrible infants’, thinks we are ‘relieved’ when they ‘leave the stage’ and, rather bizarrely, suggests that it may ‘be no accident that almost all go to their deaths’ (p. 30). Her account leaves out of the reckoning most of Shakespeare’s child roles: Titus’s Lucius and Aaron’s baby son; York’s Rutland, whose blood soaks the napkin used to wipe his father’s weeping face; Holofernes’s Mote; Mistress Page’s William and Parson Hugh’s school of scholar ‘fairies’; King John’s nephew Arthur; Henry VIII’s baby Elizabeth; the Lord’s transvestite Bartholomew, ‘wife’ to Christopher Sly; Hippolyta’s changeling child (if he’s brought on stage); Falstaff’s page – the same, perhaps, who, older, goes to the French wars with Nym and the rest; Benedick’s boy, and Brutus’s, and Mariana’s; Capulet’s Juliet (too young to be a bride); Henry V’s baggage boys; Hamlet’s Player Queen; the boy choristers in the Forest of Arden; Banquo’s Fleance and the witches’ weird infant prodigy that surfaces in the cauldron; Pericles’s Marina and Leontes’s Perdita, first babies, then girls. Then there are the notional or symbolic children: the one Julietta ‘groans’ with; the one Cleopatra nurses; the one Joan of Arc, at the stake, pleads; the one Helena, big bellied, promises to answer Bertram’s riddle; the one Doll Tearsheet threatens to miscarry – but if she does, scoffs the Beadle, she’ll deliver a cushion.

⁴ Quoted in Jack L. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington, 1977), p. 23.

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pulls back from his so beautiful, almost girlish, but now wrecked face to look at his dying looked at. As a sandstorm kicks up, desolating the beachscape, the camera cuts to a little black girl looking out from a beach caravan window; cuts again to a pair of grubby Chicano children staring through the mesh of the torn chain-link perimeter fence their little hands are clutching, looking, powerlessly, like children watching the big kids trash the playground. Finally, from John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), the sequence that has Will, on his way to his shrink to cure his writer's block, stop to talk with a kid who's torturing mice, who tells him his best play is *Titus* – then tells him his own name, John Webster.

The effects these films are achieving (if only locally) are perhaps tapping in to a wider contemporary – even millennial – concern with 'childness', with negotiating the emotive subject of the child in our culture. A quick scan down the recent bestseller lists sees dozens of novels published in English on four continents, written in a genre somewhere between memoir, confession, and public record; novels that look like children, that break the adult monopoly on history, on interpreting the past, that show that we never grow out of childhood, that childhood, rather, is in-grown, novels that offer a different, 'authentic' perspective on that thing adults call 'truth' or 'the way things have to be': *Angela's Ashes*, *A Star Called Henry*, *The Road to Nab End*, *Atonement*, *According to Queenie*, *Once in a House on Fire*, *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, *Bad Blood*, *Let's Not Go to the Dogs Tonight*, *Mere*, *Two Boys*, *At Swim, And When Did You Last See Your Father?* As far as filmed Shakespeare goes, undoubtedly the most thoughtful contribution to this way of looking is Julie Taymor's *Titus*, released in 2000 in Britain and the United States where one board of film censors rated it 'R', the other, '18', deciding the film wasn't appropriate viewing for children – ironic, really, since Taymor's *Titus* is seen entirely through the eyes of a child.⁵ I want to think through what Taymor achieves with child looking in *Titus*, but to do this, I need to start one film back, with Adrian Noble's 1996 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for

if, arguably, the *Dream* and *Titus* are companion plays, Noble's and Taymor's are demonstrably companion films, both of them using a child to do work for the films that has generic consequences.

