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Reviewing The Philadelphia Story: social convention in remarriage comedy

Carolyn Beth Greenwald
Iowa State University

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Reviewing *The Philadelphia Story*:
Social convention in remarriage comedy

by

Carolyn Beth Greenwald

A Thesis Submitted to the
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

'Love's stories, written in lovers riches book,'
(A Midsummer Night's Dream, I. ii. 123)

The idea for this thesis came from a short paper I wrote on The Philadelphia Story (1940) directed by George Cukor. Questions about the film's presentation of social issues prompted me to investigate the basis of the relationship between the socialite Tracy Lord, played by Katherine Hepburn, and her ex-husband C.K. Dexter Haven, played by Cary Grant. In the paper I argue that The Philadelphia Story does not deliver a socially elitist message. Instead, I suggest that the coupling of social order with loss and desire makes the marriage of Tracy and Dexter the appropriate one and that this essential element is lacking in the relationships between Tracy and George Kittredge. For the purposes of the paper, I also needed to explain the failure of Tracy's relationship with the reporter/author Mike Connor. Justifying the disintegration of this relationship involved an investigation of the film's "moonlight period" and lead me to the foundation for this thesis.

As the "moonlight period" suggests, The Philadelphia Story follows a pattern of events fashioned after Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. Similarities in the structure of Shakespeare's play and Cukor's film allow for an adaptation of certain theories posited by Shakespearean scholars. As Laura Shea suggests, "Seeing The Philadelphia Story in the context of A Midsummer Night's Dream creates a prismatic effect in suggesting an allusive, rather than explicit pattern of similarities, not only in their adherence to the laws of comic form, as described by Northrop Frye in "The Argument of Comedy" but also in their operation on parallel planes of
existence." (5) As a result, certain comic theories used to analyze *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and particularly those that pertain to gender, are helpful in understanding *The Philadelphia Story*.

Although I may not have realized it at the time, what I was trying to do when I wrote that original paper was to understand or "view" *The Philadelphia Story* as something more than a justification of the status quo. Here I am using the term "status quo" to refer to the social system which dominates interpersonal interactions and is adverse to any change in the established rules for those interactions since change may disrupt the stronghold that certain social groups currently enjoy over other social groups. The status quo rarely sanctions marriages between individuals of different social standing and approves of marriages that do not disrupt the prevailing boundaries between classes. The status quo is also a patriarchal social system that systematically discriminates against women solely on the basis of their gender.

A post-modern analysis of the film which de-emphasizes the film's conclusion—the marriage of Tracy and Dexter—an event which can be understood as a conformation of the patriarchy, uncovers certain discrepancies in the film's seeming adherence to social conventions and opens the film to alternative and less discriminatory interpretations. The methodology that I use to "re-view" the film comes directly out of the work of Shakespearean and Comic theorists. Nevertheless, in this thesis I will demonstrate that although the film can be understood to present something more than a justification of the status quo, this observation is not without qualifications.
In both *The Philadelphia Story* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* patriarchal conventions control and limit the behavior of the characters. At times, however, the women in these works are able to rise above the conventions that suppress them in significant displays of power and voice. A post-modern analysis of *The Philadelphia Story* which de-emphasizes the film's conclusion--the marriage of Tracy Lord (Katharine Hepburn) and C.K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant)--an event which can be understood as a confirmation of the patriarchy, uncovers certain discrepancies in the film's seeming adherence to social conventions and opens the film to alternative and less discriminatory interpretations that subvert the contradictory concept of a just patriarchy.

*The Philadelphia Story* is grounded in the traditions of screwball comedy. As a result, understanding the background of screwball comedy genre clarifies the circumstances of *The Philadelphia Story*. In the simplest and therefore in a certain sense the most accurate terms, screwball comedies are romance comedies where one or more of the characters is a "screwball." A "screwball" is a character who behaves in a zany, wacky, comic, or generally amusing way. More specifically, films of this genre focus on two individuals who interact through witty dialogue and generally drive each other crazy before they unite as a couple at the end of the film. Noted for the couples' pre-union havoc, screwball comedies deserve the description as "an open celebration of discord" (Sennet, 3). Thus discord, a lack of order, and rule-breaking are often represented as valuable and worthwhile in these films.

In screwball comedy there is a distinctive and relevant relationship among comedy, social order, and the status quo, a relationship that is actively
addressed and challenged in many of these films. These comedies de-value conformity to the established rules, including the patriarchal conventions that promote certain kinds of second class beliefs about women in society. Often in screwball comedy female characters display power and control by partially concealing these abilities under a facade of "wackiness." By playing the "screwball" character, female characters can direct the action of the film, acting as a disruptive comic force that works against conventions and social order. Through good-hearted intervention, the screwball character redirects the lives of the other characters towards a more carefree, less stable, but a superior future (according to the values set up by the films). While screwball comedies end ironically, with a coupling that reduces further threats of disruption, the body of each film celebrates freedom from social constraints and these celebrations linger long after order is restored.

Consider Howard Hawk's film *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). As in *The Philadelphia Story*, Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn are involved in a series of mishaps and crazy circumstances. Primarily because of Hepburn, they lose an "intercostal clavical" dinosaur bone, lose a tame leopard, find an escaped wild leopard, escape from jail, steal cars, and appear to maximize the amount of trouble that a couple can get into and resolve in the time span of the movie. To acknowledge the impact of all this disorder, the film's conclusion—the unification of Grant and Hepburn as a couple—is not to attempt to override the preceding craziness. Instead, the film ends with Grant and Hepburn sealing their relationship in a kiss while Hepburn causes the collapse of the important dinosaur display, further disordering Grant's life.
In addition to this kind of general havoc-wreaking, dialogue and the prevalence of argument in screwball comedies further links that genre to disorder. Argument implies a break-down of organization and challenges authorial command. The introduction of sound made it possible to present on screen the kind of verbal banter which became characteristic of screwball films. Thus the growing popularity of sound films was an important factor in development of the screwball genre. Unlike slapstick comedy, which relies on visual humor, screwball comedies rely heavily on verbal gags, although the comedy of both genres is quite physical.

In his comparison of screwball and slapstick genres, Jim Leach declares that slapstick is decidedly a misogynous genre since women are peripheral to its vision. In contrast, Leach makes the point that screwball comedy is a more equitable genre. In slapstick, women are for the most part absent while in screwball the central focus of the genre is the romantic interaction between a man and a woman and therefore the importance of women in the relationship equals the importance of men (Leach, 1977).

Leach is correct in suggesting that as a genre, screwball at least allows for the production of a pro-woman film while many other genres may not. In the 1930s, with the original releases of these films, many female viewers identified with the strong intelligent women presented in these films, such as Rosalind Russell in *His Girl Friday* (1940) and Barbara Stanwyck in *The Lady Eve* (1941). When these films were originally released screwball comedies were liberating for women both because of the content of the films and also by comparison to other major genres.
In particular, divorce, a matter of civil rights for women in the 30s and 40s, is a central issue in remarriage comedies. In the era of these screwball films, some women would have seen the depiction of divorce on screen as a positive feminist gesture. Although in remarriage comedies, such as *The Philadelphia Story*, the on-screen divorces are eventually neutralized by remarriage, they are presented as viable options. Moreover, the female divorcées are often able to live normal and successful lives until the moment of remarriage.

Leach further argues that in screwball comedy women are on equal footing with men since through these marriages women are rescued from daily routine and the daily chores that tend to enslave women (38). Leach, however, fails to recognize that the women of screwball comedies are not burdened with chores because they are all upper class, not because marriage brings any type of chore relief. If anything, marriage brings women more chores since they must often wait on their husbands and children and give up their own freedom. While it is certainly an important aspect of these relationships that the women are not burdened with daily chores and are free to be involved in silly adventures, I do not agree that this feature of the genre secures equality for the females on screen. Neither the inclusion of women in the couples' relationships nor the lack of female chores in screwballs ensures a pro-female production.

Screwball comedies reflect the contradictory social expectations for women of the 1930s. In part, problematic representations of women resulted from the Motion Picture Production Code of 1934. The Production Code, which should have reduced sexual exploitation of women in the movies
since it seemingly eliminated the depiction of sexual behavior from Hollywood films, was incredibly damaging to the presentation of women on screen. In her work *From Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell notes that prior to 1935 women on screen were "entitled to initiate sexual encounters, to pursue men, even to embody certain male characteristics without being stigmatized" (91). The Production Code, however, stripped women of their right to sexuality by labeling all female sexuality as "bad," thereby limiting the range of behavior considered feminine and proper for a woman. A lack of female sexuality coupled with an emphasis on marriage created a contradictory feminine ideal that substituted for sexual expression the kind of emotional outbursts that reinforce the negative stereotype of the "hysterical" female.

The society that created and still creates screwball comedy is patriarchal. However, since screwball comedies emphasize the importance of change, often focusing on changes in values and changes in personality, there is a relevant disjunction between the genre and certain patriarchal conventions. This stress on transformation and inconstancy suggests that, according to these films, social order is ephemeral and should not be taken too seriously. Wes Gehring calls the screwball comedy "less obvious and more ambitious" than most film genres because these films do not shy away from confrontational material; they probe and question issues of social order but with a kind of subtlety that allows them to avoid appearing antagonistic or too politically directed (6).

