



## Love's Labour's Lost

*William Shakespeare*

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William Shakespeare

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Love's Labours Lost is a Comedy written by English playwright William Shakespeare, who is widely considered to be the greatest writer of the English language. Love's Labours Lost is the story of Ferdinand, King of Navarre, who declares that his court will be devoted to ascetic study for three years and that women should be sworn off by the men in his court. Love's Labours Lost is an important work of William Shakespeare, and is highly recommended for fans of his works as well as those discovering his plays for the first time.

## Love's Labour's Lost Details

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Author : William Shakespeare

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## From Reader Review Love's Labour's Lost for online ebook

### Anthony Vacca says

Another terrific comedy from everyone's favorite Elizabethan playwright. This time Shakespeare throws a curveball that conforms to the popular conventions of stagecraft at the time (courtesy of Aristotle's list of Dramatic Do's and Don'ts in *Poetics*) and then confounds the typical endgame scenario for a Comedy, i.e. the obligatory pairing off of every single dude and dudette on the stage into forever happy marriages. The first four acts concern a king and his four loyal lords who make a pact to study in isolation for three years, swearing off all fun and women. This pact lasts for all of about ten minutes when a princess - attended by, naturally, *three* of her own ladies-in-wait - with some courtly business shows up to burst their testosterone bubble. Being the refined, scholarly gents that they are, all four of our nobleman commence with the double-dealing as they try and snag up a lady while the gettin's good. The second half of *LLL* goes down entirely within the fifth act, as the noblemen enact a plan involving a play within a play that they just know is bound to succeed at getting them all laid. Thankfully the women are all intelligent and independent enough to know a pack of lame hams when they see one, and so the climax freewheels into a full-force mockery of these silly, pretentious wooers. Shakespeare's banter is on fire in triple-*L*, with nearly every line gleefully packed with zesty wordplay and clever punning. The characters are all inspired comedic inventions, especially the men who are all unmasked as clowns for their perceptions of what women want. So not only do we have Shakespeare's takedown of academic pretension, but also that 16th century proto-feminist satire you've all been hankering for. Whew!

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### Γι?ργος Μπ?λκος says

Απ? τα καλ?τερα ?ργα του συγγραφ?α!! Στο ?ργο αυτ? ο γραπτ?ς λ?γος φτ?νει στα ?ρι? του. Θεματολογικ? θ?γονται ζητ?ματα π?ντα επ?καιρα για ανθρ?πους που αναζητο?v τα νο?ματα π?σω απ? τα επιφαν?μενα. Η αναζ?τηση της οδο? της αλ?θειας που κρ?βεται σε αυτ? τα νο?ματα δεν βρ?σκεται π?ντα στο προφαν?ς. Ο ?ρωτας φανερ?νεται ως δ?ναμη μεταρσ?ωσης των ηθικοπλαστικ?v ιδεοληψι?v σε μ?α θ?ση πυρ?ς εν?ντια στη χαμ?ρπεια που μας παρασ?ρει η μηχανικ?τητα.

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### peiman-mir5 rezakhani says

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## Matt says

What I learned from this play:

1. It is probably not the best laid plan to entrust the delivery of an urgent piece of mail to the town goof.
2. If a woman who you are not on romantic terms with suddenly shows up at your residence for a lengthy visit(?), *do not* make her camp out in the backyard. Let her have the nicest bed...and change the sheets perhaps. Shakespeare didn't mention that part - i'm just extrapolating...
3. While it is great fun to hang out with a group of guys and obsessively watch/quote Seinfeld, Lebowski, etc, in reality such an activity does not fall under the mantle of academic scholarship and most women will probably make fun of guys for overdoing it.

The possible penalties for ignoring these guidelines may include one year of indentured servitude as a candy

striper.

I really wish that I would have read this when I was in my early twenties...

Two additional thoughts:

1. This play made me want to hug the person who invented footnotes.
2. I can't wait for the next time someone pulls out in front of me while driving so that I can call that person a whoreson loggerhead.

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## Roy Lotz says

*He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.*

This is one of Shakespeare's earlier comedies, written when his greatest works were still years ahead of him. Yet *Love's Labor's Lost* is notably stronger than the comedies that preceded it—in plot, in characterization, and in thematic unity. The play's defining feature, however, is the exuberance of Shakespearean language on display. The wordplay dances on the edge of sense, sometimes straying into phrases so garbled as to be beyond comprehension. To pick just one example, here is a line from the first scene: "Light seeking light doth light of light beguile." Now, perhaps the leisurely analyst can extract something from that; but the playgoer watching it performed has little hope.

