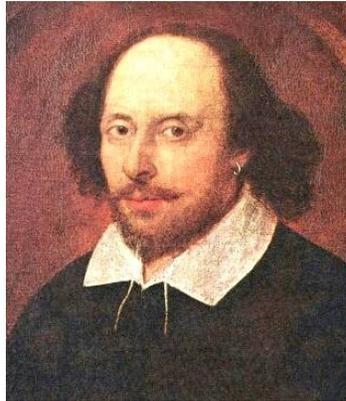


LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

by William Shakespeare



THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. Around 1590, he penned his first plays; *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Comedy of Errors* are both candidates for his initial effort. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

Love's Labour's Lost was first published in 1598 when performed for Elizabeth and her court, but was probably written at least three or four years earlier; some even consider it to have been Shakespeare's first play. The play has very little in the way of plot and derives most of its humor from language, especially the complicated wordplay that characterizes much of the bantering among characters and the ridiculous, overblown verbiage of foolish figures like Armado and Holofernes. The complex nature of the verbal humor tells us much about the linguistic skills of Shakespeare's audience - almost as much as the inability of modern audiences to grasp most of it tells us much about our own time. It also differs from most Shakespearean comedies in that it does not end with marriages, but only with the future hope that they might take place.

While *Love's Labour's Lost* is not based on an earlier literary source like many of Shakespeare's plays, it does have an actual historical antecedent. Henry of Navarre, later to become King Henry IV of France, married Margaret of Valois, sister of the French king, and thus a princess, in 1572, days before the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, from which he barely escaped. Six years later, Queen Mother Catherine de Medici and the now-estranged Margaret visited Henry's court in Navarre along with several of her ladies-in-waiting to settle competing claims to Aquitaine. Understandably, given the circumstances under which it was contracted, the marriage between Henry and Margaret never worked out, they continued to live apart and never had children, and the marriage was finally annulled in 1599, ten years after Henry ascended the French throne.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Ferdinand - The King of Navarre; he and his nobles vow to spend three years in isolated study while having no contact with women. He soon falls in love with the Princess of France
- Berowne - A lord who joins Ferdinand in his vow but falls in love with Rosaline.
- Longaville - A lord who joins Ferdinand in his vow but falls in love with Maria.
- Dumaine - A lord who joins Ferdinand in his vow but falls in love with Katherine.
- Don Adriano de Armado - A Spanish braggart who deems himself a wordsmith, though much of what he says is unintelligible. He joins Ferdinand and the other nobles in their vow, but quickly falls in love with the country maid Jaquenetta. He organizes *The Nine Worthies* and plays the role of Hector. Note that his name is a not-so-subtle gibe at the sinking of the Spanish Armada in 1588.
- Nathaniel - A curate who plays Alexander in *The Nine Worthies*.
- Anthony Dull - A stupid constable who claims no acting ability and thus plays no part in the skit performed before the nobles.
- Holofernes - A pedant whose language is more obscure than that of Armado, he plays Judas Maccabaeus in *The Nine Worthies*.
- Costard - A clown who plays Pompey in *The Nine Worthies*, he is in love with Jaquenetta and challenges Armado to a duel over her affections.
- Moth - A page to Don Adriano, he plays Hercules in *The Nine Worthies*.
- Princess of France - She visits Navarre to negotiate for the province of Aquitaine and falls in love with King Ferdinand.
- Rosaline - A noblewoman attending the Princess of France who falls in love with Berowne.

- Maria - A noblewoman attending the Princess of France who falls in love with Longaville.
- Katherine - A noblewoman attending the Princess of France who falls in love with Dumaine.
- Boyet - A nobleman accompanying the Princess of France, he serves as an intermediary between her and the nobles of Navarre and often exchanges witticisms with them.
- Jaquenetta - A country girl who is caught in the park with Costard. Armado later falls in love with her.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Light seeking light doth light of light beguile.” (Berowne, Ii, 77)

“‘Tis deadly sin to keep that oath, my lord,
And sin to break it.” (Princess, Iii, 104-105)

“You found his mote; the king your mote did see;
But I a beam do find in each of three.” (Berowne, IViii, 156-157)