Through their comic structure, screwball comedies challenge the same social conditions that enable their production. Since these films focus on
disruption and union, they raise questions about social conventions and the status quo. Grounded cinematically in the screwball tradition, *The Philadelphia Story* is also directly linked to an older comic tradition—a Shakespearean tradition.
CHAPTER TWO:
The Shakespearean Inheritance

No doubt they rose up early to observe
The rite of May.
(A Midsummer Night's Dream IV. i. 131-32)

Critics disagree about the relationship between The Philadelphia Story and screwball comedy. For instance, Stanley Cavell argues that The Philadelphia Story is not a screwball comedy; rather it is a member of a separate genre which he calls the genre of remarriage. According to Cavell, remarriage comedies inherit "the preoccupations and discoveries of Shakespearean romantic comedy" (1). Cavell is careful to differentiate between remarriage comedies and other screwball comedy films in order to emphasize the connections and the differences between comedies of remarriage and classic comedy and, more specifically, to investigate the connections between these comedies and Northrop Frye's account of Shakespearean comedy. Like Shakespearean comedies, comedies of remarriage question and reorder positions of authority by disregarding social laws. Investigating Cavell's claim that The Philadelphia Story is a member of the genre of remarriage clarifies the film's connection to Shakespeare and to A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Comedies of remarriage, following a Shakespearean tradition, brings together romantic love and marriage. As Cavell explains in his essay "The Thought of Movies," in classic comedy people who are right for each other find each other while in remarriage comedies people who have found each other find that they are right for each other. In classic comedy, the narrative presents a young couple who must overcome certain obstacles which prevent
their union, and in the end the couple becomes joined in marriage. These obstacles are external barriers, separate from the couple, and usually are manifest in the form of social constraints. Remarriage comedies, on the other hand, begin at a crisis with a couple that is less young and about to divorce. The drive of the narrative is to get the couple back together again. For these couples, the obstacles to be overcome are internal problems (Cavell, 1972).

In both Shakespearean comedy and remarriage comedy, unlike later Jonsonian comedy, the woman rather than the man holds the key to the plot and undergoes something like death or transformation in the course of the drama. In remarriage comedies it is the female member of the couple that needs to evolve and reach some kind of psychological realization in order for the couple to unite. In other words, in order to become a sexual being, the woman must recognize the role of the male in first bringing about and later fulfilling her sexuality, thereby recognizing and validating the dependency that perpetuates the patriarchy. This aspect of remarriage comedy darkens the genre with sexist overtones.

_A Midsummer Night's Dream_ can be described as a remarriage comedy because it reunites (rather than unites) young lovers. It can also be described, per Northrop Frye, as having three parts or movements. At the opening of the play, although he is in love with Hermia, Demetrius is betrothed to Helena. Likewise, although her father wants her to marry Demetrius, Hermia is betrothed to Lysander. The coupling of Hermia and Lysander is blocked by patriarchal social law, represented by Hermia's father, Egeus. To escape social constraints the four lovers leave the city and enter a nearby woods. In the forest, the couples go through a period of confusion
where both Lysander and Demetrius fall in love with Helena. After this period ends, the original couples reunite--Lysander with Hermia and Demetrius with Helena.

Like *A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Philadelphia Story* follows a similar tripartite structure. In the first part of these works an absurd, unpleasant, or irrational situation is set up. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermia must be put to death if she does not marry her father's choice of suitors--an unpleasant and irrational situation. In *The Philadelphia Story*, the Lord family gets ready for Tracy Lord's (Katharine Hepburn's) marriage to George Kittredge (John Howard). This situation is absurd since Tracy and George are shown to be an ill-suited couple.

The second part of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is marked by a prolonged episode of confused identity and various complications. During this part of the play the characters move into a charmed area, a magical woods where the ordinary laws of nature and social structure do not quite apply. In this "green world," as it has been labeled by Northrop Frye, perspectives change and thus renewal can be achieved. After the couples enter the woods in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the fairy Puck anoints the eyes of Lysander and Demetrius, causing them to transfer their affections for Hermia to Helena. At the same time, Titania, the Queen of the fairies, also confused by magic, falls in love with Bottom, who is disguised as an ass. Similarly, in *The Philadelphia Story*, after the engagement party, Tracy and Mike couple in the moonlight under the influence of champagne. Like Titania, Tracy also appears to be confused by magic--the magic of the moonlight and the magic of intoxication (Frye, 1968).
The "green world" is also a place of contemplation so there must be a degree of privacy in the location. The characters' withdrawal takes them to a place beyond society, or the law. The action moves into the "green world" in order to reaffirm and reconcile the dual obligation of marriage as an institution both private and social. Because marriage joins the sexual and the social, marriages must be able to operate successfully in both public and private space. Therefore, the films must establish these marriages as auspicious in both domains. Thus, the united couples cannot remain in the "green world"; they must reenter society in order to prove and legitimate their marriages (Cavell, 1981).

Comic inversion occurs when a situation arises that allows a character to behave in a way that is outside of what society usually accepts as proper behavior. It is during times of comic inversion that society's patriarchal foundation is most clearly objected to and scrutinized. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the way that Hermia speaks to Thesus is an example of comic inversion. When Thesus tells Hermia that "Demetrius is a worthy gentleman," she forcefully replies "So is Lysander" (I.i. 52-3). The injustice of Egeus' complaint against Hermia and the irrational law that decrees she be put to death if she does not honor her father's request sanctions Hermia's strength and allows her to "talk back" to a king.

In Shakespearean comedy, and similarly in remarriage comedy, most often these inversions takes place in the upside-down fantasy "green world" which allows for the discovery of the "woman's voice." As we see in Hermia, these inversions give rise to strong vocal women who normally are absent from Elizabethan drama (Gay, 1994). As Frye understands this realm,
the "green world" operates outside of all law and patriarchal control. Frye's account of the "green world," however, downplays an essential occurrence. In this fairyland, Titania and Oberon quarrel over possession of a little changeling boy. Titania justifies her possession of the boy through her connection to the boy's mother, an Indian queen. Puck and Oberon claim that the boy had been stolen from an Indian king. Oberon's intentions lack righteousness since the boy arouses his sexual desire and jealousy, perhaps suggesting that his behavior is somehow "unnatural" or at least a violation of convention. Oberon seems also to want the child simply so Titania cannot have him. Yet because of the far reaching influence of patriarchy and the sexual double standards this influence beings to the "green world," there is a tacit assumption that Oberon's behavior is justified when Titania, by contrast, is made ridiculous in her affair with Bottom (Garner, 1981).

Oberon's behavior in regard to the changeling boy exemplifies how a man can exert power over a woman arbitrarily. His behavior parallels the earlier behavior of Egeus and thus should be seen as wrong and inappropriate according to the moral code of conduct established by the play. Since Oberon has the ability to control Titania in the "green world," the rules of patriarchy still apply. Since the "green world" is not an antithesis of Thesus' society, the power that the female characters display during this is important and relevant.

Nevertheless, in creating this kind of magical world, a playwright (or a filmmaker) invents a magical locale which operates outside of convention and allows for the presentation of non-conventional behavior without that behavior completely threatening the audience's sense of security. Since the
"green world" is presented as twice removed from reality, as a kind of fantasy-land within a fantasy-land (similar to Peter Quince's play within a play), the boundaries between what is "real" and what is a performance become obscured. This can be optimistically understood to suggest that a female position of equality in society may be achievable reality rather than merely a fantasy.

Then, in the third part of Shakespeare's comic formula, order is restored. The couples realize that they belong together, something the audience is aware of from the beginning. The play and the film end happily with a marriage ceremony, a marriage renewed, or at least the assumption of a future marriage. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Lysander and Hermia reunite. In *The Philadelphia Story* Tracy reunites with Dexter.

An emphasis on the conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which presents the couples happily entering into marriage, imparts some support, at the very least through its presentation of traditional marriages as an accepted norm, for a hierarchical, patriarchal, and oppressive social structure. Susan Carlson believes that women are allowed freedom and power in comedy only because the institution of marriage provides the genre with a built-in safeguard against female control. Shakespeare's women almost always lose their power in comic endings (Carlson, 1991). Carlson further argues that these plays deceptively empower women. She says, "while Shakespeare's women claim control and voice in the [play's] long celebrated inversion[s], they fail to transcend the limits a traditional comic ending imposes on them" (23).
The silencing of Helena and Hermia, which occurs at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, supports Carlson's theory. At the beginning of the play both Hermia and Helena clearly have strong voices. Hermia is depicted as aggressive and unrelenting. Likewise, Helena refuses to be silenced by Demetrius despite his insults. Once Helena and Hermia leave the forest, however, they lose their voices and they are never heard from again. As a result, the effort that went into bringing about a "new" society that nevertheless takes away privileges rather than allowing for new opportunity seems almost tragic (Garner, 1981).

Although I agree with Carlson that comic heroines are systematically disadvantaged, I disagree that a comedy's ending necessarily eradicates the relevance of all that comes before. Carlson's formalist argument, that what is presented last overrules what has been presented in the body of the work, is neither accurately depicts all that occurs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* nor acceptably explains *The Philadelphia Story*.

In his essay "Popular Discrimination," John Fiske argues that in popular culture viewers often ignore those conventions that are oppositional to their sense of self and focus on those spectatorial moments that praise and value their personal social climate. Through what Fiske calls "popular discrimination," viewers form interconnections between a text and their immediate social surroundings and disregard the text's oppressive elements. Thus popular viewers "are concerned less with the final unit of a text than with the pleasures and meanings that its elements provide" (107).

Questions about audience can be understood with Fiske's ideas in mind. While Shakespeare's plays are no longer considered popular
entertainment, they were certainly created to be just that. Perhaps Fiske's
ideas have an even wider application and are at least somewhat relevant to
our understanding of Shakespeare. Thus, in an important way, despite safe­
guard weddings, the achievements of Shakespeare's heroines may not be
eradicated by the conventional patriarchal ending of the play. In addition,
according to the reasoning in Fiske's theory, the viewers of remarriage
comedies, such as The Philadelphia Story, are less concerned with the
constraints of remarriage than with the drive of the narrative and the actions
that bring about this conclusion (Fiske, 1991).

