

Exercise 6

Choose a short scene, or a short piece of a longer scene, from *Much Ado about Nothing* and give a detailed account of how it might be presented on the modern stage. Your 700-word essay should use descriptions of the placement, motion, and gestures of the players, their manner of speaking, and their use of any props, to offer an interpretation of the scene: that is, you should both describe the action as you would stage it, and explain why that staging would help us understand the play. You may also—in the manner of many modern Shakespearian productions—transpose the setting geographically or historically. The acting may be naturalistic or stylized. You have all the freedoms of a modern director.

Exercise 5 was aimed at understanding the dramatic resources of the Elizabethan stage. This exercise gives you all the freedoms of a modern director. You will likely have seen productions of Shakespeare plays set in unlikely times and places, like Ian McKellen as Richard the III in a proto-fascist Europe, or the outer-space transposition of *The Tempest* in *Forbidden Planet*. You have the same freedom here. But your new setting should itself be an *interpretation* of the play: that is, you should choose a circumstance that helps you draw out the meanings of the play as Shakespeare wrote it (as McKellen shows us Richard the fascist autocrat, and the sci-fi *Tempest* gives us a new brave new world). The script is fixed; everything else is up to you.

As last time, some particulars to consider. You may choose factors for emphasis; you need not treat them all.

- Where the actors stand, where they move (how? how fast?), and when. You can use the conventional modern designations of the spaces of the stage: stage right and stage left (the actors' right and left, not the audience's), upstage (the back of the stage), and downstage (the front). Your theater can draw on the resources of any space or time in theater history that suits your interpretive project.
- Gestures. This time, you should allow yourself entire historical freedom with acting styles, adjusting them (or even pitching them against) whatever setting you choose.
- Tone of voice, pacing, pauses etc.: how should an actor speak these lines?
- Costume.

The easiest way to write such an account will be to treat it as a description of a performance, i.e., “Don John clenches his fist” rather than “the actor playing Don John should now” etc.

Reproduce only the text necessary to make your points. You may want to sketch the broad outlines of a scene, to get at the work that it does in the play as a whole; you may choose the close dramaturgy of a relatively small set of lines. Either way, take the occasion to be imaginative and free-thinking: your job is to bring the scene alive, for your reader as well as your imaginary audience, and explain how this particular staging, and its imaginary setting, open up our understanding of the whole play.