“Young blood doth not obey an old decree.” (Berowne, IViii, 212)

“Then fools you were these women to forswear,
Or, keeping what is sworn, you will prove fools.
For wisdom’s sake, a word that all men love,
Or for love’s sake, a word that loves all men,
Or for men’s sake, the authors of these women,
Or women’s sake, by whom we men are men,
Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,
Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths.
It is religion to be thus forsworn,
For charity itself fulfills the law
And who can sever love from charity?” (Berowne, IViii, 350-360)

“They have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps.” (Moth, Vi, 35-36)

“Nay, my good lord, let me o’errule you now.
That sport best pleases that doth least know how;
Where zeal strives to content, and the contents
Dies in the zeal of that which it presents.
Their form confounded makes most form in mirth
When great things laboring perish in their birth.” (Princess, Vii, 513-518)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - Ferdinand, the King of Navarre, and three of his nobles, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine, swear an oath that for three years they will spend their time in study at the court without seeing a woman, fasting once a week, eating only one meal a day, and sleeping only three hours per night. Berowne immediately argues that the stipulations of the oath are too difficult to keep and would lead only to incessant thinking about that from which they are abstaining. The King offers to allow Berowne to return home, but he relents and signs the oath. Ferdinand's decree stipulates that no woman can come within a mile of the court on pain of losing her tongue. Furthermore, any man seen talking to a woman is to suffer public shame, but Berowne reminds Ferdinand that the daughter of the King of France is due in court shortly to negotiate the return of Aquitaine to her father. The King wants to make an exception to the oath on the grounds of necessity, but Berowne insists that such an excuse will then justify breaking the oath for any cause over the next three years. Berowne then wonders if they will have any diversions during their three years of isolation, and Ferdinand tells him that a Spanish nobleman, traveler, and scholar, one Don Adriano de Armado by name, will entertain them, along with Costard the fool. Dull, the constable, then appears with Costard and a letter from Armado. The letter, in absurdly flowery language, indicates that Armado found Costard consorting with a woman named Jaquenetta in the King's park. Ferdinand warns him that by rights he should suffer a year's imprisonment, but relents and sentences him to a week on bran and water in the care of Armado.

Act I, scene 2 - The scene begins with a conversation between Armado and his page, Moth. In the midst of their banter, Armado tells his servant that he intends to study with Ferdinand for three years, and that he is also in love with the lowborn Jaquenetta. Dull arrives with Costard and Jaquenetta and tells Armado that he must watch over Costard, making sure he fasts three times a week. Jaquenetta, meanwhile, will be taken to a lodge in the park. Armado professes his love for her and promises to meet her at the lodge.

Act II, scene 1 - The scene begins with the Princess of France conversing with her lords and ladies. She tells them of Ferdinand's vow, and fearing that she will not be admitted to his presence, sends Boyet to convey her greetings. Her ladies in waiting then describe to her the nobles who have joined Ferdinand in his vow. The descriptions are so complimentary that the Princess concludes that her ladies are in love with the three nobles. Ferdinand then appears with his nobles and the Princess gives him a note indicating the reason for her visit. While he is reading it, Berowne and Rosaline exchange witticisms about their earlier meeting. The note demands the province of Aquitaine. Ferdinand responds that he will willingly give up Aquitaine in return for one hundred thousand crowns owed by France to his father. The Princess insists that the money had already been paid back and tells Ferdinand that the proof is in a packet that will arrive the following day. Berowne and Rosaline banter again, and Dumaine asks Boyet for the name of one of the ladies-in-waiting to the Princess. He is told that she is Katherine, the heir of Alencon. Longaville then inquires and discovers that Maria is the heir of Falconbridge. After Ferdinand and his men leave, Boyet tells the Princess that he is sure that Ferdinand is in love with her.

Act III, scene 1 - Armado sends Moth to fetch Costard so he can take a letter to his love Jaquenetta and pays him for his trouble. He meets Berowne on the way, and Berowne gives him a letter to

deliver to Rosaline when the Princess and her ladies come to hunt in the park, paying him a shilling. Berowne then marvels that a man like himself, who has so long resisted Cupid's arrows, should now fall in love.