De-emphasizing the play's and the film's comic conclusions shifts
focus from the marriage-based conclusions to the internal structure of the
comedies. To a large extent, comedy is about breaking down conventions and
opposing cultural restrictions. Madeleine Henry, in her essay "Ethos, Mythos,
Praxis: Women in Menander's Comedy," says "Comic drama is often held to
be the genre which takes its subject and form from conflicts between social
values. Acceptance of this premise invites us, if it does not indeed require us,
to examine the conflicts and values which critics claim for the subject and
form of comedy" (141).

The nature of comedy as a disruptive force suggests that comedy
should be linked with a re-ordering of society and a movement towards
gamos, an ideal state, or at least with a dis-ordering of conventional society.
This further suggests that the subject of comedy often relies on this proposed
re-ordering and, as a disruptive force, the drive of comedy should move
towards this objective. However, critics such as Northrop Frye interpret A
Midsummer Night's Dream as a vindication of a patriarchal world view since
the social structure overthrown at the beginning of the play is ironically reestablished and reaffirmed at the end (via marriage.) According to Frye, in romantic comedy the normal action presents a young man trying to get (own) a young woman who is being kept from him by social boundaries or power, namely her father. At the end of this Oedipal play, the father no longer has the power to stand between the couple and the young man steps in and takes control of his new wife.

The following lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrates the play's patriarchal agenda:

- Jack shall have Jill
- Nought shall go ill
- The man shall have his mare again,
- And all shall be well.

(I. ii. 461-464)

For Frye, the re-establishment of the patriarchy, confirmed here by Robin Goodfellow, produces an element of stability and a sense of order which not only exonerates but exults in the play's patriarchal social structure.

However, Henry rightly criticizes Frye's theories as androcentric and male-biased since Frye oversimplifies the drive of the narrative to be the fulfillment of this single goal—the Jacks must overcome all obstructing forces and claim their Jills (Garner, 1981). When Frye speaks of the drive of comic narrative primarily in terms of a movement towards fulfilling the desires of the hero, he de-emphasizes the importance of both members of a dyad couple in romance and romantic comedy. The narrative drive of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not the simple fulfillment of the hero's desires; rather, the narrative drive develops out of comic ambivalence towards the status quo. Affirmation of ideal social values, the true narrative drive, leads not to the
desires of the hero but to what Susan Carlson calls comic inversion and what I call comic revision.

According to Frye, the greatness of comedy comes from the comic resolution and its consequences--crystallization of a new social unit (Frye, 1965). The "newness" of this unit is essential to comic revision. Thus, what has been established as flawed at the beginning of a play cannot logically be reestablished at the end of a play without violating the comic trajectory of the play. The conflict between social values inherent in comic drama drives the narrative less towards "spring and continuance," as Frye suggests, than towards change and overcoming oppression.

Although one may argue that the only necessary change in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the transference of the daughter as a "commodity" from the father to the husband, one may also argue that patriarchal social organization is questioned by the play. For instance, the law of Athens irrationally decrees death or perpetual imprisonment in a convent for any daughter who marries without her father's consent. In other words, daughters must obey fathers or risk death. Through this law, patriarchal control is depicted as cruel, overly powerful, and inappropriate rather than as a legitimate manifestation of the natural order.

The metaphorical nature of words allows the dialogue of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be "revised" or interpreted an objection to unlawful patriarchal control. When Hermia seeks to free herself from patriarchal control and marry a man of her own choice, Thesus orders her, "Either to die the death or to abjure/ For ever the society of men" (I. i. 65-66). While Thesus assumes that a life without men is a punishment, his words
also suggest the appeal of this proposal. Without men, Hermia will not be put to death. "The death" has both a figurative and literal meaning since a life controlled by others can be understood as the death of free will or the death of the soul. Hermia then replies "So will I grow, so live, so die..." (I: i.79). Hermia does not surrender her convictions because of Thesus's threat since she understands that a life married to (and controlled by) a man she does not love equals death. For Hermia, her death "will" be a positive development since death represents an escape from the confines of patriarchy.

Since Thesus, the king and physical embodiment of the law, is also a manifestation of the patriarchal social system, the state's absurd law associates patriarchy with irrationality. Hermia's revolutionary behavior, lauded by the play for contesting this injustice, cannot later be entirely suppressed or repressed. Thus, the movement towards gamos, the ideal state, which suggests a movement away from irrationality towards justice, also suggests a movement away from patriarchal control.

Once the unjustness of forcing people to behave in ways that are somehow contradictory to their nature is established as a feature of patriarchy, these comedies can be seen to no longer advocate patriarchal control. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, the episode in the "green world" leaves a trace or a shadow of what is right that lingers beyond the play's patriarchal conclusion. When the play attempts to return to its original irrational social structure and also attempts to present that social structure as "normal," this contradiction suggests that something is not quite right. The audience can
reject what is presented by the play at the conclusion in light of what is presented by the play at its inception and what has transpired along the way.

Although patriarchal social order is not overcome within the confines of the play, the effect of its presentation suggests the possibility of its opposite. The fact that these women have discovered and momentarily laid claim to their voices renders the patriarchal ending problematic. The fissures in the re-established system offer the possibility of a just social system that does not deny women their voices and does not oppress certain members of the population for the benefit of others. The trace of justice created by the play is not erased by the ensuing marriages, and the patriarchal structure that retains control of society throughout the play necessarily suggests an alternative to this social construction. Thus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* invites critical examination of the process of patriarchy. The absence of change at the end of the play does not negate the questions raised by the play's comic form.

Similarly, fissures in the patriarchal constraints of *The Philadelphia Story* invite a critique of Hepburn's reliance on Cary Grant in the film's conclusion. Reproducing the comic structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* allows Cukor to create these fissures. Through dramatic comedy the film is able to question the established society while appearing to adhere to its conventions.
CHAPTER THREE:  
THE PHILADELPHIA STORY

"So musical a discord, such sweet thunder."  
(A Midsummer Night's Dream, IV. i. 116-7)

The relationship between The Philadelphia Story and screwball comedy and the connections between The Philadelphia Story and A Midsummer Night's Dream expose the film's contradictory stance towards issues of gender. While in the film there is a great deal of support for a patriarchal worldview, there is also a strong vocal female--Katharine Hepburn--whose powerful and assured on-screen presence is not eradicated by the social regulations to which she finally succumbs, both as "actress" and "character."

Philip Barry wrote his play The Philadelphia Story as a star vehicle for Katharine Hepburn. In the play, Tracy Lord, of the Philadelphia Lords, has married C.K. Dexter Haven and divorced him. Tracy is now about to marry George Kittredge. The day before the wedding, a reporter named Macaulay (Mike) Connor and a photographer named Elizabeth Imbrie arrive at the Lord household pretending to be friends of the family. At the end of a pre-wedding party, Tracy becomes intoxicated and spends the evening with Mike. In the morning, Tracy decides not to marry George and marries her ex-husband, Dexter Haven, instead.

By replicating the narrative structure of Shakespeare's play and also through direct references, Barry's play intentionally evokes A Midsummer Night's Dream. Like the lovers in A Midsummer Night's Dream who act under the influence of Puck's magical ointment, Tracy and Mike act under the influence of champagne, a kind of magical ointment. Under the spell of
this powerful liquid, Tracy and Mike enter into the 'green world.' Like Demetrius and Lysander, in the 'green world' Tracy and Mike have their vision temporarily impaired. All four of these characters later have their vision restored by a 'juice' cure. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Oberon tells us that the cure comes from a flower called 'love-in-idleness' (II.ii.168). In *The Philadelphia Story* this juice is transformed into Dexter's cure for a hangover which he says is made of 'just the juice of a few flowers' (176).

Working together, Philip Barry and Katharine Hepburn created the character of Tracy Lord. Tracy possesses many of the same personality characteristics as Hepburn. Hepburn has an intelligence and assured sense of self that contradicted many of 1930s society's stereotypical assumptions about women. This made it difficult for some people to accept her characters as realistic and thus earned her the label 'box-office poison.' In an interview with Gavin Lambert, George Cukor remarks that 'she [Hepburn] challenged the audience and that wasn't the fashion in those days. When people first saw her they saw something arrogant in her playing' (82).

While these characteristics are normally considered appealing and appropriate in men, the public often found Hepburn unattractively superior and haughty (Lambert, 1972). In order to counteract Hepburn's problems at the box office and improve her appeal as an actress, Barry and Hepburn intentionally gave Tracy these characteristics only to have her later reject them. Specifically, both the film and the play are set up so that Tracy/Hepburn's personality is checked by genre restrictions. This makes it difficult to avoid interpreting the film as a confirmation of patriarchy. Nevertheless there are distinct and important moments in the film when
patriarchal forces are not in control; these traces of equality, coupled with signs of oppression present an ambiguous ideological statement to the audience.

Cukor's *The Philadelphia Story* stands out as a particularly good example of how the personalities of strong women cannot be completely stifled by patriarchal constraints. In large measure this is due to Katharine Hepburn's strength of character both on and off the screen. Although Hepburn's assertiveness is qualified by the narrative's comic form (which ends in marriage), the temporary empowerment that she radiates during key moments in the film produces an essential tension that opens *The Philadelphia Story* to the view that it is a critique of patriarchal society rather than a justification of the status quo.

Katharine Hepburn bought the rights to the play and then sold the story to MGM for $150,000 (Roppolo, 1965). In the agreement, Hepburn included several stipulations. She insisted that she play Tracy, the lead female role in the film, that two popular "stars" would be cast as the leading men, that Donald Odgen Stewart write the script, and that George Cukor, the only director whom she trusted, direct the film. Hepburn originally wanted Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable to play the leading men, but they were not interested in working with Hepburn on this project because of her problems at the box office. By default Grant and Stewart were cast as the leading men, C.K. Dexter Haven and Macaulay Connor, respectively. (In Retrospect, it is hard to imagine that any other actors could have played these roles). Cukor accepted the assignment to work again with Hepburn, his lifelong friend. Preparation for filming began in 1940 (Green, 1988).
Odgen Stewart's script follows Barry's play quite closely, and like many early Hollywood directors, Cukor had a strong background in the theater, so it is not surprising that the film is highly theatrical. To maintain the play-like quality and the Shakespearean "inheritance" in the film, Cukor chose to use sparingly those typical cinematic tools, such as close-ups and point-of-view shots, which further distinguish film from theater. Instead, Cukor shot most of the scenes in simple medium long shots. The camera is kept at an even distance from the actors, enhancing the feeling of theatricality and giving the film a balanced tone.