This may be a rather cynical reading, but to me the play focuses on the theme of vanity. The King of Navarre decides to shut himself and his friends up for a period of three years in order to live in virtuous study. This is not done out of any genuine love of knowledge—indeed they ridicule the pedant—but with the hope of achieving that vanity of vanities: immortal fame. This plan is quickly scrapped when the men are confronted with women, with whom they promptly fall in love. Yet it becomes painfully clear that these lovers are really in love with their own reflections, addicted to the feeling of seeing themselves mirrored in loving eyes. As the mask scene makes evident, the identity of the woman hardly matters to them, just that the woman gaze back.

Though Lord Berowne is a winsome and witty character, I admit that I was more taken with the auxiliary comedic attractions: the melodramatic Spaniard, Amado, and his saucy page, Moth; and most of all the scholar, Holofernes, whose mode of speech is such a perfect satire of pedantry that I am sure Shakespeare was personally well-acquainted with professors.

The play is famous for breaking the defining rule of comedy. It ends, not with a happy marriage, but with the announcement of the death of the King of France and the consequent deferment of marriage. Indeed, the play leaves open whether the marriages are ever carried through, since two of the matches are conditional on elaborate forms of penance that the women demand their vain men perform in the interim. One doubts whether the King of Navarre and Berowne are up the task. The play is saved from ending on a note of disappointment by a very clever and lovely song that Shakespeare inserts: a dialogue between spring and winter, or between the Cuckoo and the Owl, whose rustic words pierce the affected, pretentious speech of

much of the play, and return us from vain striving to the cycles of nature.

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## **Jaksen says**

I am currently reading all of Shakespeare's plays. This is the seventh, and most disappointing thus far.

Now, this is a comedy with immense amounts of wordplay, puns, various malapropisms, etc., so to fully appreciate this play, and unless one has an inordinate knowledge of early modern English - which I do not - an annotated version is the way to go. This is what I did. I also read a lot of commentary and criticism, both positive and negative. One of the best comments I found was that this play is the best evidence that Shakespeare is meant to be seen on stage, not read, and yes, yes, I found that to be so true. There were times I could not read more than a few pages as I had to read, re-read, read aloud, then decipher the words I did not know, the words which were plays on other words, or malapropisms on words whose definitions have changed over the last 400 years.

But, thankfully, the play is a comedy! Yet somehow the comic intent was often lost on me after deciphering, taking notes, reading and re-reading.

The story...

It concerns four young men - the King of Navarre and three of his friends - who vow to spend three years in study, and eating and sleeping very little. They forswear women, in other words, which right off the bat sets up a lot of possible comedic scenarios.

But even in that first scene the impossibility of doing this is revealed when one of them remembers that the Princess of France is due to visit and that the King cannot possibly hold to his oath if he is to greet and entertain the princess. Well he doesn't allow her into his castle, but makes her pitch a tent in the field. From then on it's all the women can do NOT to bring the men to heel. They disguise themselves in one scene and in another are entertained by the men who put on a play-within-a-play. There are various other characters, including a teacher, a curate and a fool who interact with - and often misunderstand each other. (The King falls in love with the princess and his three friends fall in love with the Princess' three ladies.) This is Shakespeare playing with the audience AND a way to show off his knowledge of words, Latin, his comedic timing, and his skill in developing characters with only dialogue and limited action on stage.

Well, about 100 wordplay, pun laden and endless, repetitious pages of dialogue later, plus copious references to mythology, (which thankfully I do know a lot about), the play ends with the ladies and princess going home to France but promising to return. Really, not a lot happens here other than the endless talking. (Okay, lots of talking = almost any play, but this was overboard.)

Reading it, I often got tired and that hated 'B' word, bored. (Bored is the one word I hate more than any other.) But I was. I kept saying: it's a masterpiece! Go with it! It'll pay off! You'll learn more about words and Shakespeare's skill than in most of his other plays and then...

I got so tired I fell asleep one day reading this in a sunny window. haha! I haven't fallen asleep with a book in my lap in over 20 years!

Still and all, the fault is mine. I might return to this play later, but for now I move on to a good solid tragedy

or historical.

The play's the thing, but the thing is not always my thing.

Three stars, for now.

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### **Alan says**

The 2000 film of this play got me in trouble because I was laughing so loudly at Shakespeare; I was told after the film, Everybody (maybe 15 in the theater) HATES you. (Guess Americans are not s'posed to laugh at Great Drama--or poetry, either.)