Act IV, scene 1 - The Princess and her lords and ladies are hunting in the park. They encounter Costard, who asks for Rosaline and says he has a letter for her from Berowne. He mistakenly gives the Princess Armado's letter to Jaquenetta, however, and she has Boyet read it aloud. It is full of pompous bombast, and the courtiers have great fun ridiculing it.

Act IV, scene 2 - Dull the constable enters with Nathaniel, a curate, and Holofernes, a schoolmaster. They banter with one another, arguing over what kind of deer the Princess has killed. They are then approached by Costard and Jaquenetta. Since neither can read, they ask Nathaniel to read the letter Jaquenetta received from Armado, not realizing that they have Berowne's letter to Rosaline instead. Holofernes tells her to take the letter to Ferdinand and the three friends go off to dinner at the home of one of Holofernes' pupils.

Act IV, scene 3 - Berowne, Ferdinand, Longaville, and Dumaine have all written poems to the women with whom they have fallen in love, and each enters and reads them in turn without knowing that those who have entered earlier are eavesdropping. Each in turn then, seeking to hide his own violation of the vow, accuses the one who followed him - Longaville accuses Dumaine, the King accuses Longaville, and Berowne accuses the King. As soon as Berowne is finished berating the others, however, Costard and Jaquenetta enter bearing Berowne's letter to Rosaline and still thinking it is from Armado. The King asks Berowne to read it, but he rips it up, insisting that it is worthless trash. His friends, however, pick up the pieces and recognize his handwriting, at which point he confesses. The others comment disparagingly about Rosaline's dark hair and complexion, but Berowne steadfastly praises her. The friends then turn to him for some way to forsake their vows without shame. He argues that their vows are null and void because they were contrary to nature, and that true study can only occur by contemplating a woman's eyes and seeking love. The four then resolve to woo their respective loves, determining to bring them from the park to the palace and provide an evening's entertainment for them.

Act V, scene 1 - Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Dull return from their dinner and Nathaniel tells the others that he has spoken to Don Armado. Holofernes immediately begins to ridicule the Spaniard's manner of speech in language that would put the braggart himself to shame. Armado then arrives with Moth and Costard, who both in asides comment sarcastically on their masters' manner of speaking. Armado tells them that the King has asked him to put together a play to entertain the nobles that very evening, and he asks for the assistance of the others, to which they readily agree. Holofernes suggests that they put on *The Nine Worthies* and begins to assign parts.

Act V, scene 2 - The Princess and her ladies have received missives from their suitors accompanied by gifts - the Princess has gotten diamonds from Ferdinand, Rosaline a picture of herself from Berowne, Katherine gloves from Dumaine, and Maria pearls from Longaville. They decide to torment their lovers now that they have them in their power. Boyet then arrives and tells them that he overheard their lovers plotting to visit them disguised as Russians in order to woo them. The ladies decide to mask themselves and exchange favors so the men will address themselves to the

wrong women. Moth then introduces the “Russians,” getting the words of the script Berowne had given him thoroughly mixed up. The men want to dance with them, but the women refuse. They then pair off for intimate conversation, the men pledging their undying love but not realizing that they are with the wrong women. Unable to make progress in achieving their desires, they leave. The Princess is sure they will return with their disguises removed, so the women plan another trick. This time they will appear unmasked and chide the men for allowing them to be visited by a group of foolish and tedious Russians. The men confess that they were the “Russians,” but the women then confuse them by telling them that they swore their love to the wrong ladies - Berowne to the Princess, Ferdinand to Rosaline, Longaville to Katherine, and Dumaine to Maria. Berowne blames Boyet for revealing their plans and the men beg forgiveness.