The film's lack of close-ups distances Tracy's outward facial expressions from her true inner feelings. This is important for her character's development from a flawless "bronze statue" into a "human being" with an "understanding heart," so that, at the end of the film, when Tracy uncovers the vulnerable self hidden inside her tough outer shell a rare close up of Tracy just after Dexter's proposal demonstrates just how much she loves him and how right they are for one another--according to the point of view of the camera.

The connections to theater, which come from the play's Shakespearean inheritance as well as its origins on stage, are essential to an interpretation of The Philadelphia Story that sees beyond its patriarchal power structures. Cukor alternates between theater-like staging and more cinematic open shooting in order to transport the action of the film into the magical "green world." The outside-society/inside-society, "green world"/mansion dichotomy expands the film's connection to A Midsummer Night's Dream and the movement from theater to film allowed Cukor and Odgen
Stewart to explore the film's relationship to Shakespearean comedy and to produce a visual "green world" that reflects the spirituality of this mystical locale.

Because of the theatrical nature of the film, dialogue in *The Philadelphia Story* is often more important than mise-en-scène in establishing nuance, meaning, and plot development. As Carlos Clarens says, throughout the film the mise-en-scène is "almost invisible in its discretion, a matter of stagey groupings of three or four performers within the frame" (61). Clarens' observation correctly points out how the scenes in the film are staged very much like a play, resulting in mise-en-scène that primarily functions to emphasize the dialogue.

Since words rather than action or mise-en-scène create the momentum that carries the film's plot to its comic conclusion, *The Philadelphia Story* can be classified a dialogue comedy as this category is defined by Gerald Mast in *The Comic Mind*. According to Mast, the first of the three major comic traditions to emerge after the introduction of sound is the dialogue film. The primary characteristic of a dialogue film is that comedy is created through talk rather than, for instance, through sight gags (this is not to say that a dialogue comedy cannot also have sight gags). Part of the appeal of this type of comedy in the 30s and 40s stemmed from novelty. In silent films, while sight gags are practical, puns and verbal banter are virtually impossible. Dialogue comedy allows a new kind of witty humor to be presented on screen. An argument can be made that conversation became an important means of establishing relationships because it need not involve what Hollywood deemed "improper" behavior.
In a dialogue film, the writer often plays a greater role than the director in the shaping of the comedy. Thus Mast believes that the most successful dialogue comedies are ones where the style and attitude of the director and the writer are fused (Mast, 1973). Cukor agrees. Unlike, for instance, Woody Allen and Ingmar Bergman, Cukor does not write his screenplays. Nevertheless, he believes that it is important for a director to be present during the creation of the screenplay. Cukor says that it is essential for the director to sit in on script writing conferences so that his ideas are synchronized with the ideas of the writer (Koszarski, 324). The Philadelphia Story’s prologue, an afterthought of Cukor’s, is an example of screenwriter/director collaboration.

Like most dialogue comedies, The Philadelphia Story can be understood to invoke "a unique aesthetic for destroying Hollywood assumptions while appearing to subscribe to them" since, as Mast suggests, "underlying the best of the dialogue comedies was usually a subtle and silent rebellion against the very studio system and values that produced them" (250). Through spoken metaphors, such as the kind regularly employed by Dexter, these films are able to reject the familiar movie definitions of love, sex, success, and property as well as familiar stereotypes about women without causing studio conflicts. As Mast says, "by shredding Hollywood clichés, the comedies frequently implied a more human, sensible, and sensitive system of emotional relationship and moral values" (250).

The double meanings and witty puns of the film's dialogue, and particularly Tracy's dialogue, are reminiscent of Shakespeare's use of language in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Like Hermia and the women of
Shakespeare's plays, Tracy is able to manipulate her words in order to
denounce the men who try to control her. When Tracy first meets Mike
Connor, played by Jimmy Stewart, and Elizabeth Imbrie, played by Ruth
Hussey, she pretends not to know they are reporters for Spy Magazine. Tracy
speaks of little Mr. Grace who does the social news and asks Mike, "Can you
imagine a grown man having to sink so low," knowing full well that Mike is
undercover writing a social news story. Later, Dexter acknowledges the power
that Tracy wields through her words. Commenting on their divorce she says,
"I thought it was for life but the nice judge gave me a full pardon." Dexter
replies "That's the old red-head. No bitterness. No recrimination. Just a
good swift left to the jaw."

While Tracy is able to manipulate words and language in order to
express herself in a given situation, Dexter is able to manipulate a given
situation through words and language. This ability comes from a
combination of Cary Grant's comic wit and charm and his character's position
as a husband in a patriarchal society who enjoys high status in the Lord
household. Dexter's status in the household is greatly enhanced by the
elimination of Sandy Lord, Tracy's brother, from the story. In Barry's play,
Sandy brings the reporters into the mansion. In Odgen Stewart's screenplay,
this is done by Dexter. By assigning Sandy's role in the remarriage to Dexter,
Odgen Stewart creates a more interesting and more influential character for
Cary Grant to play and for Cukor to direct by establishing a familial
relationship between Dexter and the Lords (Barry, 1939). The new depth added
to this character allows Dexter to become symbolic of Cukor as the surrogate
writer/director. Dexter's role as director is essential to our understanding of the relationship between Dexter and Tracy.

Through the character of Dexter, *The Philadelphia Story* displays self-reflexivity and self-mockery, which fortifies the film's ability to poke fun at the very conventions it promotes. Dexter's behavior continuously calls attention to the fact that *The Philadelphia Story* is removed from reality, a piece of filmed theater where actors deliver lines. The result of his action is a story within a story with a self-reflexive narrative form. Dexter's sly comments also allow the film to subtly ridicule its own conventions. Thus, dialogue allows *The Philadelphia Story* to perpetuate a patriarchal worldview while, at the same time, it seeks to undermine this kind of male-biased social control.

After the silent comedy prologue, the viewing audience next sees Dexter silently follow Liz and Mike as they walk through a series of doorways towards the office of Sidney Kidd (Henry Daniel). At first, Sidney Kidd, a newspaper mogul, seems to have at least partial control over the character's lives. As Mike and Liz walk to Kidd's office, Mike insists that he will no longer allow Kidd to control him. However, in Kidd's office, Dexter emerges as the true author of Kidd's "Philadelphia Story." The swift walk to Kidd's office establishes Dexter's role as seemingly silent and following but actually directing. It is he who assigns Liz and Mike the "roles" that they need to "play" in order to get safely into the Lord household so that they can cover Tracy's wedding and provide Kidd with the story he is after. Dexter continues to subtly manipulate the action until the very last scene. As Gary Green says:

> Dexter writes and directs what we come to see is the real Philadelphia story, a dialogue comedy of remarriage that appears
to unfold of its own cinematic and theatrical volition, yet the presence of the author, Dexter, reveals just how staged the outcome actually is, as evidenced by the two final sequences in the film (35).

The final sequence expands the film's self-reflexive film-within-a-film structure. The film ends ironically as Dexter's power is usurped by Kidd, who steps in to finish the story he began. Kidd snaps the picture that he had promised not to shoot. The noise and flash of the camera direct the actors to look not at the altar, where Grant wants them to be, but to the side, where Kidd is standing. Thus the film acknowledges that characters are always being led by their sideline director and that what is important often occurs "at the margins" or, literally, behind the scenes.

As Dexter "directs" the action of the film by subtle manipulation, the camera aligns itself with his point of view. Often in other Hollywood films, the camera aligns with a particular character through simple eye-line matches and point-of-view shots. However, since The Philadelphia Story is mainly shot as if the members of audience were watching a play, with very few point-of-view shots, Cukor achieves alignment with Grant by framing Grant on the wings of the screen, as if Grant were looking on like an actual director. Cukor frequently positions several characters huddled together while Dexter stands on the opposite side of the screen. When the Lords and the guests assemble on the patio for sherry, Dexter steps aside to sit at the edge of the pool but, as always, he is poised to interrupt the action if it moves beyond the scope of his control.

Grant often removes himself from the shot in order to watch the performances, only to enter into the scene when he feels it is necessary to prod a particular character or to make a remark about something he finds
amusing, and there is a great deal he finds amusing. In the scene before the wedding, George arrives at the house in order to discuss with Tracy the previous night's activities. As soon as George enters the "stage," or the patio, where Tracy, Mike and Liz have already assembled, Grant walks around the couple and sits down at a table off screen. Grant stays out of the view of the camera, except when he feels compelled to comment. George tells Tracy that a wife should "Behave herself, naturally." Grant brilliantly corrects George's pronunciation and replies that Tracy should be able to "Behave herself naturally." Dexter forms a pun, altering George's accent and mocking George's foolishness.

In this simple line, Dexter also seems to be insinuating that a wife should not "behave herself" according to how proper behavior is defined by her husband, but that she should behave herself in a way that is natural and comfortable for herself. Thus Dexter is not only making fun of George, he is making fun of George's beliefs, the beliefs of a patriarchal society which defines female (and male) behavior according to a strict set of artificial rules, thereby presenting evidence that, as Mast suggests, the film rebels through the use of dialogue against studio/society values.