Noble's *Dream*, made from his enthusiastically reviewed 1994 RSC stage production, was panned, the director-behind-the-camera slammed for thinking 'like a primitive' (*The Times*, 28 November 1996), producing something on the order of 'an ambitious film school experiment' (*Variety*, 18 September 1996).⁶ It is not, however, my purpose here to kick a dead donkey; rather, to consult Noble's filmed *Dream* as a pre-text glossing of Taymor that provides important preliminary viewing. Like Noble's *Dream*, Taymor's *Titus* began in the theatre, with a production directed for Theatre for a New Audience in New York in 1994. Both film projects, then, were translation exercises working to find a film language to rewrite in visual imagery Shakespeare's dense poetic text. Both, revelling in metatextual and metacinematic discourse, declare what Mark Thornton Burnett calls their 'postmodern aspirations',⁷ James Loehlin reminding us that intertextuality is 'one of the hallmarks of postmodern cinema': 'the reference to other works, genres and styles, whether as homage,

⁵ Produced by Clear Blue Sky, the film stars Anthony Hopkins (Titus), Jessica Lange (Tamora), Laura Fraser (Lavinia), Colm Feore (Marcus), Alan Cumming (Saturninus), James Frain (Bassianus), Harry Lennix (Aaron), Angus MacFadyen (Lucius), Matthew Rhys (Demetrius), Jonathan Rhys Meyers (Chiron), Dario D'Ambrosi (Clown), Tressy Taddei (Clown's Assistant), and Osheen Jones as the Boy/young Lucius. Bah Souleymane played Aaron's baby.

⁶ Made in association with BBC Channel 4 and The Arts Council of Great Britain, this production featured Osheen Jones as the Boy, Alex Jennings as Theseus/Oberon, Lindsay Duncan as Hippolyta/Titania, Barry (Finbar) Lynch as Philostrate/Puck, Desmond Barrit as Bottom, and Ann Hasson as the Head Fairy.

⁷ See his 'Impressions of Fantasy: Adrian Noble's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*' in Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray, eds., *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle* (London, 2000), p. 89, for a reading that aims to 'redress' critical opinion of the film as an 'unmitigated disaster' (*The Observer*, 1 December 1996), merely 'a highbrow pantomime' (*The Sunday Times*, 1 December 1996).

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parody, simple imitation or even unconscious duplication'.⁸ Noble quotes children's literature (*Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*); film (*Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz*, *Mary Poppins*, *E.T.*, *A Close Shave*); and plunders past theatre productions: Peter Brook's 1970 *Dream* most conspicuously (walking, some might say, a fine line between quotation and plagiarism), but also John Barton's (1977), Ron Daniels' (1981), Bill Alexander's (1982) all at the RSC, and Barrie Rutter's Northern Broadsides *Dream*, 1994. Taymor re-cites – mischievously – some of Noble's citations, but also *The Silence of the Lambs*, Fellini's *Satyricon* and *La Strada*, and both Jane Howell's BBC *Titus* (1985)⁹ and Deborah Warner's RSC *Titus* on the Swan stage (1987) – the *Titus* that taught Taymor what our post-Tarentino generation understands very well, that laughter in this play isn't an embarrassment, an impropriety to be killed or gagged: laughter in *Titus* belongs.¹⁰ Both Noble and Taymor are interested in toys and play, in the fantasy life of objects metamorphosing. Their films play with space (as location but also as size, as scale) and with time (as history and memory, rendered also dys-chronically, anachronistically as reverie, imagination, fantasy). They are interested in apertures (keyholes, windows, doors squeezed shut or flying open, fissures in walls and pavements, eye holes in masks) and in surfaces that work like lenses to set up complicated looking economies – rain drops, bubbles, mirrors, glass, water. And both films begin with a child, that most enduring 'part of screen mythology', the 'omnipotent tot',¹¹ here prompted by Shakespeare's text (the changeling child, the Indian boy in the *Dream*; young Lucius, the grandson in *Titus*) but expanded far beyond the implicit Shakespearian performance text.