Arguably Shakespeare's most Shakespearean play, or interplay: the exchanges of wit, what he would have overheard at Middle Temple and among his fellow actors. Rather than the text, I'll comment on Branagh's musical version, with himself as Berowne and Director, Scorsese as producer. It's hilarious, especially for a Shakespearean; I laughed throughout so much (my laugh scares babies) one lady in the audience 25 came up to me after the film to kindly inform, "Everybody in this room HATES you." I thanked her for the admonition.

Very slow, stagey opening lines by the Prince. Dunno why. They cut the poetry criticism, and substitute the American songbook--Gershwin, Berlin--for poems. The Don Armado stuff (with Moth his sidekick) is broad, not literary: mustachioed, funny body, melancholy humor. Armado's the most overwritten love-letter, parodying catechism; but he is standard Plautine Braggart Soldier ("Miles Gloriosus") by way of commedia dell'arte. Then the Plautine Pedant (commedia Dottore) Holofernia crosses gender, a female professor type. Costard wears a suit, maybe a Catskills standup.

Branagh cuts the Russian (or fake-Russian) lingo, "muoosa-Cargo" of the masked entrance.

Wonderful 30's film cliches: female swimmers, the dance scenes, the prop plane's night takeoff. Ends with WWII, grainy newsreel footage of the year, after news of the French Princess's father's death.

Berowne (pronounced .."oon") is sentenced privately "to move wild laughter in the throat of death..." His judge, Rosaline, points out the Bard' instruction on jokes: "A jest's prosperity lies in the ear / Of him that hears it, never in the tongue / Of him that makes it" (V.end). LLL ends with death and winter (the Russian an intimation?): "When icicles hang by the wall,/ And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,/ And Tom bears logs into the hall,/ And milk comes frozen home in pails.." and the owl talks, "Tu-whit..Tu whoo, a merry note/ While greasy Joan doth keel the pot." That's the European Tawny Owl (male and female must combine for it) so an American director might replace with the same prosody, "Who cooks for youuu?"(the Barred Owl). In the penultimate scene, Dull is onstage the whole scene nere speaking a word until Holofernes says, "Thou hast spoken no word the while," to which Dull, "Nor understood none neither, sir."

Well, no wonder, if he has no Latin, for Costard offers, "Go to, thou has it AD dunghill...as they say." Hol, "Oh, I smell false Latin--dunghill for UNGUEM." The Bard kindly explains the Latin joke, essential for modern American readers.

Incidentally, Berowne uses Moliere-like rhymed couplets in his social satire on Boyet, V.ii.315ff. His most daring rhymes, "sing/ushering" and maybe "debt/Boyet."

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### **Cindy Rollins says**

This is one of my favorite plays. I think of it as Shakespeare making fun of the educated class. In fact, I think this is Shakespeare using his massive imitation skills to make fun of them. Very fun play. Lots of word play.

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2017 Update: Listened to Arkangel Audio and while the production was wonderful and the voices talented, it was confusing to keep up with 4 couples of roughly the same age with just voices. Better to have the book on hand when doing this one in audio.

### **Bill Kerwin says**

It could be argued that one of the themes of Shakespeare's plays is the glories and failures of language itself. If so, it is truer of *Love's Labor's Lost* than of any other play in the canon. The courtiers, both in their sparring and wooing (and it is often difficult to tell which is which) engage in so much wordplay that they confuse each other and themselves. The comic characters also engage in continual wordplay, each specific to his stock type: fustian braggadocio, pedantic latinate quibbling, malapropism, etc.

Excess of language piles upon excess of language, obscuring the genuine romantic interest these young people have in each other, until plain-spoken death--in this case, a courtier in a black suit--enters and interrupts their idle chatter, bringing the play to an abrupt conclusion. And, as Hamlet would say, "The rest is silence."

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### **Liz Janet says**

Three men sworn off girls, then they see hot girls. They then proceed to forget their oath.

*"From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:  
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;  
They are the books, the arts, the academes,  
That show, contain and nourish all the world."*

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### **Ben says**

I found one! A Shakespeare play for which I care very little - dare I say, I don't like!

Yet even when confronted with works which do not titillate one's fancy, I imagine one can still find things to respect or even admire within it. While this play does not stimulate me, it may stand as one of Shakespeare's best in regards to his occupation as a wordsmith. He effortlessly plays with words like many athletes juggle balls or sticks. His characters dissect words nearly to the point of voiding them of meaning, perhaps leaving the audience look elsewhere for themselves within the play. Comedic? Maybe - to an old English audience more sophisticated in language than this generation.