The victim of many of Dexter's sly remarks, George, does not quite understand how Dexter directs the action of the story. After Tracy rejects his offer for reconciliation he says to Dexter, "I have a feeling you had more to do with this than anyone." Dexter responds, "Possibly, but you were a great help." Dexter's comment, perfectly delivered by Grant, demonstrates not only Grant's genius as a comic actor, but the importance of dialogue to the action
of the film. It is through Dexter's comments that the audience comes to
disrespect Kittredge.

Although, at times, Dexter mocks patriarchal convention, his role as
director allows him to continue to control Tracy as if she were his wife
(property) despite their divorce. Dexter's final and most important direction
secures the story's adherence to the rules of patriarchy. When Tracy emerges
from her experience in the "green world," Dexter steps in to assure that she
transforms properly, into the wife he wants.

In the "green world" Tracy undergoes an important transformation.
According to Stanley Cavell, remarriage comedies require the creation of a
new woman. What this means is that the woman must undergo a
transformation and a kind of rebirth. For a woman who is scared and
subdued, a rebirth may be a positive experience. However, few of the female
stars of screwball comedies demonstrated these qualities. Instead, they were
often outspoken, self-sufficient and very funny. However, by patriarchal
standards, the standards that control these movies, these women could not
co-exist with their husbands because they were not demure enough and
therefore were in need of change. Cavell ties the creation of a new woman to
the consciousness of women in the society beyond the film.

The powerful magic of the "green world" comes to a climax as Tracy
and Mike dance in the moonlight and drink champagne after her
engagement party. Social order, which approves of the reunion of Tracy and
Dexter, loses its hold in the moonlight just as it does in the Shakespearean
forests. It is during this lapse in authorial control that Tracy is able to stop
fighting for power and drops her "shining sword." Unfortunately, she never
recovers once she is "tricked" by drink and romance into relinquishing her power. The scene between Tracy and Mike takes a significant turn when the sun begins to rise. They are no longer under the spell of the moon and their magical moment together comes to an end along with Tracy's independence.

Tracy's rebirth leads to self discovery and the rejection of her assertive qualities. This rejection is necessary in order for her subsequent remarriage to Dexter to take place since, according to the plot, her first marriage failed because she possessed these qualities. Thus, like the woods outside of Athens which did not free Titania from patriarchal control yet allowed Hermia and Helena greater degrees of freedom, the "green world" in *The Philadelphia Story* is a contradictory place. On the one hand, Tracy is allowed the freedom to behave as she likes. On the other hand, her experience in the "green world" leads her to reject her proud, assertive self. This rejection comes in the morning when she apologizes to her father, contradicting her personal ideas of morality and proper behavior.

After her experience in the "green world," Tracy finds that she "doesn't know anything anymore," and Dexter approves of her uncertainty and her lack of control. When the film concludes, Tracy seems to have been given power only to have it usurped by comic form. About to enter into matrimony, Tracy looses the ability to think for herself and is forced to turn to a man to give her words.

Cavell believes that in remarriage comedies men and women are spiritually equal—they both have the right to pursue happiness. Yet, despite their importance in the movement of the narrative, these woman cannot claim their rebirth as their own. Cavell notes that in classical romance, the
discovery of one's origins is a prerequisite for marriage. (The frog must
discover that he is a prince before he can marry the princess.) While in
remarriage comedy this prerequisite is no longer required, there is a new
requirement—the women must now learn and acknowledge their male
dependency before entering into a marital union.

Cavell admits that "the creation of the woman is the business of men"
(57). The female characters require an education in order to experience
enlightenment. However, since the male characters are in control of ideas
and knowledge, the women must rely on the men for their education. While
Cavell sees this as a situational or historical circumstance, in actuality,
"happiness" is not what these women are in pursuit of. The true quest of the
women in remarriage comedies is not to find spiritual happiness; it is to find
a husband capable of presiding over her education.

Tracy decides that she will inform the wedding guests of her break-up
with George. Unfortunately, handling the situation is equated with choosing
the right man to tell her first how to behave and then tell her what to say.
When addressing the guests, Tracy turns to Dexter for assistance. Dexter, the
husband, steps in and reestablishes social order. Dexter begins to "feed" Tracy
lines which she then repeats to the guests. These words include the
announcement that Tracy and Dexter are going to be remarried. This decision
is made entirely by Dexter who simply informs Tracy of "their" plans. Like
Hermia who was silenced by her wedding, Tracy is silenced in the sense that
the words she repeats are not her own. Instead, she "speaks" patriarchal
values, ideas and conformity. Thus, she sacrifices her morality as well as her
mind for the sake of the "right" husband. This type of female subservience is
applauded and reinforced by this film when it is presented as the appropriate climax with Dexter presented as the appropriate husband.

Although the film tries to convince the audience that Dexter (Grant) is an ideal husband, he is not. As is characteristic of the screwball genre, *The Philadelphia Story* presents abusive male behavior as humorous. Ed Sikov correctly notes that "in screwball comedies, the heroine's relative independence is countered all too often by punishing, resentful heroes whose punching fists, spanking palms, and generally threatening mouths serve as the forces of masculine reaction. Women get a raw deal throughout the genre" (28).

In the opening sequence, Dexter is shown squarely pushing Tracy to the floor after she drops his bags and breaks his golf club. Throughout the film, Dexter's abusive behavior is made into a series of jokes. Dexter tells Mike that he "thought all writers drink to excess and beat their wives" after which he grins at Tracy and says "I think I once had a desire to be a writer."

Although the line is delivered by Grant with a humorous tone, what is implied is that Dexter beat Tracy and that this is somehow funny. The film also implies that it was Tracy's unforgiving attitude and not Dexter's abusive behavior or his drinking problem that lead to the break-up of their first marriage.

Tracy acknowledges her own second class position in a patriarchal society. She recognizes that when she and Dexter were married, he was her "lord and master." However, in a rare moment of intuition, George suggests that this was simply not true. And Dexter realizes that he does not want this to be true, he does not want a wife who has no spirit or sense of self. When
Tracy promises him that she will be "yar" and well behaved in their second marriage, Dexter tells her that she can behave however she likes. While it is encouraging that Tracy will not have to behave as her husband commands, it is problematic that she must first receive permission to behave how she chooses. Before she is married, Tracy is a "Lord," reversing gender conventions. However, she loses her title when she marries Dexter and seeks shelter in his "Haven."

Nevertheless, it is the verbal "Lord Tracy" on screen throughout most of the film. And this Tracy is an appealing character. A large part of this appeal comes from her "zany" convention-breaking comic behavior. Tracy is particularly endearing when she and Dinah mock Mike and Liz early in the film. However, Tracy's appeal is not limited to her comic abilities; she is also appealing because she is intelligent. Tracy is too smart to be fooled by Dexter's plan to bring reporters into the house. She is also smart enough to play along with the scheme. She is so self-assured that she is able to assure the audience of her abilities. Although these traits are forfeited by Tracy in the final sequence, it is these characteristics that the audience remembers. Like Hermia, Tracy leaves a lingering trace of a moment when she controlled her own behavior, even if only for a brief period of time.

Tracy is an active, strong and vocal woman before her wedding and until that event she exerts a great deal of power. Her abilities are demonstrated over and over again in the film. Although her parents name her sister Diana, Tracy overrules them and "changes" the name to Dinah. When Tracy agrees to go along with Dexter's scheme and sacrifice her privacy in order save her father from scandal, she quickly takes control. Tracy decides
to put on a show that will confirm Mike's assumptions about the mindless affected rich. She mocks Mike and Liz by staging their encounter, playing the part of the terribly sophisticated woman. Roles are reversed, Tracy takes control of the situation, and Mike wonders "Who is doing the interviewing here?" In this scene it is Tracy, rather than Mike, who controls language and voice.

In their struggle against patriarchal control, women often find that they need to work together. When Tracy breaks off her engagement to George, this leaves an opening for a groom in the wedding party. Through most of the film, it seems as though Mike Connor is Tracy's love interest. After their romantic evening Mike volunteers to fill the open role of groom. However, in the light of day, Tracy sees an obvious flaw in their relationship. She answers his proposal by saying, "I don't think Liz would like it."

Tracy's refusal to marry Mike verifies the importance of female covenants. Although Mike and Liz have been working together for some time and are romantically involved to a certain degree, Tracy seems to understand Liz much better than does Mike. Although Liz mentions her ex-husband to Mike, he does not realize that she was ever married. However, Tracy realizes this almost immediately. Likewise, Liz is quite understanding of Tracy's position. Liz recognizes that just like everyone else, rich or poor, Tracy is trapped in a social role.

Tracy goes so far as to attack patriarchy at its source, opening an alternative interpretation to Seth Lord's description of her as "justice with her shining sword." Out of context, these words could be mistaken for a compliment. But according to patriarchal convention, in a daughter this
attitude is deplorable. Tracy strips her father of the ownership of his family, forcing him to play the role of "Uncle Willy." However, Tracy has now gone too far. Seth Lord will not have his position reduced and he insists that the charade end. When Tracy announces, after her father's insistence, that she will handle the reporters, he mocks her self-promoted position of power: "Don't you think that is my responsibility as at least the titular head of this household." Thus Tracy's position in charge of the mansion is only hers because her father temporarily abandoned it by going to New York. Patriarchal convention allows him to reclaim his rank at any time.

The father-daughter relations presented by the film are the strongest statements made by the film in favor of patriarchal dominance. Seth Lord disgustingly goes so far as to blame Tracy's lack of Oedipal affection for his affair. He says:

I suppose the best mainstay a man can have is a daughter, the right kind of daughter. A devoted young girl gives a man the illusion that youth is still his because without her he might be inclined to go off in search of his youth... A girl of his own full of warmth for him, full of foolish unquestioning affection. (my emphasis)

While Tracy protests performing this service or function for her father, Dinah fulfills this desire for Uncle Willy. Before the wedding Dinah insists that she and Uncle Willy ride together in her carriage so they can be alone and "intimate." Partially fulfilled by Dinah, Uncle Willy is merely a "pincher" instead of a philanderer.

