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## LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT AND PAUL WERSTINE  
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SHAKESPEARE

LOVE'S LABOR'S  
LOST

BY  
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## **From the Director of the Library**

For over four decades, the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare provided accurate and accessible texts of the plays and poems to students, teachers, and millions of other interested readers. Today, in an age often impatient with the past, the passion for Shakespeare continues to grow. No author speaks more powerfully to the human condition, in all its variety, than this actor/playwright from a minor sixteenth-century English village.

Over the years vast changes have occurred in the way Shakespeare's works are edited, performed, studied, and taught. The New Folger Library Shakespeare replaces the earlier versions, bringing to bear the best and most current thinking concerning both the texts and their interpretation. Here is an edition which makes the plays and poems fully understandable for modern readers using uncompromising scholarship. Professors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine are uniquely qualified to produce this New Folger Shakespeare for a new generation of readers. The Library is grateful for the learning, clarity, and imagination they have brought to this ambitious project.

Werner Gundersheimer,  
Director of the Folger Shakespeare  
Library from 1984 to 2002

## Editors' Preface

In recent years, ways of dealing with Shakespeare's texts and with the interpretation of his plays have been undergoing significant change. This edition, while retaining many of the features that have always made the Folger Shakespeare so attractive to the general reader, at the same time reflects these current ways of thinking about Shakespeare. For example, modern readers, actors, and teachers have become interested in the differences between, on the one hand, the early forms in which Shakespeare's plays were first published and, on the other hand, the forms in which editors through the centuries have presented them. In response to this interest, we have based our edition on what we consider the best early printed version of a particular play (explaining our rationale in a section called "An Introduction to This Text") and have marked our changes in the text—unobtrusively, we hope, but in such a way that the curious reader can be aware that a change has been made and can consult the "Textual Notes" to discover what appeared in the early printed version.

Current ways of looking at the plays are reflected in our brief prefaces, in many of the commentary notes, in the annotated lists of "Further Reading," and especially in each play's "Modern Perspective," an essay written by an outstanding scholar who brings to the reader his or her fresh assessment of the play in the light of today's interests and concerns.

As in the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare, which this edition replaces, we include explanatory notes designed to help make Shakespeare's language clearer to a modern reader, and we place the

notes on the page facing the text that they explain. We also follow the earlier edition in including illustrations—of objects, of clothing, of mythological figures—from books and manuscripts in the Folger Library collection. We provide fresh accounts of the life of Shakespeare, of the publishing of his plays, and of the theaters in which his plays were performed, as well as an introduction to the text itself. We also include a section called “Reading Shakespeare’s Language,” in which we try to help readers learn to “break the code” of Elizabethan poetic language.

For each section of each volume, we are indebted to a host of generous experts and fellow scholars. The “Reading Shakespeare’s Language” sections, for example, could not have been written had not Arthur King, of Brigham Young University, and Randal Robinson, author of *Unlocking Shakespeare’s Language*, led the way in untangling Shakespearean language puzzles and generously shared their insights and methodologies with us. “Shakespeare’s Life” profited by the careful reading given it by the late S. Schoenbaum, “Shakespeare’s Theater” was read and strengthened by Andrew Gurr and John Astington, and “The Publication of Shakespeare’s Plays” is indebted to the comments of Peter W. M. Blayney. Among earlier editions of the play, we particularly valued the late George Hibbard’s (1990). We, as editors, take sole responsibility for any errors in our editions.

We are grateful to the authors of the “Modern Perspectives”; to Leeds Barroll and David Bevington for their generous encouragement; to the Huntington and Newberry Libraries for fellowship support; to King’s College for the grants it has provided to Paul Werstine; to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided him with a Research Time Stipend for 1990–91; to R. J. Shroyer of the University of

Western Ontario for essential computer support; and to the Folger Institute's Center for Shakespeare Studies for its fortuitous sponsorship of a workshop on "Shakespeare's Texts for Students and Teachers" (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and led by Richard Knowles of the University of Wisconsin), a workshop from which we learned an enormous amount about what is wanted by college and high-school teachers of Shakespeare today.

Our biggest debt is to the Folger Shakespeare Library—to Werner Gundersheimer, Director of the Library, who made possible our edition; to Deborah Curren-Aquino, who provides extensive editorial and production support; to Jean Miller, the Library's Art Curator, who combs the Library holdings for illustrations, and to Julie Ainsworth, Head of the Photography Department, who carefully photographs them; to Peggy O'Brien, former Director of Education at the Folger and now Director of Education Programs at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and her assistant at the Folger, Molly Haws, who gave us expert advice about the needs being expressed by Shakespeare teachers and students (and to Martha Christian and other "master teachers" who used our texts in manuscript in their classrooms); to Jessica Hymowitz, who provided expert computer support; to the staff of the Academic Programs Division, especially Amy Adler, Mary Tonkinson, Lena Cowen Orlin, Linda Johnson, Kathleen Lynch, and Carol Brobeck; and, finally, to the staff of the Library Reading Room, whose patience and support are invaluable.

Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine





## Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*

The story told in Shakespeare's early comedy *Love's Labor's Lost* seems, at first glance, to offer little outside of easy laughter. Four young men (one of them, admittedly, a king) decide to withdraw from the world for three years. They take an oath that, most importantly, forbids them to have anything to do with women in that space of time. Warned by Berowne, the most skeptical of the lords, that the oath will inevitably be broken, the King of Navarre is immediately put in an impossible situation: the Princess of France and her attending ladies are on their way to Navarre on an embassy. Fighting to keep his oath, the King lodges the Princess outside the gates of his court, but that ungracious strategy fails to head off the inevitable, as all four men fall immediately in love with the French ladies, abandoning their oaths and setting out to win the ladies' hands.

The laughter triggered by this simple story—usually at the expense of the misguided young men—is augmented by subplots involving a braggart soldier, a clever page, illiterate servants, a parson, a schoolmaster, and a constable so dull that he is named Dull. Letters and poems are misdelivered, confessions are overheard, entertainments are presented, and language is played with (and misused) by the ignorant and learned alike. This is a play that entertains and amuses.

At a deeper level, though, *Love's Labor's Lost* also teases the mind. It seems to begin with the premise that women either are to be feared and avoided as seductresses who tempt young men away from heroic endeavor, or are instead to be worshiped as goddesses who are men's sole guide to wisdom. The play soon makes it

clear, however, that while this split vision of woman is what the men in the play accept, the reality of male-female relations is something other.

Our first major clue that the men's view of women is not to be trusted comes at the end of Act 3 (which, in this play, with its strange and misleading act divisions, is actually quite early in the action). Berowne confesses to himself (and the audience) that he has fallen in love with Rosaline. He is angry with himself—he who has so scoffed at love, now to be marching in love's army!—but his self-contempt gives him little excuse for the things he says about Rosaline. He has barely met her: in the previous scene he has had to ask her name. Yet he now accuses her of being the "worst" of the four women, a "wanton" who "will do the deed / Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard." This bitter attack on Rosaline as a wild sexual creature is preceded by a more general comment on "woman"—"like a German clock, . . . ever out of frame," "never going aright, being a watch, / But being watched that it may still go right." This is the same speaker who will shortly describe Rosaline as "the sun that maketh all things shine" and praise women's eyes as "the books, the arts, the academes / That show, contain, and nourish all the world."

Because we see Rosaline for ourselves, we see that both poles of Berowne's responses to her are incredible exaggerations. She is neither whore nor goddess. But Berowne's attitude toward her is of a piece with male views and expectations of women throughout the play. Lodged in the fields as potential seductresses, the women quickly become the focus of a military-style campaign of seduction themselves—"Advance your standards, and upon them, lords. / Pell-mell, down with them." The men will argue that, under the power of the ladies' eyes, they have been transformed and that their courtship, though seeming "ridiculous," has expressed

genuine love; the women will answer that the men's gestures have been taken as "pleasant jest," "as bombast and as lining to the time," as "a merriment." The women seem quite bewildered by the men's belief that the women should, because the men want them, immediately give themselves in marriage.

Much of the action of *Love's Labor's Lost* turns on the discrepancy between, on the one hand, what the men think about the women and, on the other, how the women see themselves (and see the men). That women are not identical to men's images of them is a common theme in Shakespeare's plays. In *Love's Labor's Lost* it receives one of its most pressing examinations. Thus, while the play amuses, it also gives us much to ponder.

After you have read the play, we invite you to turn to the back of this book to read "*Love's Labor's Lost: A Modern Perspective*" by Professor William C. Carroll of Boston University.

## Reading Shakespeare's Language: *Love's Labor's Lost*

For many people today, reading Shakespeare's language can be a problem—but it is a problem that can be solved. Those who have studied Latin (or even French or German or Spanish), and those who are used to reading poetry, will have little difficulty understanding the language of Shakespeare's poetic drama. Others, though, need to develop the skills of untangling unusual sentence structures and of recognizing and understanding poetic compressions, omissions, and wordplay. And even those skilled in reading unusual sentence struc-

tures may have occasional trouble with Shakespeare's words. Four hundred years of "static" intervene between his speaking and our hearing. Most of his immense vocabulary is still in use, but a few of his words are not, and, worse, some of his words now have meanings quite different from those they had in the sixteenth century. In the theater, most of these difficulties are solved for us by actors who study the language and articulate it for us so that the essential meaning is heard—or, when combined with stage action, is at least felt. When reading on one's own, one must do what each actor does: go over the lines (often with a dictionary close at hand) until the puzzles are solved and the lines yield up their poetry and the characters speak in words and phrases that are, suddenly, rewarding and wonderfully memorable.

### Shakespeare's Words

As you begin to read the opening scenes of a play by Shakespeare, you may notice occasional unfamiliar words. Some are unfamiliar simply because we no longer use them. In the opening scenes of *Love's Labor's Lost*, for example, you will find the words *wight* (person), *farborough* (petty constable), *welkin* (heavens), and *yclept* (called). Words of this kind are explained in notes to the text and will become familiar the more of Shakespeare's plays you read.

