Writing Exercise 1.1
Finding a Question in the Text
Due: 10 p.m. Monday, September 12 BY E-MAIL (BRING HARD COPY TO CLASS ON 9/13)

PART ONE
Review A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and pick a character about whom to write, if you have not settled on one yet. Once you have done this, return again to the play, taking note of what happens in which scene, and of what passages and speeches you find particularly interesting. You might want to look at the plot I have prepared of the entire play to help you in this regard. Your assignment in the first part of this exercise is then to write two or three sentences in which you explain what you think makes this particular character a good candidate for your study, and then, below this explanation, to provide a discussion question about the character—a question justified by your explanation. This question should be something that you think addressable in an expository essay of six to eight pages. On Monday, we will look at the questions, checking them for scope, practicality, and appeal to readers.

DO NOT TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT on this part of the assignment. You could of course scribble off an explanation or question unthinkingly, ignoring aspects or functions of characters that seem confusing, complicated, disturbing, or problematic. Such avoidance will not get you off to a good start. As Aristotle once observed, the best kind of thinking finds its motive in the sense of wonder or curiosity. You are looking for what might elicit the impulse to explore further—the impulse that one experiences in response to mysteries, surprises, contradictions, or apparent contradictions that seem significant. It might be tempting to ignore the problems posed by your character, but doing
so will not result in an interesting or plausible essay. So take a good half hour or hour of quiet time- -with play in hand--to mull over what it is in your character of choice that might inspire a sense of wonder, and in so doing call for the writing and reading of an extended essay.

Probably your explanation will deal with one or both of two areas of inquiry. The first of these is how the character, as she comes across in your reading, fits into some larger agenda or phenomenon in the play (but you need to specify the agenda or phenomenon and explain why it is important to know how the character furthers it). The second is how the character, in her own right, can come across to spectators or readers as she does. You may select one of the major characters in the play (e.g. Theseus, Puck, Bottom, Helena, Titania, etc.), or one of the minor characters (e.g. Hippolyta, Egeus, Fairy, Quince, Snout, etc.).

**PART TWO**

Now that you have selected a character, explained what it is in this character that one might see as worth reading about, and asked a question reflective of your explanation, **PICK** three passages, of no more than ten lines each, that might help you to address your question. **NEXT**, write a couple of sentences explaining what makes the passage worth reading about. **THEN**, write a sentence or two explaining how the passage itself might be particularly illuminating with regard to the question you asked in Part One of this exercise.

In order to do this, of course, you will need to make your best effort to understand the gist of each passage, looking up, in The Oxford English Dictionary, any words whose meanings you do not know or find confusing (NOTE: the meanings of words have changed in the past four hundred years. If instinct tells you that a word in the text would not have meant the same thing to a sixteenth-century audience that it would mean to you, instinct is probably right, and you need to look up the word in the **Oxford English Dictionary** in order to understand the passage.) You will also need, again, to focus on what is problematic or surprising or difficult about the passage you have selected. This could involve syntax, imagery, word meaning, tone, logic, or other elements. The passages may all be spoken by the character you have selected, but that is not a requirement; they may be spoken by other characters, as long as they have compelling relevance (to be pointed out by you) to the character you have selected.

**FINALLY**, look back at the question about your character, and make sure that it is (a) still important to the play as a whole or a larger issue that readers might want to understand and (b) addressable with available evidence--particularly the evidence you have gathered in the passages you selected. If it needs tweaking in light of the work you have just done on the passages, please do so now!

This assignment does not actually require you to write very much (in total no more than sixteen carefully considered sentences), but it does ask you to do a great deal of thinking. So leave an hour and a half or two hours to complete it (not including the time it takes you to finish reading the play).