Tracy denies her responsibility for her father's affair with Tina Mara, the dancer in New York. Exerting his superior power, Seth accuses her outright, saying that she was indeed responsible for his affair because she is a
"prig" and a "perennial spinster" and therefore failed to fulfill his quasi-sexual need to feel young and doted upon. Her father's insults destroy Tracy's confidence and she is completely defeated. However, Tracy's is only defeated by her father because he has the support of her mother. When Tracy begins to defend herself and insult her father for his philandering, Margaret Lord (Mary Nash) steps in to silence her. Mother Lord insists that Seth's behavior is neither Tracy's business nor hers. She says "I don't know who it concerns really except, perhaps, your father." By sacrificing her own right to contest Seth's affair, Mother Lord denies Tracy any right to do so, reinforcing traditional roles of women in patriarchy--roles that are transferred from mother to daughter. Mother Lord's unconditional love, despite her disapproval of Tracy and Seth's behavior, can be taken as a model of how Tracy is supposed to feel and behave (Scheman, 1988).

In Pursuits of Happiness, Cavell notes that the price of the woman's happiness is "the absence of her mother (underscored by the attractive and signal presence, whenever he is present, of the woman's father) together with the strict absence of children for her, the denial of her as a mother" (232). Though The Philadelphia Story seems an exception, it proves the rule in that, in supporting her husband, Mrs. Lord abandons Tracy. While Cavell claims that "no account of these comedies will be satisfactory that does not explain this absence, or avoidance [of motherhood]," his own explanations of this motherlessness, finally, fall short of cleansing these films of their patriarchal elements and the resulting female oppression (51).

While Katharine Hepburn creates a strong, likable character, this character is still in many ways oppressed by the men in her life. Since the
female willingness to remarry is based a heterosexual awareness, the female must overcome an "untouchable purity," or sexual distancing (which substitutes for the lack of virginity of a once married female). However, female self and sexual discoveries are highly problematic, if only because the women of remarriage comedy can neither be a mother nor have a mother.

Cavell suggest that the women of remarriage comedies cannot be mothers because neither member of the couple can be a parent. Without children, the couple's decision to remarry will be unencumbered. Recalling Milton's divorce tracts, Cavell claims that children do not authenticate a marriage. Furthermore, since "true love," Cavell's explanation for the remarriages, can only encompass a dyad couple, children are intruders. Thus Cavell argues that these films are not eliminating the idea of motherhood; they are simply avoiding the complications of children. To justify his hypothesis, Cavell argues that in Smiles of A Summer Night the presence of a child is justified out of wedlock and, therefore, acceptable by the standards of the genre and of European audiences of the 50s (whereas this would have been unacceptable for Hollywood films of the 30s).

Cavell's explanation for the absence of motherhood only addresses one half of the phenomenon. Not only are the women of remarriage comedies not mothers themselves, they also lack mothers. Although The Philadelphia Story seems to be the exception to this rule, Mrs. Lord seems to lose her wits and becomes almost absent. At the same time, the father, or the patriarchy, plays an essential role in the outcome of the female/daughter's future. Although Cavell's explanation may partially justify why these women cannot
be mothers, he offers no adequate explanation as to why these women cannot have mothers.

In contrast to Cavell's incomplete and unsatisfactory explanation of motherlessness, in her article entitled "Missing Mothers/ Desiring Daughters: Framing the Sight of Women" Naomi Scheman proposes as alternative reading of why these films lack mothers. According to Scheman, within the systems of male privilege set up in these films, neither feminine sexuality nor female ability to assume power are compatible with being a mother's daughter. Thus, all ties to motherhood, either having a mother or being a mother, are considered threatening to the patriarchy and are avoided (1988).

Cavell believes that remarriage comedies are in pursuit of equality between men and women. However this cannot be true since the women of remarriage comedy are denied any ties to motherhood, have no female friends or acquaintances and, as a result, are forced to discover their sexual identity as it is defined by the many men in their lives. While these women are not completely denied access to sexuality, they are only allowed to experience a male-defined femaleness and a limiting, male-defined sexuality.

Cavell's reading of the issues of gender in these films needs to be reassessed. These comedies do not necessarily release women from social oppression; indeed, they can create new kinds of oppression, such as motherlessness and patriarchal control. Nevertheless, it is Cavell's formulation of the genre of remarriage that allows us to understand *The Philadelphia Story* as a film with both positive and negative gender relations.

*The Philadelphia Story*'s adherence to patriarchal convention and its presentation of women are inherently contradictory in much the same way
that Shakespeare's presentation of women and adherence to convention is often contradictory. This is not surprising considering the close narrative ties and the similar marital conclusions that bind The Philadelphia Story to Shakespeare's work and particularly to A Midsummer Night's Dream.

David Shumway suggests that marriage, the means through which the patriarchy perpetuates itself, is problematic for strong women in comedy (1991). However, marriage need not mean or necessitate silencing for women. Although it seems that the misogyny is inherent in the narrative structure, with remarriage comedies always ending in female-suppressing marriages, two other inheritors of Shakespeare's narrative structure, Smiles of A Summer Night and A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy, present slightly different interpretations of what it means to be married. These works free the female characters from some of the constraints that hinder Hermia and Tracy.

The neat conclusion of The Philadelphia Story does not eradicate the chaos that has comes before. As Barry Grant observes, "the anarchy that is unleashed by the screwball characters is usually dispelled by the union or reunion of the couple, but the balance is precarious at best and does little to counter the effect of the irrational forces aroused in the body of the film" (81). Thus like A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Philadelphia Story leaves us to question the correctness of established social conventions however inappropriate the conclusions may be.
CHAPTER FOUR: ALLEN AND BERGMAN

'The lunatic, the lover and the poet/ are of imagination all compact.' (A Midsummer Night's Dream, V. ii. 112)

The Philadelphia Story is not unique in its reproduction of the narrative structure of A Midsummer Night's Dream. A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy (1982), written and directed by Woody Allen, and Smiles of a Summer Night (1955), written and directed by Ingmar Bergman, also follow this comic trajectory. These films represent a couple or a group of couples who are estranged or in the verge of separation; one or more of those characters experiences the kind of transformation that leads to reunion(s) as well as new unions.

As a archetype, A Midsummer Night's Dream allows for an investigation of the comic structures, the conclusions, the status of the female characters, and the transcendence of social constraints in these films. A comparison between The Philadelphia Story and these later inheritors of the "preoccupations and discoveries of Shakespearean romance" reiterates or validates the claim that although remarriage comedies promote female subservience when they extol traditional marriages, these films are also able to promote ideas of equality and suggest the possibility of worlds that are free of the social conventions that subvert women.

In both A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy and Smiles of A Summer Night the "green world" episodes of confused identity, inherited from Shakespeare's forest adventures, manifest themselves as long weekends in the country. In Allen's film, three couples retreat to the home of Andrew Hobbs, an eccentric inventor played by Woody Allen, and his wife, Adrian
(Mary Steenburgen). The weekend is a celebration of the marriage of Adrian's cousin Leopold (Jose Ferrer) whose fiancée, Ariel (Mia Farrow), turns out to be an old love of Andrew's. Andrew also invites his best friend Maxwell (Tony Roberts) to partake in the celebration festivities. Although Maxwell brings along his new nurse Dulcy (Julie Hagerty) as a companion, he also falls in love with Ariel.

Similarly, *Smiles of a Summer Night* reunites old lovers and scrambles new couples in a country setting. With plot twists even more complicated than those of *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, *Smiles of a Summer Night* presents the affairs of four couples. These couples center around Fredrick Egerman (Gunner Björnstrand), a middle-aged lawyer. During an episode of confusion and lust, Egerman's young wife Anne (Ulla Jacobson) is united with his son, Henrick (Björn Bjelvenstam). Egerman reunites with his old mistress Desirée (Eva Dahlbeck). Desirée's new lover Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm (Jarl Kulle) and his wife Charlotte (Margit Carlqvist), who becomes interested in Fredrick, also attend the weekend retreat. The fourth couple includes Petra (Harriet Andersson), a young maid first involved with Henrik, interested in Fredrick, and later coupled with Frid (Åke Fridell).

These films can be classified as remarriage comedies. In his classification of the genre of remarriage, Cavell borrows Wittgenstein's philosophy of group membership. According to Wittgenstein, members of a group need only exhibit a kind of family resemblance. Although being a member of a group does not require one specific feature, it does require a certain quota of the group of features. *The Philadelphia Story* can be
recognized as the principal member of the remarriage genre because it contains the greatest quantity of traits common to those displayed in the other films.

If a member of a group lacks a given genre feature, the absence of that feature must be compensated for by the inclusion of another. In line with his genre's "replacement clause," Cavell classifies both Bringing Up Baby (1938) and It Happened One Night (1935) as comedies of remarriage despite the significant couples' obvious lack of first marriages. Since, according to the drive of the narratives, the first marriages are necessary to establish a kinship stage between the couples, this stage must be expressed some other way. In It Happened One Night, the kinship stage develops between Elle and Peter as they ride the midnight bus together. Thus, the film compensates for its missing feature.

Since no static set of features exists for any of Cavell's genres, like a Wittgensteinian group, a Cavellian genre undergoes continuous redefinition and change. This important aspect allows the genre to expand and include additional films. For instance, Cavell mentions in Pursuits of Happiness that he considers Smiles of A Summer Night to be a remarriage comedy (58). Although Cavell does not acknowledge A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy as a comedy of remarriage, the film does display the necessary features and merits inclusion in the genre.