I want to begin, then, by citing the opening minute of Noble's *Dream*, to observe how the camera works to capture the world of the child – a particular world, in a particular way. Starting with a shot travelling across the heavens somewhere above the clouds, accompanied by a choir that sounds like Dorothy's munchkins in *Oz*, the camera, cued by a key change that says 'menace', drops through the clouds, zooms through a window, and passes over

the interior, a room, a *museum* rather, assembled like a material version of the Opie collection, a nursery containing the paraphernalia of an exclusive, 'proper' English Edwardian childhood. Briefly, the camera picks out a Pollock toy theatre – a replica of an antique eighteenth century stage – then finds a sleeping Boy. Shut on his pillow

⁸ "“These Violent Delights Have Violent Ends”": Baz Luhrmann's Millennial Shakespeare' in Burnett and Wray, *Shakespeare, Film*, p. 124.

⁹ Nowhere that I have come across does Taymor acknowledge her clear debts to Howell (or Warner). Howell wants spectators to see the story from young Lucius's eyes, puts him in the frame from the opening shot: a shadow materializes as a skull before dissolving into the face of the boy (played by Paul Davies-Prowles). While she dresses Rome in period costume, she makes the boy also a modern, giving him, significantly, a pair of steel-framed spectacles to focus his looking. But she kills all the laughs that Warner later found in the play and performance, cutting Titus's 'Ha, ha, ha' – and the cook's costume.

¹⁰ As laughter, since Aristotle, has been held indecorous in tragedy, so dodging the laughs in *Titus* has been held a main – indeed, perhaps *the* main – challenge for the play's contemporary directors. Alan Dessen takes it as read that Edward Ravenscroft's eighteenth-century adaptation was finding 'solutions' for 'a series of problematic moments that continue to bedevil today's directors', and 'bedevil' because they 'elicit unwanted audience laughter' (*Titus Andronicus: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester, 1989), p. 9). See Dessen on Peter Brook's directing *Titus* in 1955 as a 'beautiful barbaric ritual', a reading he achieved, according to J. C. Trewin, by cutting every 'offending phrase' that threatened 'mocking laughter' (pp. 15, 22). But what if Dessen et al. are wrong? What if laughter isn't a risk to be avoided but one to be *courted* in the play? Following on from Warner, Taymor hears laughter as aurally constituting the authentic emotional territory of the tragic grotesque in *Titus*, and cues it to the laughter the play itself elicits in Titus's 'Ha, ha, ha!' (3.1.263).

¹¹ Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow, *The Screen Image of Youth: Movies About Children and Adolescents* (London, 1980), p. xiv. 'Down through the decades in Hollywood', they continue, 'a little child has saved them – the unhappy millionaires, the gamblers with hearts of gold, the couples drifting apart, the lonely curmudgeons – saved them by falling sick, getting hurt, running away, or just giving the grown-ups a good talking to'. They cite, too, as 'another movie staple', the 'partnership between a disreputable man and a child, in which the child learns corruption from the man and the man may learn sentiment from the child' (p. 27). Both paradigms are apposite to Taymor's *Titus*.

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is Arthur Rackham's illustrated *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which we can take as a *terminus a quo* for this representation: it was first published in 1908.¹²

When the camera cuts and spectators see the child walking down primary-coloured corridors, past the satyr who – Puck's avatar – guards the door, we understand that this *Dream* is his *Dream*, that, like the scene he sees when he bends down and looks through the final door's keyhole onto a magical golden room filled (seemingly) with Theseus and Hippolyta, his look is going to be the film's point of view. Later, having listened, unseen, to the lovers' plotting, the Boy, now their presumptive co-conspirator, will exit at full tilt after them out of this room, running through the yellow door then, terrifyingly, falling through the suddenly absent floorboards, dropping into space through a vortex tunnel like Alice down the rabbit hole. A quick cut to the Boy sitting up in bed screaming 'Mummy!' will be followed by a shot of him popping up through a stove pipe in a village Scout hut where, following Baden-Powell's injunction to the movement he launched in 1908 – 'Be prepared!' – a collection of superannuated Scouts distribute the parts to 'Pyramus and Thisbe', then exit into a storm. At the window, the Boy, still (always in this film) in pyjamas, watches the weather rip Peter Quince's black umbrella out of his hand, whip it up into the stratosphere, then, like saturation bombing by parachutes, return it, multiplied, transformed, floating down from a now blue sky – with fairies attached: here, all the Court parts (except Egeus) double roles in fairyland. So Philostrate returns as Puck, and Peter Quince's mob, like Aunt Em's farmhands tornado-transported from Kansas to Oz, reappear as Cobweb and Mustardseed, Peaseblossom and Mote.

