

# A midsummer night's dream performance analysis



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In 'A Midsummer Nights Dream'- How would you perform the role of:

1. Lysander (500 words)
2. Demetrius(500 words)
3. Helena(500 words)
4. Hermia(500 words)
5. Theseus(500 words)

in order to convey interpretation of the role to your audience?

A point to consider before bringing the individual character interpretations into play is how to contextualise the performances within the text as a whole. In other words, the characters are not mutually exclusive entities, rather, they are interactive and woven into the landscape of the play. Therefore, I would like to propose a general outline for the overall performance.

There are many ways to perform 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' and the way I choose will affect elements of the characters. There have been many performances of Shakespearean drama, where the play is brought into the modern day. I however, would like to perform the play in its classic setting. I would like the play to retain its archaic time setting. It is a very self-reflexive play – it is a play about staging a play. This highlights the idea of drama at its root – the rehearsal and work that goes into a play. I would like to leave the play in an olden day setting because it consolidates the idea of drama being detached from life through its artifice, and the play being set in a by-gone era further consolidates the idea of detaching drama from everyday life.

(a)The first character I would like to look at is Lysander. He refuses to yield to Demetrius's demand for Hermia's hand, and risks the wrath of Theseus by eloping with Hermia. This demonstrates not only the depth of his feeling for Hermia, but also his conviction in his own beliefs, and the courage to carry out these beliefs.

The comic arc of Lysander's performance hits its climax after Puck has sprinkled the love potion into his eyes and he falls in love with Helena. I would perform the character with some hyperbole at this point, in order to convey the comic element of the text to the audience. The idea of Lysander challenging Demetrius to a duel in order to win Helena's hand is an example of the excessive behaviour and heightened action that brings much of the comedy into the play. It is a humour that comes from the reversal of the natural order - Helena has gone from being desperately in love with Demetrius and being scorned by him to being the object of both men's affection, for example.

This reversal in the behaviour of Lysander is something I'd like to highlight in performance. I think a change in demeanor, and in vocal qualities could highlight this. At the beginning of the play, Lysander is portrayed as a romantic hero. I would convey this to the audience through his appearance; ideally, the role would be filled by a tall, handsome man. I would like him to wear a costume of light material - symbolising the innocence of the 'true lovers' (Hermia's description of themselves). As I would like to keep the play true to its chromatic origins, I would like Lysander to wear a type of Athenian costume, which he could change when he enters the wood. I would like all the characters to change their costumes when they enter the forest,

<https://assignbuster.com/a-midsummer-nights-dream-performance-analysis/>

to represent the immense change in their environment. I would like him to don a more earthy, swarthy coloured robe, such as green, to convey the pastoral environment to the audience.

I would like to focus on how the character of Lysander should be performed during the sequence in which he challenges Demetrius to a duel. The interpretation that I would like to convey to the audience is one of escalating absurdity, which contributes to humour. This would be done through the props, delivery, vocal quality, paralinguistic features and a demonstration of how Lysander relates to Demetrius in this section:

Lysander

...Helen, I love thee. By my life I do.

I swear by that which I will lose for thee

To prove him false that says I love thee not.

Demetrius

I say I love thee more than he can do.

Lysander

If thou say so, withdraw, and prove it too. (Scene III, Act II, lines 251-256)

There is a strong sense of rhythm in these lines, and also rhyme, which contribute to the tension and sense of heightened action. I would like the actor to highlight the rhythm in his delivery.

I would like Lysander to adopt a masculine stance, and to circle Dimitrius, expanding his movement around the stage, owning the stage, as it were, using the entire stage to convey to the audience that he feels he owns the space, as he prowls around it.

(493 words)

A character trait that emerges from the text is the point where he tells the infatuated Helena that when he says, “ Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;/For I am sick when I do look on thee.” (Scene II Act I, lines 211-212). This utterance evokes a sense of his cruel nature, a pejorative view of Demetrius which is further consolidated when we examine the first first scene of the first act. When Lysander and Hermia are told that they cannot marry, Demetrius tells them they should let him have his “ certain right.” (Scene I Act I line 92). There is subsequently a huge change in Demetrius when he falls back in love with Helena at the end of the play. This is indicative of a softening of his character – a change which I feel should be represented visually in performance.

