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Shakespeare, Naturally

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Jordan Wolfe as Moth in the New York Classical Theater production of “Love’s Labour’s Lost” that wanders around a pond in a corner of Central Park.

ALL the world’s a stage, sure, but what might Shakespeare have made of the dramatic possibilities of a Lower East Side parking lot, with cars backing out right into the Capulets’ masked ball? Or “Love’s Labour’s Lost” on a stroll through Central Park, as helmeted bicyclists whiz by?

More than any other works in the theatrical canon, directors and actors say, Shakespeare's plays lend themselves to ambitious and unconventional interpretation, in part because they are so well known — and so well written — that they can survive any manner of tinkering.

And the ways to pop them open are infinite, whether they be Michael Greif's decision to make a huge pool of water spanned by a bridge the centerpiece of the stage at Shakespeare in the Park's "Romeo and Juliet" or the New York Classical Theater's elimination of the stage itself with a modern-dress version of "Love's Labour's Lost" that wanders around a pond in the northwest corner of Central Park.

New York Classical Theater has done its open-environment productions in the park for eight years, and for "Love's Labour's Lost" — an atypical comedy-romance that ends with the women turning down their suitors' marriage proposals — the company leads the audience through eight spots on the grass. When it's time to move to the next "stage," the actors point the way, ad-libbing a few lines in character. At the opening performance last week Armado, the Spanish buffoon, told the audience at the end of Act I: "I need to be alone to write my sonnet. You go that way."



"Love's Labour's Lost" by flashlight in the New York Classical Theater production that takes the audience to eight "stages" in Central Park.