As the Boy is put into play, he begins to perform work that the film needs to have done on a narrative and technical level: he is dreamer, observer, voyeur, active spectator, creative manager, agent of theatrical transformations. But enforced upon him is an adult way of looking that deprives him of childness, his look made knowing, but, curiously, simultaneously sanitized. Activating the trope of theatre-as-magic, the Boy's toy theatre

fetches up in the woods, spirited out of the nursery by Oberon's 'I know a bank where the wild thyme blows' (2.1.249), and, in a borrowing straight from Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), the Boy collaborates with Oberon to direct the night's revels.¹³ Oberon and Puck, discovering the toy theatre, bend seemingly gigantic heads level with

¹² Published by Heinemann in London in January, the entire deluxe edition of 1,000 copies sold out by March, along with over half of the 15,000 trade copies; new impressions followed in 1911, 1912, 1914 and 1917, and the English edition remained in print and paid Rackham royalties until the end of his life. It's no wonder, then, that Rackham's *Dream* was as common a resident in the middle-class Edwardian nursery as the clockwork lion, tin soldier, and rocking horse. While the *Athanaeum*, reviewing the *Dream*, complained that his public forced 'Mr Rackham to live in a sentimental region', where 'landscapes full of fire and vigour' were 'spoilt by the introduction of nambly-pamby nymphs', *The Outlook* saw a landscape 'sprung from seed found in the fancies of Dürer'; 'trees gnarled and black and twisted'. See James Hamilton, *Arthur Rackham: A Life with Illustration* (London, 1995), pp. 167–71.

¹³ I owe this citation to Tony Howard. Bergman's film opens on a toy theatre façade, the backdrop rising to reveal the face of the boy, Alexander, looking through the theatre into the camera as he reaches forward to place an additional toy figure on the set. The film is saturated with Shakespeare allusions: Shakespeare's plays are performed in the Ekdahl family's theatre where Alexander's father dies rehearsing old Hamlet's ghost, a rehearsal that continues *post mortem* with the ghost returning to haunt the son, and the mother marrying a proxy Claudius whose house becomes the children's prison. In an unpublished seminar paper Bronia Evers observes, 'The film explores the darker side of childhood from the start, contrasting the child's "theatre of the mind" (where death lurks behind the living room pot plants) with the adult construction of childhood (where children appear as angels in the Christmas play)'. For adults, 'the powerful fascination of childhood... rests partly on its very elusiveness'; it is 'a form of seduction' ('Shakespeare's Later Collaborators', p. 4). Quoting Bergman's film, Noble detoxifies its vision, drains it of existential menace. This being the case, to interpret power in Noble's candy-floss film as 'a matter of contest' and the Boy's 'imaginative energies' as working 'simultaneously [to] empower and enslave' – as Mark Thornton Burnett does – is to misread several key moments: there is no sense in which 'the Boy must struggle with Oberon for ownership of the puppets' strings' nor is Oberon's handling of the model figure a 'seizure' that shows him 'usurping the Boy's manipulative privileges' (Burnett, *Shakespeare, Film*, p. 91).

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the miniature stage, Oberon sliding the cardboard scenery open and looking through the theatre façade – to see the Boy’s gigantic face looking back. On ‘seek through this grove . . .’, the (now invisible) Boy reaches a huge hand forward, placing centre stage a tiny model Helena, which seems to prompt Oberon to complete his thought – ‘A sweet Athenian lady’ (2.1.259–60). Oberon extends his own hand across the stage, carefully picking up Helena for Puck to examine, a toy magically put into play. In the next shot, the Boy is life-sized, standing over the theatre, handling puppet strings; cutting back, the camera shows Puck and Oberon, now toy-sized like Helena, riding the wires: manipulators of dreams, manipulated by the dreamer, an idea whose potential darkness is left unexplored.

