



Thinking About Performance Choices

Performing a range of styles

The specific performance choices that you make when you perform a piece of Shakespeare's text can radically change the meaning of the piece. By performing the script below in several different ways, you will see the various ways the same scene can appear to an audience.

Differences in status—the social relationships between characters—can affect the audience's understanding of a character. First, try acting this scene with Theseus as a high-status character (in control, powerful, expecting to be successful) and Hippolyta with low status (depending on Theseus for any control or power she might have). Then, reverse the status relationships and perform the scene again: Hippolyta now has high status and Theseus has low status. When you are done, discuss the differences in the two portrayals: how does the scene affect an audience differently when done the two different ways?

Now try it again with two **different understandings** of Theseus's line "I wooed thee with my sword". In the first performance, Hippolyta is entirely unhappy with having been captured by Theseus and hates the thought of marriage; in the second, she has been a willing participant and is looking forward to the marriage. How does your perception of the scene—and the play as a whole—change with these changes? How many other different interpretations can you perform here?

A Midsummer Night's Dream 1.1.1-11 and 17-20

THESEUS

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon. But, O, methinks how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS

...

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword
And won thy love doing thee injuries,
But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph and with reveling.