In order to convey Demetrius’s somewhat cruel, righteous nature to the audience, I think the actor should appropriate a certain demeanor. Body language could be used to demonstrate his confident, cocky side. For example, he could strut, use large gestures and also make use of all of the stage space – exercising his self imposed ‘ right’ to the stage space in the same way that he wants to exercise his ‘ right’ to Hermia’s hand. I would like his costume to be dark colours – such as a rich red – and flamboyant design, to contrast with Lysander’s. The vocal qualities should also demonstrate

these traits. He only has two lines in scene I, act one, so it is very important how these are represented, as they will be the first impression the audience have of him.

Demetrius's lines are:

Relent, sweet Hermia; and, Lysander, yield

Thy crazed title to my certain right. (Scene I, Act I, lines 91-92)

The way in which this line is performed is very important. As the tormented lovers, the audience feels very strongly for Hermia and Lysander, to whom the presence of Demetrius is an invasive one. I would therefore also like to convey to the audience this sense of invasion. When Demetrius says, “Relent, sweet Hermia...” I would like him to walk up to Hermia, and put his arm around her, caressing her with his other hand, turning them both away from Lysander. When he speaks to Lysander, Demetrius should keep his back to Lysander, but turn his head to face him, so that his line is like an aside, as if he does not respect him. The words ‘...crazed title...’ should be accompanied by paralinguistic features, such as an outstretching arm to convey to the audience how much Demetrius does not want Lysander and Hermia to marry. Finally, the word ‘...my...’ should be over emphasized to convey that Demetrius strongly feels that Hermia should be his, whether she loves him or not, because of the wishes of her father.

His character, and especially his behaviour towards Helana changes at the end of the play. Whilst in the earlier stages of the play, he is confident, using large gestures and a lot of stage space, at the end of the play, I would like

him to express a more tender side to the audience, to convey the development of his character:

That we are awake? It seems to me

That yet we sleep, we dream. Do not you think

The duke was here, and bid us follow him? (Scene IV, Act I, lines 192-194)

This line should be used to convey character development to the audience as it contrasts so strongly with his opening line – the use of ‘...you...’ in contrast to ‘...my...’ for example. There is also a confusion in this utterance, which contrast with the confidence in the first lines.

(566 words)

Helena

At the beginning of the play, Helena is portrayed as hapless; the scorned lover who has been wooed by Demetrius and then ignored in favour of Hermia. However, like Demetrius, Helena demonstrates a massive character development and transformation. Like Lysander, the arc of her character trajectory reaches its crescendo after Puck has sprinkled the love potion in Lysander and Demetrius’s eyes. When they both try to woo her, she feels they are mocking her, and gets angry. To best convey the transformation in her character between before and after the love potion has been dispensed, I’d like to consider how vocal quality and demeanor can be used in two of her utterances:

Call you me fair? That ‘ fair’ again unsay.

<https://assignbuster.com/a-midsummer-nights-dream-performance-analysis/>

Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!

...Sickness is catching. O, were favour so,

Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go.

...O, teach me how you look, and with what art

You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart. (Scene I, Act I, lines 181-194)

This excerpt is from a long speech in which Helena proceeds to extol the virtues of Hermia, with whom Demetrius is infatuated. The key message I would like to convey to the audience from this speech is the idea that Helena is confused, upset and slightly jealous of Hermia. She is asking Hermia how she won the heart of Demetrius. In order to convey this dejection to the audience, I think the delivery of this speech should involve some rhetoric – while Helena is asking Hermia how she wooed him, and saying how fair Hermia is, my interpretation of this speech is that it is a melancholy meditation on the loss of her love. She is not looking for external answers, rather internal answers, and so it is questions she is asking herself. This could be expressed to the audience by the character of Helena distancing her self physically from the group – this would be a visual symbol of her isolation. Her demeanor and body language would be hunched and dejected, and her voice subdued and hushed

The other speech that is a seminal moment in the performance of Helen is when she feels she is being mocked by the two men, and gets angry. Clearly her relationship with Demetrius is changed when he falls in love with her. While she may be unaware of it, the hierarchy of the relationship has been

<https://assignbuster.com/a-midsummer-nights-dream-performance-analysis/>



overturned, and she has now adopted a position of power. In her speech, she says:

O spite! O hell! I see you are all bent

To set against me for your merriment.

If you were civil and knew courtesy

You would not do me thus much injury. (Scene III, Act II, lines 145-148)

This speech can be used to great effect to demonstrate the performance possibilities of this role. The demeanor and vocal qualities performing this speech would require differ hugely to the earlier one – with a louder voice, delivery directed at the other characters and inflated body language required.