At this point Costard enters and tells the nobles that he and his fellows are ready to present *The Nine Worthies*. The performance, of course, is horrible, and the nobles mock them while they are trying to recite their parts. During Armado’s recitation as Hector, Costard interrupts and tells him that Jaquenetta is pregnant with his child, then challenges him to a duel. Marcade then arrives to announce that the King of France has died. The clowns are dismissed and the Princess insists that she and her courtiers must leave that very night. Berowne assures the women that their courtship was not done in jest, but in earnest, and begs them to return their love. The Princess is at this point unwilling to trust them and tells Ferdinand that he must spend the next year in a hermitage while she grieves the death of her father. If after that time he still wishes to marry her, she will have him. Rosaline tells Berowne that he must spend a year visiting the sick and cheering them up, while the other two women tell their men that they, too, must wait a year to achieve their desires. Armado then enters, announces that he has vowed to take up farming for three years to earn Jaquenetta’s love, and brings the clowns back in for a closing poem about winter and spring, the owl and the cuckoo.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Compare and contrast the romances of Berowne and Rosaline in William Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and that of Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. What indications do you find of Shakespeare honing his craft in the three years between the initial performances of the two plays? Discuss matters of language, characterization, and plot in your analysis.
2. Compare and contrast the performance of *The Nine Worthies* in William Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* to the mechanicals’ sketch in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Evaluate them for humor, satire, and relationship to the plot and the characters. Which do you enjoy more, and why?
3. In Act IV, scene 3 of William Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Berowne is asked by his friends to justify forsaking their vows. Analyze his argument. To what extent is it valid? Be sure to consider what the Bible teaches about the sanctity of oaths and vows in your analysis.

4. William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, unlike most of his comedies, does not end with marriages, but only with the hope that the couples will get together in the future. Does this abnormal denouement in any way detract from the audience's enjoyment of the ending of the play? Why or why not? When the play is over, are you convinced that the five couples will eventually marry?
5. The wordplay in William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* is among the most obscure in the Shakespearean canon. What does this tell you about the nature of the audience for which Shakespeare was writing? About the nature of education in Renaissance England? About the quality of education among modern audiences? Does this mean that the language of the play requires significant editing in order for it to be enjoyed by a modern audience?
6. For several centuries after its composition, William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* was considered the author's worst play. Why do you think so many critics came to this conclusion? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
7. Discuss the view of rhetoric, its uses and its misuses in William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. Consider both the wordplay and the use of logic in developing your answer. Is Shakespeare here laughing at himself, since the use of language is clearly his stock-in-trade?
8. William Shakespeare had little formal education, yet is considered one of the great literary geniuses of all time. We should not be surprised, then that much of the humor in his *Love's Labour's Lost* is at the expense of academic scholarship. Consider both the oath that is central to the plot and the supposed learning or lack of learning of the lesser characters in evaluating the author's view of the academic world. Be sure to cite specifics in your analysis.
9. All good drama requires conflict to generate interest and forward movement of the plot, thus most plays have heroes and villains, protagonists and antagonists. This is not the case, however, with William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. If the conflict in the play is not between characters (one can hardly count the battle-of-the-sexes aspect of the plot as real conflict), where then is it found? Does the beginning of Portia's song in *The Merchant of Venice* give a clue, where she sings, "Tell me where is fancy bred / Or in the heart, or in the head"?
10. While William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* has no villains, it also has no heroes; no characters stand out as the focal points of the story. The play thus lacks the depth of insight into human psychology that marks the playwright's greatest works. The stock characters and flimsy plot thus serve as vehicles for conveying central themes. What are those themes? Choose three central ideas with which Shakespeare deals and discuss how the plot and characters serve to develop those ideas.

11. In William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* we see one of many examples of the battle of the sexes in his plays. What does the structure of the play indicate about the author's views of men and women? Who wins the battle, and to what extent does the outcome bring out the major themes of the play?
12. Analyze the appropriateness of the title of William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. Is the title an accurate description of the ending of the play? While *Love's Labour's Won* doesn't quite hit the mark either, *Love's Labour's Postponed* lacks poetic style and would be unlikely to attract an audience. What title would you suggest that effectively conveys the story arc and denouement of the play? Defend your choice by citing specifics from the script.
13. Which is more attractive, working hard in school to get good grades and making something of yourself in life or having fun, particularly in the company of the opposite sex? Shakespeare's answer to this question in *Love's Labour's Lost* is clear and unmistakable. Evaluate his choice. Is he right or wrong to favor love over learning, emotions over the mind, relationships over serious labor?