Still, this gesture puts the Boy back in charge, reverses the power dynamic set up by his earlier disconcerting discovery that he’s doubling in this dream as his own alter ego: he learns that he’s the very changeling child the fairy king and queen are warring over. When he was reporting Oberon’s ‘wrath’ to Titania’s punk-pink henchman as the Boy looked on, Puck fingered a raindrop off the rim of his green umbrella, blew it like a soap bubble, and magically there materialized inside it, looking back at the Boy, *himself* – or a version of himself, or indeed, a version of Kenneth Anger’s changeling child in Max Reinhardt’s 1935 *Dream*: in his mirror image, he’s an Indian boy, wearing a turban.¹⁴ Nothing more is made of this twinning: yet again, nothing more is made of the trope of the dreamer dreamed. But the Boy, as if to signal that he’s the answer to everyone’s dreams, finally is the one to break the night’s hold by rolling forward Time: spectators see him pushing forward the clock in the form of a giant ‘wandering moon’. In this *Dream* the child never wakes. (But then, neither do the lovers: Noble cuts to Bottom’s waking straight from Titania’s.) Instead, the ‘changeling’ is adopted into a new family whose address is a place on a stage. At the end of Peter Quince’s play, which was performed on the stage of the Boy’s antique toy theatre, magically grown life-sized, with the little Boy himself acting the manful stagehand, as the theatre empties, ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’s’ actors

depart, and the lovers exit to bed, a disembodied hand in close-up is seen flipping levers backstage, dropping the curtain, dousing the lights, darkening the foyer and auditorium. A cut discovers the ‘lost’ Boy, not backstage where he’d been sitting in the wings, delightedly clapping Bottom’s performance, but now alone in the dress circle, chin propped up on the railing, still watching. Puck steps out from behind the closed curtain, speaks his ‘hungry lion’ speech front-of-cloth, then turns, strides upstage, and opens a scenery door in the back wall – onto fairyland. Magically, the Boy steps into the doorway behind him, and watches as fairyland, eerily set against a full moon, travels across water toward them. Speaking his nuptial blessing on Theseus and Hippolyta’s future children (‘Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar, / . . . Shall upon their children be’ (5.2.41–4)), which cuts to a close up on the ‘perfect’ Boy, Oberon lifts him high, like an offering or fetish, the magician literalized as the promised magic. When Puck finishes his Epilogue, speaking straight to camera, he and the Boy exit fairyland together, back through the door that opens onto the colour-filled antique stage where, crowding in behind them, the fairy world meets the stage full of mortals, Bottom now hoisting the Boy high, the whole company’s trophy, before finally settling into position in slow motion, the Boy at the centre, for a family portrait – or a full company curtain call.

Introducing the Boy – who wasn’t part of his original RSC production concept – as ‘the mechanism’, said Noble, ‘for translating the theatre into film’¹⁵ must have seemed like a canny solution to the challenge of translation. While, on the one hand, literalizing the dream wasted Shakespeare’s most teasing theatrical conceit – for no one dreams

¹⁴ Anger, born and raised in Tinseltown, was four years old when he played the role he called a ‘decent little walk-on’ in ‘Warners’ – not Reinhardt’s – *Dream* (*Babylon II*, p. 2). Later he pursued his love-hate relationship with Hollywood by serving as its unofficial biographer, archivist of doom and dirt in *Hollywood Babylon I and II* (London, 1975, 1986) – an ironic afterlife for a changeling child.

¹⁵ I’m grateful to Finbar Lynch, Puck/Philostrate in Noble’s *Dream*, for recalling this.