The privileged and care-free circumstances of the characters also disappointed me. They take their social

status for granted and in so doing fail to realize any consequence for their boredom induced mockery of love and relationships. Even the King's vow to avoid love and pursue study for three years may suggest his longing for meaning in a privileged life but he devalues the pursuit of that meaning (even if in the wrong direction) by abandoning the vow fairly easily. Only at the end, when real consequence halts the lovers' suits do they realize they do not live in a world apart from agony or sadness rendering their labor's lost.

I can respect many things in this play but ultimately the word play and character play fail to comprise a coherent plot or stimulating idea. It all seems meaningless. But perhaps we witness Shakespeare's labor's lost in this endeavor of his loved passion for play writing.

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### **Zachary F. says**

*They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps.*

#### **-Act 5, Scene 1**

This is probably my favorite of the three comedies I've read so far on my chronological journey through Shakespeare's works (the other two being *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), though it's also the densest and most challenging of the trio. The analysis I've read on this play makes a great deal of its preoccupation with language, the excessiveness of the wordplay even by Shakespearean standards, and that seems pretty spot-on to me. I depended *a lot* on my footnotes to make sense of this one, and it doesn't surprise me at all that it's not performed very widely today.

That being said, there's plenty to recommend *Love's Labour's Lost*. There are a number of memorable characters, especially (for me) the pretentious Spanish courtier Don Armado, and that obsessive attention to words and their uses allows Shakespeare to have a lot of fun with the mannerisms and verbal tics of each. It's also maybe the first Shakespeare play to really emphasize the strength and intelligence of its women, with the level-headed female characters exerting far more influence over the bombastic and arrogant men than vice versa. Finally, this is one of only two Shakespeare plays (the second being *The Tempest*) without an identifiable source text. That doesn't necessarily mean Will *wasn't* drawing from existing materials, but it does at least allow for the possibility that this story is one of the most purely Shakespearean of all Shakespeare's works. The subversive final act, which defies the comedic conventions of the day by leaving its characters still single (for the time being, at least) at the end, seems to me to lend evidence to that conclusion.

Probably not the best Shakespeare to start with, but interesting and a lot of fun for those who already consider themselves fans. In the second act, a character is described who "[d]elivers in such apt and gracious words / That aged ears play truant at his tales, / And younger hearings are quite ravished; / So sweet and voluble is his discourse." The same could be said, of course, of Will.

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### **Whitney Atkinson says**

I read Act 1 through Act 4 then definitely gave up. This is the hardest play to comprehend because the vocab was really under-explained, and I really didn't like any of the characters. I saw the play when my school did a production of it but they twisted it to have Harry Potter references, and even then it was confusing and weird.

I'm just not a fan.

## Mahdi Lotfabadi says

**Darwin8u says**

*"honorificabilitudinitatibus!"*

- William Shakespeare, Love's Labor's Lost

The plot was a bit underwhelming but the dialogue was razor sharp. Sometimes, Shakespeare's early plays just seem like discoing dervishes in a mirror-adorned room. As a reader we are amazed, dazzled, and distracted by all that is going on, by the spinning virtuosity of Shakespeare's words, by his absolute mastery of the English language, by his dash, his deft slight-of-tongues. There just doesn't seem to be ENOUGH central narrative gravity to IT to pull the reader completely through IT. LLL just seems heavy on the baroque icing and less focused on any narrative complexity.

Shakespeare data dumps his genius for wit, flirtatious innuendo, and language with some fantastic lines, but wasn't flirting with a fully-developed form yet. I feel like I'm looking at early, beautiful Picasso sketches, Da Vinci cartoons, a beautiful homunculus of the future Shakespeare formed . But I want more. It really isn't you Shakespeare it is me.

Still, the play is fun, a frolic, a half-jest and nudge. It is also Shakespeare playing with the comedic form. He is rejecting and twisting the form to suit his wishes. Not yet the master of the English World, he is playing the master he will soon be.

I can't disagree too much with Harold Bloom: "*Love's Labour's Lost* is a festival of language, an exuberant fireworks display in which Shakespeare seems to seek the limits of his verbal resources and discovers that there are none."

## Some of my favorite quotes:

? “Never durst a poet touch a pen to write  
Until his ink was tempered with love's sighs.

•

*From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:  
They are the ground, the books, the academes,  
From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire*" (Act IV.3).

? “*They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps*” (Act V.1)

? “*O, they have lived long on the alms-basket of words. I marvel thy master hath not eaten thee for a word; for thou art not so long by the head as honorificabilitudinitatibus: thou art easier swallowed than a flap-dragon*” (Act V.1).

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