(493 words)

Hermia

Hermia is represented in the play as a strong, defiant young woman, prepared to take risks in order to fulfil her own desires. This is exemplified in her refusal to bow down to her father's wish that she marry Demetrius. In the face of a death sentence, or life in a nunnery, she escapes with Lysander into the forest. Lysander's love for Hermia, along with Demetrius's desire, demonstrate that she is an attractive and desirable young woman.

These are two important points I'd like to consider when constructing the performance of Hermia. I would like to convey to the audience her inner strength and determination, alongside her physical attractiveness.

The notion of physical attractiveness could be conveyed primarily through costume and appearance. As Hermia is clearly a woman of considerable charm (illustrated when Helena asks her what charm she used to capture Demetrius's heart), her costume should reflect this. As it is believed that she unwittingly won over Demetrius (this is an ambiguity in the text - it is possible that Demetrius loves her because her father is so impressed by him) I would also like to impress upon the audience a sense of naivete and innocence. The obvious symbolic colour of this is white. White would also look striking under the stage lights. I would use floaty fabrics for the costumes, such as organza, to communicate the ethereal quality of not only Hermia herself, but also the forest, and the magic contained within it. When Hermia leaves Athens and escapes to the forest, I would like her to adopt a robe over her dress, of green, to convey to the audience, through her change in costume, that a change is impending in the play.

While the charm and beauty of the character of Hermia will be communicated visually, the inner strength and courage that I interpret as being key elements of her character, will be communicated through her demeanor. It is commonly understood in the study of body language that confident people stand up straight, unlike shy people, who hunch up, in a subconscious decision to take up less space. In this way, stage space becomes an important indicator of personality. I have mentioned before that I would, at certain points in the text like characters to use the whole space of <https://assignbuster.com/a-midsummer-nights-dream-performance-analysis/>

the stage to convey a sense of confidence. I would like the performance of Hermia to adopt a comfortable use of the entire stage space.

More specifically, I would like to refer to one speech that I feel is very important in the text, in Scene I, Act I, when Hermia is talking to Theseus with regards to her desire to marry Lysander:

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,

Ere I will yield my virgin patent up

Unto his lordship whose unwished yoke

My soul consents not to give sovereignty. (Scene I, Act I, lines 79-82)

This speech is an important point at the text because Hermia makes clear her intentions to avoid marriage to Demetrius. It is a very dramatic, sensitive piece. This speech should be delivered with intensity, to convey to the audience the depth of Hermia's feelings for Lysander. The performance should include some paralinguistic features such as moving around the stage, facial expressions and hand movements to express her feelings visually.

(549 words)

My understanding of Theseus is that he is a very complex character - there is conflicting evidence in the text as to his true nature. There is one utterance in the text that brings up questions regarding his true nature, when he is talking to Hippolyta and he says that:

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,

And won thy love doing thee injuries;

But I will wed thee in another key: (Scene I, Act I, lines 16-18)

My interpretation of this line is that Theseus raped Hippolyta. The implications of this in terms of how the character should be performed are vast. In much of the text, Theseus is represented as a pensive, thoughtful man. He kindly advises Hermia to "Take time to pause..." (Scene I, Act I, line 83) when discussing the situation with her father Egeus. This scene presents him as rational and kindly.

The suggestion of rape in line 16 makes the line highly important, the suggestion I would like to convey to the audience is the idea that Theseus is warning Hippolyta. In bringing the issue of the rape to the forefront, he is reminding her of the power balance in their relationship. There is also possibly some penitence in this admission. This could be communicated to the audience through the use of certain vocal qualities, demeanor and stage space. I would like Theseus's sense of power to be conveyed to the audience in a visual way, so he would deliver this speech standing, and walking around, whilst the character of Hippolyta would be sitting down. The discrepancy in their heights would be a visual representation of the hierarchy, which would further consolidate what Theseus was saying. This is such a patriarchal power play that props could be used to represent a sense of phallogentricity - such as a sceptre - a regal and phallic symbol. The use of this prop could convey to the audience my interpretation of Theseus as being the patriarchal and dominant force in the opening of the play. His

<https://assignbuster.com/a-midsummer-nights-dream-performance-analysis/>

kingdom is run on a set of rigid rules - for example, Egeus invoking the ancient law of Athens as Hermia wants to marry Lysander. This is in stark contrast to the forest - the mysterious, feminine arena which is the binary opposite of Athens.

In terms of demeanor, Theseus should be calm, and considered in his movements. I would like his costume to be of dark colours, and of neat, clean lines. This operates in contrast to Hermia's costume - the white of her costume is a symbol of innocence while the dark of Theseus's costume is aligned with the dark side he hints at in this speech.

(440 words)