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in his *Dream* except Hermia dreaming nightmarishly of snakes – on the other, dreaming up the dreaming child offered Noble a place of filmic refuge, for it is at the level of the child's dream-looking that everything filmic happens in this film. (We remember, of course, that in its infancy one of the first things film learned it could do was to dream.) It's as though, as the interface between the camera and the stage, Noble slides in the face of the child, the child's looking functioning as a kind of lens or reflecting surface to focus and register magic. Looking like a child is a metonymic stand-in for the 'magic' of cinema and offers a layer of representation where the director can imagine visually: where motorcycles can fly, raindrops inflate, toy theatres grow. Thus equipped, Noble goes on to produce what I want to call a 'compilation' film. First, he photographs his original theatre production virtually unchanged (with its theatre-sized acting and box set that looks curiously flat on screen) as though making an archive video. Then he shoots a supplementary text, framed within the unself-conscious gaze of the child, written in a film language – shot/reverse shot; close-up and reaction shot; special effects. Finally, he interleaves the two. In this process the Boy in the film stands not just as surrogate for the spectator in the theatre;¹⁶ he stands surrogate for the process of filmmaking.

Narratively, looking like a child renders this *Dream* incoherent. Locating the Boy in the Edwardian nursery locates childhood in a place of nostalgia; those toys, the nursery paraphernalia, loaded with nostalgic associations, fill in an 'authentic' *mise-en-scène* for a Merchant/Ivory film, instantiating a deeply conservative, restrictive (because historically constituted) looking regime that Noble's opening does nothing to disrupt – by, for example, signalling itself as post-modern pastiche. Later, nervous perhaps of the (mass) audience his Edwardian nostalgia will alienate, Noble violates the rules of engagement that he himself has set up for the film, starts pulling in metacinematic references the Boy can't access, aimed at the multiplex generation – Oberon as David Bowie's Goblin King in *Labyrinth* (1987), for example. Incomprehensibly, then, the Edwardian Boy is required to start

dreaming the post-modern future, not just 1980s films but 1970s, 1980s, 1990s theatres: the set he dreams up for his *Dream* belongs to Brook's *Dream* while the technology it relies on belongs to the millennium. Such citations may work at the level of stylish in-joke, but they seem unable, as Bronia Evers observes, 'to move beyond an elaborate form of collage'.¹⁷

Toys, Don Fleming suggests, function 'as a kind of cultural construction kit', offer ways of ordering the 'overheard' world of adults, should be seen 'not as objects, or not only as objects' but as 'events' generating 'traffic – called "play"'.¹⁸ But toys are also, writes David Cohen, the 'stunted hallmarks of a materialist culture' that condition children to accept the adult world.¹⁹ The fact that toys, as Roland Barthes sees, 'literally prefigure the world of adult functions obviously cannot but prepare the child to accept them all, by constituting for him, even before he can think about it, the alibi of a Nature which has at all time created soldiers, postmen, and Vespas. Toys here reveal the list of the things the adult does not find unusual; war, bureaucracy, ugliness, Martians'.²⁰ Or indeed, in the case of the toys Noble assembles, what this adult director doesn't find unusual, the nostalgic myth of innocent childhood. For Noble imagines a child who only wishes to play nicely and, while many of his citations fold toy, story, theatre and film in upon themselves, achieving a kind of representational closed circuitry (so that his flying Boy summons up that other flying boy, remembering him in all his versions on

¹⁶ As Matt Wolf shrewdly observed (*Variety*, 18 September 1996).

¹⁷ 'Shakespeare's Later Collaborators', p. 6. I owe the Bowie citation also to Evers. I'd like to record, too, my debt to three more Warwick University undergraduates who have challenged my thinking on this film: Brent Hinks, Jonathan Heron and Irene Musumeci. I am also enormously grateful to Cathia Jenainati for acting as an unofficial research assistant on this project, who taught me how to surf the net and keep my feet dry.

¹⁸ Don Fleming, *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 35, 11.

¹⁹ David Cohen, *The Development of Play* (London, 1993, second edition), p. 63.

²⁰ Quoted in Cohen, *The Development of Play*, p. 63.