Why is it important that Smiles of A Summer Night and A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy can be classified as members of the genre of remarriage? In Pursuits of Happiness, Cavell explains:

Let us think of the common inheritance of the members of a genre as a story, call it a myth. The members of a genre will be
interpretations of it, or to use Thoreau's word for it, revisions of it, which will also make them interpretations of one another.

(31)

The Philadelphia Story, Smiles of A Summer Night and A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy follow a pattern of inheritance; A Midsummer Night’s Dream influenced all three films and the later films are inheritors of the earlier works. Investigating the three films as a member of a single genre distinguishes the different ways that similar themes, such as marriage and gender constraints, are presented.

Since Smiles of a Summer Night was produced in Sweden, Bergman did not need to adhere to the rules of film etiquette typically enacted in Hollywood films. Thus Hollywood's deference to the patriarchy does not affect Bergman's works and Smiles of a Summer Night provides an example of an adaptation of the structure of A Midsummer Night’s Dream that does not reproduce the same conclusions mandated by Hollywood. Therefore, to interpret Smiles of A Summer Night as a remarriage comedy is to highlight and recapitulate important aspects of these films and their relationship to social convention.

According to Cavell, in remarriage comedy the desire to be remarried is essential for successful remarriages. In “The Thought of Movies” he says, "the validity or bond of marriage is assured, even legitimized, not by church or state or sexual compatibility" but "by something I call the willingness for remarriage, a way of continuing to affirm the happiness of one's initial leap" (190). Thus the bond's validity comes from the couple's willingness to be together and their desire to fulfill a loss rather than from an adherence to social conventions. Logically enough, the films find another way to
legitimate marriage since social law has already been presented as less than adequate. Therefore, these couples experience a natural desire to spend time together. This circumstance "leads to happiness because it is led by happiness" (Cavell, 1981).

As noted by Cavell, remarriage comedies do not ground marriage on legal constraints but on a desire to be married, what he refers to as a "pursuit of happiness." Although it is a remarriage comedy, *The Philadelphia Story* retrogresses back to legal and social conventions with the remarriage of Tracy and Dexter. Unlike *The Philadelphia Story*, *Smiles of A Summer Night* does not equate marriage with conventional ties and restrictions. In Bergman's film, "marriage" is defined not as a legal institution but as the recognition of a certain relationship between a heterosexual couple--and this relationship is simply one of sexual relations.

Strong evidence for this unconventional definition of marriage comes from the relationship of Egerman and his young wife, Anne. Egerman and Anne never consummate their relationship sexually. To consummate is to complete, perfect, or fulfill, so without this consummation Anne and Egerman coexist as if they were never married. Anne says to Egerman, "One day I'll become your wife," insinuating that she is not yet his wife since they have not had sexual intercourse. Without the necessary fulfillment, these marriages are "unfulfilled" and therefore forsaken, abandoned or unfinished. Abandonment becomes the final culmination of Anne and Egerman's marriage when Anne leaves Egerman for Henrick.

It follows from the observation that Anne and Egerman are not "married" that Egerman cannot remarry Anne. Instead, Egerman's
recoupling is with Desirée Armfelt, his old mistress. When Egerman kisses Anne, he dreams of Desirée, whose name means "the desired one." Through an exchange in Desirée's dressing room, Bergman establishes that Desirée and Egerman have had sexual intercourse, and therefore, at one time in the past, have consummated a relationship. It is later revealed that Desirée and Egerman have a child together. The existence of the child further substantiates the claim that their first relationship should be equated with marriage. The child also validates their remarriage by providing an additional incentive to marry, his legitimation. However, it is essential that Egerman and Desirée reunite without Egerman's knowledge of the child. Thus the reunion is not motivated by feelings of responsibility; it is purely a reunion based on love and lust.

*Smiles of A Summer Night* opens on a framed image of Cupid, or Eros, the young god of love and lust. In this first shot, Bergman informs the viewers of what he is about to present—Cupid in a frame. In other words, Bergman is presenting a contained "picture" of love and lust. The framed Cupid is a metaphor for the love and lust of the characters. They too are contained by the frames in which they live, or the social conventions which restrict their behavior and prevent them from expressing their love and lust. (As this opening image suggests, Bergman film's are often self-reflexive [Gado]. The apex of this kind of reflexivity is demonstrated in Bergman's *Persona* [1966] when the narrative is interrupted by the film tearing in half, forcing the viewer to acknowledge the film's presence.)

For Bergman, the theme of frames is closely tied to the theme of theatricality. Like Cukor, Bergman also directs stage productions and is
strongly influenced by the theater. The theater is another frame that cannot contain its "components." As Desirée recites her lines on stage, she speaks directly to Egerman. While the production allows her to deliver words of love to Egerman by providing an acceptable distancing--the theater's "fourth wall"--the meanings of her words are not contained by the stage. Anne understand that Desirée is speaking to her husband, and she insists that they leave the theater.

Throughout the film, Bergman continues to explore the relationship between frames and conventions. As presented in the film, frames are artificial and cannot contain behavior or successfully perpetuate conventions. For instance, Egerman hopes to solidify his unconsummated relationship with Anne by having several portraits of her made by a photographer. However, although Egerman has Anne "framed," the pictures cannot contain her. Egerman loses Anne to a truer relationship when Anne leaves Egerman for a lustful and loving relationship with Henrick. The triangular relationship between Egerman, Anne, and Henrick, Egerman's son, recalls the Oedipal structure of Shakespearean romance.

Following the Shakespearean tradition, Smiles of A Summer Night takes us into a "green world" when the characters retreat to the country. According to David Sylvester in "The Films of Ingmar Bergman," the Shakespearean formula of Smiles of a Summer Night allows Bergman "to achieve some brilliant transitions and interplay between lyricism farce, fantasy, satire and naturalism, and keep the whole incredible confection under control" (518). Bergman keeps the shifting relationships organized by a
single theme, in the "green world" we are presented with four "smiles" (or
loves) of the summer night.

The first is young and pure love which develops in Anne and
Henrick, causing them to elope. Anne and Henrik have the least interesting
relationship since theirs is not one of remarriage. The fourth smile is also
not a remarriage; Petra and Frid are united after making love (marry) in the
haystacks.

The second smile, which reunites Count Malcolm and Charlotte, is
"for the clowns, the fools, the unredeemable." Count Malcolm and his wife
Charlotte are legally married. However, Malcolm's constant philandering
keeps them physically and spiritually separated. After their experience in the
"green world," the couple agrees to reconcile or "remarry" on their own
terms. These terms are not the terms of established marital conventions.
Charlotte does not want Malcolm's title, she wants a faithful husband.
Agreeing, Malcolm says "I'll be faithful to you for at least seven eternities of
pleasure, eighteen false smiles and fifty-seven loving whispers without
meaning. I'll be faithful to you until the last big yawn separates us."

As the sun rises over fields, the summer night puts on its third smile
for "the sad, the depressed, the sleepless, the confused, the frightened, the
lonely" Fredrick Egerman. During the course of the film, Egerman
experiences a "fall" tied to a loss of dignity. He is forced to walk home in
Malcolm's ridiculous ruffled nightshirt, he is further humiliated by Malcolm
in a duel, and then he loses his wife to his son. However, Egerman's reunion
with Desiree raises his hopes for the future.
As demonstrated by these four smiles, the most important "frame" dismantled by the film is the institution of marriage. Marriage is not presented as the conventional frame that creates certain boundaries and limits the behavior of the characters. Instead, marriages are redefined by the individual couples in order to satisfy their specific needs. Anne and Henrick satisfy their lust. Petra acquires respectability. Frid finds a young lover. Malcolm retains his staunch dignity. Charlotte reclaims her husband sexually. Egerman recovers his desire and Desirée reunites with the man she loves.

Although four couples have unified in marriage, the women in the film are not silenced, like Hermia, or told how to behave, like Tracy. According to Brigitta Steene in Ingmar Bergman, remarriage is not linked to submission for the women in Smiles of A Summer Night. She says:

Male authority is only an illusion. It is the women who have the upper hand in the erotic battles, while the men are usually ridiculed. The women are anchored in their traditional roles as wives and mothers, even when they are professional women like Desirée. The men, on the other hand, are split in their desires; they move between three worlds without feeling at home in any: the world of work, of home life and of free eroticism. (126-127)

When Steene refers to male authority as "an illusion" she unwittingly reminds us that the world of Smiles of A Summer Night is still a patriarchal one. For instance, Anne's elopement with Henrick echoes the exchange of women as property between fathers and young suitors. Nevertheless, it is accurate to say that the women control the film's sexual relations. Desirée invites the couples to her mother's house with the specific intention of reuniting herself and Egerman, Desirée and Charlotte agree to work together
in order to achieve their separate goals, and the dinner speeches of Mrs. Armfelt, Desirée and Charlotte have the intended effect on Henrick, who retires in typical Bergman-style angst but is quickly followed by Anne.

While Grant appears to be the surrogate director for Cukor, Desirée appears to be the surrogate director for Bergman. In touch with her own sexuality, Desirée does not direct the film to a conclusion that limits her own behavior and capabilities. Instead, she manipulates the male characters in order to create an environment that she can control. Interestingly, while only select male characters seemed to benefit from Grant's direction, all the characters benefit from Desirée's.

Unlike Bergman and Cukor, Allen stars in many of his own films, including *A Midsummer Night Sex Comedy*, and therefore his own character assumes the position of director. Although the female directorial influence does not carry over into this film, Allen had Bergman's work in mind when he filmed *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (Hirsch, 24). Additionally, Allen obviously acknowledges his film's direct ties to Shakespeare's play in the film's title and in the film's narrative structure. In his article "Woody Allen's Comic Irony," C. Morris correctly remarks that "Woody Allen's films can be effectively analyzed in terms of certain literary paradigms and structures of comedy" and that *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* these structures stem from the film's Shakespearean inheritance (175).