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page, stage and celluloid), Noble's citations habitually by-pass their sources' complex rendering of childhood as an elusive, menacing place. If the nursery serves frequently as the site of transfer between real and fantasy worlds – into Never Never Land, or The Thousand Acre Woods – it can work that way because the cosy domestic nursery doubles also as the terrifying space of childhood alienation and trauma, home to the uncanny where, cast in darkness, toys come alive, intruders secretly enter, and daydreams replay as nightmares. We might remember that, in the original *Peter Pan* at the Duke of York's Theatre in the Christmas season of 1904, the father of those Darling Edwardian children, Wendy and the rest, doubled as Captain Hook.²¹

Noble never seriously considers this dark territory, to explore what he only coyly flirts with in his *Dream*, the existentially terrifying hypothesis put to Alice in Looking-Glass Land that she's not the dreamer but the dreamed, that she's the Red King's fiction. He never opens up his core reference book, Rackham, to see how scarily grotesque fairyland is in the version his Boy has been reading: Rackham's Leviathan is clearly a boy-eater. Worse, considering the stories a child in 1990s multi-racial Britain might be found to tell, Noble doesn't notice that Shakespeare's *Dream*, like *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, is also about imperial contest and the *translatio imperii*, the gradual westward shift of empire's power base.²² The *Dream*, from Athens, looks toward the exotic, luxurious East, with its spiced air, wanton wind, yellow sands, from whence the 'lovely' changeling boy has been 'stol'n from an Indian king' – as Puck tells it – or bequeathed to the Fairy Queen as an act of devotion by the mortal mother, her 'vot'ress' – according to Titania (2.1.22, 123). But Athens looks in the opposite direction, too, toward the chaste, cold and continent West where the unseduce-able 'fair vestal', another Fairy Queen and 'imperial votress', is 'thronèd'. Like *Titus* and *Antony*, those other imperial, geographic narratives, this one is aligned along a racial axis, which Rackham certainly saw: in his illustration, the changeling child is black.²³

Noble tidies up the nursery, nanny-like won't permit his boy to tell difficult cultural stories, or his

toys to embody, as Lois Kuznets says toys do, 'the secrets of the night' in a 'secret, sexual, sensual world' 'behind the doors of dollhouses' – or 'parents' bedrooms'.²⁴ The carnality Noble's stage *Dream* performed – Bottom grossly bonking Titania in a pink umbrella, a tired, Viagra-generation travesty of the Peter Brook original – was retained for the film, but this explicit adult sex practice was something no child would dream up: it exceeds the universe, the experience of the child. So, discovering there were things in his *Dream* that couldn't be made to fit the Boy's dreaming, Noble farked it: the film cuts so the child never sees what the adults get up to.

The effect is to infantilize *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a story dreamed by a child, 'about' a child, and therefore, perhaps, for children, Noble producing a reactionary reading that, while appropriating what Brook learned from Jan Kott

²¹ Offering detailed readings of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (London, 1992), James R. Kincaid suggests that those – like Noble? – 'who imagine that the child... offers nostalgic "escapism", soft regression, "ease and repose from the troubles of the day", something "safe and simple", seem to have looked past the formulations of erotic Otherness in these complex images'. He sees these stories as 'dramas of perpetuation, plays of the elusive maneuverability of the child'; both stories 'are supremely indifferent to the adult's feelings and desires'; both 'are never going to let themselves down to give the adult what he wants'. Ultimately, Kincaid concludes, these are 'crisis stories' where the 'crisis' is the betrayal the child commits upon childhood by growing up (pp. 275–8). Nina Boucicault, Dion's daughter, was the original Peter Pan on stage. Cross-casting a girl to play the part of the 'cock sure' boy who refuses to grow up initiated a long theatre tradition that offered spectators Peter as a permanently, if teasingly, pre-sexual androgynous. Something of the same tease is on offer in Noble's casting of his androgynous *Dream* Boy, and is built into the story Noble directs the Boy's body (desired in this film by male and female alike) to display, only it is made 'safe and simple' by renegeing on desire's abusive power. Any gesture made in this direction instantly has the punch pulled.

²² Jonathan Bate discusses this theory of 'the translation of empire' (yet another 'translation' story embedded in the *Dream*) in his Arden edition of *Titus Andronicus* (London, 1995), p. 17.

²³ See the illustration facing p. 24 in the 1908 edition.

²⁴ Lois Kuznets, *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development* (New Haven, 1994), p. 2.

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and Polish theatre of the 1960s about the erotic politics inscribed in Shakespeare's adult-viewing *Dream*, first degrades then cancels that knowledge, reinstating this as the Shakespeare play that's family entertainment. And that's a genre definitively remembered in Tyrone Guthrie's 1937 Old Vic production – which put a toy theatre on stage along with the entire Sadlers Wells ballet, and, in the audience, looking like a child, the eleven-year old Princess Elizabeth and her little sister, Margaret.²⁵ What we see finally is Noble using the child to play out his own longing for an absent, 'never never', fantasy childhood, distorting the image of the dreaming child into an illusion that fulfils the 'wish images' of his adult nostalgia²⁶ – among them, surely, the fact that the Boy, a mute throughout, behaves like a well-brought-up child from the past, seen but not heard. At the level of film representation, the Boy works like an extended reaction shot, his face permanently radiant, looking like wonder. The toys in his nursery, like the objects Walter Benjamin saw in the Paris arcades of the 1850s, function as 'dream-images of the collective', objects the camera translates into so many 'commodity fetishes', dreams themselves produced as commodities – and childhood as the ultimate adult commodity fetish.²⁷

Writing about what he calls 'nostalgia films' – which 'gratify... a desire to return' to an 'older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artefacts through once again' – Fredric Jameson diagnoses in them an inability 'today to focus our own present', as though we were 'incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience', seeing this as a 'pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history', one 'condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach'.²⁸ Noble, re-living the *Dream* both through the 'old aesthetic artefacts' of Peter Brook and Arthur Rackham, proves incapable of imagining a *Dream* to 'focus our own present'. The sleeping child that we spectators access through the window in the film's opening sequence is finally disturbingly significant – 'looking like a child' gives

us a child with eyes wide shut, and the intertext we recognize most powerfully at this voyeuristic moment is not Barrie's *Peter Pan* but Hitchcock's *Psycho*.²⁹

Four years later, in another debut film made from a stage production, Taymor's *Titus* picks up where Noble's *Dream* begins – and ends: in a nursery (of sorts), among toys, with a child, offered as a trophy of culture and representation. But this child isn't sleeping. He's looking straight at us.³⁰ Only, to begin with, we don't know it. For in the film's

²⁵ I owe this citation to Tony Howard.

²⁶ Evers, 'Shakespeare's Later Collaborators', p. 7.

²⁷ I am drawing upon the work of Rachel O. Moore in *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham, 2000). Citing Benjamin's 'Arcades Project', his meditations upon 'collections of recently out-of-date objects displayed in the glass cases of the Paris arcades', she observes with Susan Buck-Morss that those objects served both as 'distorting illusion and redeemable wish-image'. Further, 'If commodities had first promised to fulfil human desires, now they created them: dreams themselves became commodities' (Moore, *Savage Theory*, pp. 76, 70).

²⁸ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* (London, 1998), pp. 8, 9, 10.

²⁹ That Noble now mostly directs shows for children – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1998), *The Secret Garden* (2000), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (2002) – might be read as a career dissolving into soft focus. But he used to have a hard edge. In *Macbeth* (1988) at the RSC he used children to terrifying effect, locating in the contamination of their innocence a felt analogue to the evil circulating in the text: Macduff's flax-haired children, in white Victorian nightgowns, doubled as the witches' prophecies, playing a game of blind man's buff with blindfolded Macbeth and laughing through their utterance as they dodged his groping hands. In *The Winter's Tale* (1992), he staged the opening scene as Mamillius's birthday party, the little lone boy moving apart from the adults, who, captured inside a scrim box in a world of their own, in slow motion drank champagne amongst the red balloons, ignoring him as he knelt, concentrating on play, spinning a top that, turning and turning as the grown-ups talked, began to feel like *Clothes*.

³⁰ The Boy was part of Taymor's original concept both on stage and film. Seeing *Titus* as 'the greatest dissertation on violence ever written', its themes 'war, ritual, the domestic, lust, nihilism', she fixed on 'the idea of the child watching his family go at it, watching these bloodlines, these tribes, these religious rites, this whole event' as establishing the film's point