*A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* opens with plain white on black credits acoustically accompanied by an energetic wedding march. Against the simplistic visual foreground, the wedding march is highlighted as an essential theme in the film. Playing the march during these opening credits
sets the mood for a comedy of remarriage. Marriage seems to be both a prelude to the story that is about to be presented and the ultimate goal of that story. The latter inference supports David Shumway's hypothesis that marriage is continuously presented as an ideal objective by narratives in order to perpetuate the system that benefits from this institution, or the patriarchy (1991). However, the remarriages in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* deny most connections to conventionality and established institutions. The marriages and also the remarriages are not based on traditional ceremonial ties, but on "natural" unions.

As is the case in *Smiles of A Summer Night*, marriage in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* is not about social constraints and is not based on legal bonds. For instance, the "marriage" of Ariel and Maxwell is a matter of scent and is depicted as "natural" rather than socially constructed and "artificial." When the couple first meet at the beginning of the film, they are immediately able to recognize each other's odors. This causes Maxwell to remark that "in the animal kingdom we'd be married." Retired to the country for the weekend, Ariel and Maxwell have entered a kingdom where the normal rules of society do not apply, and they are married according to the unconventional customs of the film. Thus marriage is defined by the film as something natural and animalistic or "creative" rather than something conventional and civilized.

While Andrew and Adrian are the only legally married couple, they are actually separated according to the film's presentation of their marriage. Recalling the relationship between Egerman and Anne, Andrew and Adrian have not been able to consummate, and therefore validate, their marriage, for
over a year. Adrian lost her desire to have sex with Andrew after having shared a night of passion with Maxwell one summer night. When Andrew learns of the affair, Adrian is able to overcome her feelings of guilt and betrayal. Once she overcomes these inhibiting sentiments, she recovers the desire to have sex. Adrian and Andrew are remarried when they recover their lost sex life in a highly passionate encounter. Furthermore, through their exchange Allen satirizes traditional gendered behavior characteristics when Adrian aggressively pursues her reluctant husband in a role reversal.

Like the second marriage of Tracy and Dexter in *The Philadelphia Story*, the second marriage of Adrian and Andrew promises to be more successful than the first. For Tracy and Dexter, the assurance of success in their remarriage comes from Tracy's pledge to conform to social conventions. For Adrian and Andrew, the assurance of success in their second "marriage" comes from the lessons on lovemaking given to Adrian by the young but experienced nurse Dulcy. In *The Philadelphia Story*, proper behavior is exulted as *sine au non* for auspicious relationships. In *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, sex, ironically a disruption of convention, is celebrated as such. Thus each couple, Tracy and Dexter and Adrian and Andrew, brings to the remarriage the necessary requirements of marriage as defined in the respective films.

In considering gender restrictions, the requirements of Adrian and Andrew's marriage seem more evenhanded and less oppressive than the requirements of Tracy and Dexter's marriage. However, in both situations the woman must transform herself into what her husband wants. What is different in these films is simply the desires of the husband--Dexter wants a
well behaved wife and Andrew wants a wife who is able to please him sexually. These messages seem to correlate with what was valued by mainstream culture in the 1940s and in the 1980s. It can be argued that the latter message, that "you must be good in bed in order to keep a husband," can be as psychologically damaging to a modern woman as the former was to a woman in the 1940s.

Allen's portrayal of women in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* is somewhat positive, however, as he demonstrates that the education of women is no only longer the business of men. The philosophy underlying the genre of remarriage can be contrasted to that of *A Doll's House*. Following a European tradition, *A Doll's House* avoids the Hollywood trap of always reestablishing female subservience by the end of a narrative. In Ibsen's work, Nora must go off in search of the education her husband says she needs but he cannot provide. According to this philosophy, the female cannot truly educate herself unless she does so on her own. As discussed earlier, while Tracy must turn to a man in order to receive an education, Adrian does not. This supports Cavell's assertion that women in remarriage comedy must turn to an educated mentor in order to receive an education and it is merely circumstantial that this someone is almost always male. In *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* a female, Dulcy, is the teacher, or conveyer of knowledge. While Dulcy's character seems flighty, she is shown to be quite intelligent. For instance, when Ariel sprains her ankle in the forest, Dulcy proceeds to give a jargon-filled and impressive diagnosis of her condition. Later, after Leopold teaches Dulcy how to play chess, she soon wins the game, beating the great scholar.
In another collapse of gender restrictions in the film, the rebirth or transformation characteristic of remarriage comedies is no longer limited to the female member of the couple. While in the relationship between Andrew and Adrian, it is Adrian who goes through a transformation, in the relationship between Leopold and Dulcy, it is Leopold who experiences rebirth. The spiritual world produces the hedonistic "highest moment of ecstasy" that produces simultaneous orgasm and death for Leopold. Once a non-believer in the spirit world, Leopold dies in the act of lovemaking and literally becomes a "free-spirit." One scholar suggests that by asking the viewer to accept outrageous mysticism in the ending of *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, Allen undermines and mocks the expectations of the comic form and therefore questions adherence to convention (Morris, 1987).

Although in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* Allen reworks the Shakespearean pattern and brings equitable changes, his films have a reputation for misogynistic presentations. In his article "Displaced Feminine Representation in Woody Allen's Cinema," Richard Feldstein says that "Allen's female protagonists have been staged as scopophillic objects-to-be-looked-at while the schlemiel/protagonist has remained the visual, aural, and narrative center of attention" (Feldstein, 69). To a certain extent, Feldstein's argument applies to *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*.

Set in the first half of the twentieth century, *A Midsummer Night Sex Comedy* is able to present as acceptable gender assumptions that are now considered offensive or oppressive. For instance, Leopold's colleagues look at a picture of Ariel and remark that "She will be final jewel in your crown," as if Ariel's beautiful face is the final showpiece that Leopold needs to prove
himself a great man. And Dulcy, who is more medically knowledgeable than Maxwell, is his nurse, while he is the doctor.

Yet despite moments of constraint, the sexual freedom acceptable for both the males and the females in the film liberates the characters from sexually-founded cultural restrictions. Ariel and Dulcy are both referred to as "modern" women because they are sexually unrepressed and engage in frequent sexual encounters. Linked with progress, the term "modern" demonstrates the film's celebration of the behavior of these unrestrained women. And although Adrian's transformation into a sexual being changes her into the ideal women as defined by a man, she is also liberated from socially constructed chastity and experiences greater freedom.

Since sexual repression is one of the most oppressing cultural restrictions on female behavior, to a certain extent these films present enlightened portrayals of women. Interestingly, in both films the elimination of these restrictions is linked to a redefinition of marriage. Although remarriage comedies follow a comic trajectory that celebrates disunion and havoc, marriage is the inevitable telos of the comic structure. Redefining social constraints keeps these films "loyal" to their relationship to comedy by avoiding non-comic undisruptive endings. By redefining marriage, society's ultimate convention, patriarchal culture need not oppress the female members of a couple.

The disruption of normal social regulations in these films distances them from the average remarriage comedy. According to David Shumway, "comedies of remarriage can be made to reveal the conventions of marriage under patriarchy, although they seek to hide these realities by constructing a"
romantic mystification of marriage" (7). Remarriage comedies present marriage, a confining institution, as a natural and inevitable end. Thus, remarriage comedies serve to mask the truly oppressive nature of the marriage institution by presenting marriage as a false ideal (Shumway, 1991).

David Shumway is correct to recognize marriage as a central force in the oppression of women and the perpetuation of the patriarchy unless the requirements of marriage are redefined in such a way that liberates both members of the couple. While the presentations of gender and marriage in Smiles of A Summer Night and A Midsummer Night Sex Comedy are not entirely without conventional confinements, both films present a more enlightened view of marriage than the one that concludes The Philadelphia Story.

Screwball comedies, which emphasize disruption and disorder, have the potential to argue against social conventions and patriarchal control. Comic inversion allows the strong vocal and articulate women cast in these films to assume temporary positions of power and control by masking their "non-traditional" behavior in wacky behavior and episodes of confusion. Although the films attempt to limit female strength by presenting marriage, an institution with sharply defined gender roles, as the ideal outcome of a romantic adventure, the bodies of these films celebrate freedom and disorder rather than submission and order.

As a screwball comedy, The Philadelphia Story can be understood to be something more than a justification of the status quo and a justification of patriarchal control. This reading stems from the film's Shakespearean inheritance and adherence to the narrative structure of A Midsummer
Night’s Dream. Similarly to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Philadelphia Story* presents fissures in the comic form that allows for moments of comic inversion and moments of comic revision. In these works, power is connection to dialogue and therefore to voice. When these women are able to express themselves, they exert power. When they are silenced or spoken for, they are controlled by others.

Although feminist interpretations of Cukor’s *The Philadelphia Story* are substantiated by the film, ultimately the film presents a problematic depiction of Katharine Hepburn, the roles of wives and daughters, and what is considered proper female behavior. Later screwball comedies, such as *Smiles of A Summer Night* and *A Midsummer Night Sex Comedy*, which also follow the narrative structure of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, seem to be less problematic. These films redefine marriage so that it is no longer a socially constructed frame that limits behavior. Instead, marriage is depicted as something natural and linked to sexual freedom.

Marriage, the convention through which patriarchal society perpetuates itself, is the key to understanding these films. Since the nature of screwball comedy is disruptive, it is not the body of the films that contradicts the conclusions, but the conclusions of the films that contradict the bodies. Marriage must be redefined as non-confining and non-controlling in order for this institution to adhere to the gender equalizing messages of screwball comedy.

These presentations are linked to the location and era of production. As Andrew Bergman correctly points out, every movie is a cultural artifact that reflects "the values, fears, myths and assumptions of the culture that
produces it" (xii). Thus, understanding how human relations, social conditions and social interactions are presented in such films leads to understandings of the films, their genre, and the world that produced it.