In *Love's Labor's Lost*, as in all of Shakespeare's writing, more problematic are the words that we still use but that we use with a different meaning. In the opening scenes of *Love's Labor's Lost*, for example, the word *passed* has the meaning of "spoken," *stops* is used where we would say "obstructions," *envious* is used where we would say "malicious," *lie* where we would

say "reside," and *quick* where we would say "lively." Such words will be explained in the notes to the text, but they, too, will become familiar as you continue to read Shakespeare's language.

## Shakespeare's Sentences

In an English sentence, meaning is quite dependent on the place given each word. "The dog bit the boy" and "The boy bit the dog" mean very different things, even though the individual words are the same. Because English places such importance on the positions of words in sentences, on the way words are arranged, unusual arrangements can puzzle a reader. Shakespeare frequently shifts his sentences away from "normal" English arrangements—often to create the rhythm he seeks, sometimes to use a line's poetic rhythm to emphasize a particular word, sometimes to give a character his or her own speech patterns or to allow the character to speak in a special way. When we attend a good performance of the play, the actors will have worked out the sentence structures and will articulate the sentences so that the meaning is clear. In reading for yourself, do as the actor does. That is, when you become puzzled by a character's speech, check to see if words are being presented in an unusual sequence.

Look first for the placement of subject and verb. Shakespeare often rearranges verbs and subjects (e.g., instead of "He goes" we find "Goes he"). In *Love's Labor's Lost*, when Berowne says "Or vainly comes th' admirèd princess hither," he is using such a construction. (The "normal" arrangement would be "th' admirèd princess comes.") And so is the King of Navarre when he says "Nor shines the silver moon one-half so bright." Shakespeare also frequently places the object

before the subject and verb (e.g., instead of "I hit him" we might find "Him I hit"). Dumaine's "The grosser manner of these world's delights / He throws upon the gross world's baser slaves" is an example of such an inversion (the normal arrangement would be "he throws the grosser manner of these world's delights upon . . ."), as is Berowne's "So much, dear liege, I have already sworn."

Inversions are not the only unusual sentence structures in Shakespeare's language. Often in his sentences words that would normally appear together are separated from each other. (Again, this is often done to create a particular rhythm or to stress a particular word.) Take, for example, the play's first two lines: "Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives, / Live registered upon our brazen tombs." Here, a subject ("fame") is separated from its verb ("live") by the clause "that all hunt after in their lives." Or take Maria's lines: "The only soil of his fair virtue's gloss, / If virtue's gloss will stain with any soil, / Is a sharp wit matched with too blunt a will." Here, the "normal" construction "The only soil is a sharp wit" is interrupted by the insertion of a phrase ("of his fair virtue's gloss") and then a clause ("If virtue's gloss will stain with any soil"). In order to create for yourself sentences that seem more like the English of everyday speech, you may wish to rearrange the words, putting together the word clusters (e.g., "Let fame live registered upon our brazen tombs"). You will usually find that the sentence will gain in clarity but will lose its rhythm or shift its emphasis.

In some of his plays (*Hamlet* is a good example), rather than separating basic sentence elements, Shakespeare simply holds them back, delaying them until other material to which he wants to give greater emphasis has been presented. While there are not nearly so many examples of this construction in *Love's Labor's*

*Lost* as there are in *Hamlet*, this kind of sentence is, nevertheless, evident in, for example, the Princess's words to the King of Navarre, near the end of the play:

If this austere insociable life  
Change not your offer made in heat of blood;  
If frosts and fasts, hard lodging, and thin weeds  
Nip not the gaudy blossoms of your love,  
But that it bear this trial, and last love;  
Then, at the expiration of the year,  
Come challenge me, challenge me by these deserts.

Here the verbs ("Come challenge . . . challenge") in this imperative sentence are delayed until the Princess can present in vivid detail her conditions for granting any further hearing to the King's expressions of love.

In many of Shakespeare's plays, sentences are sometimes complicated not because of unusual structures or interruptions but because Shakespeare omits words that English sentences normally require. (In conversation, we, too, often omit words. We say "Heard from him yet?" and our hearer supplies the missing "Have you.") Frequent reading of Shakespeare—and of other poets—trains us to supply such missing words. In his later plays, Shakespeare uses omissions both of verbs and of nouns to great dramatic effect. In *Love's Labor's Lost* omissions are rare and seem to be used primarily for the sake of speech rhythm. For example, when Berowne mockingly responds to Dumaine's praise of Katherine's beauty ("As fair as day)," Berowne says "Ay, as some days, but then no sun must shine." In Berowne's speech the omission of the words "as fair" before "as some days" produces a regular iambic pentameter line. Or, to take another example, Berowne's line "Nothing so sure, and thereby all forsworn" is both rhythmical and elliptical. It would lose much of its expressive force if its omissions were

repaired: "Nothing is so sure, and thereby we are all forsworn."

## Shakespearean Wordplay

Shakespeare plays with language so often and so variously that entire books are written on the topic. Indeed the wordplay in *Love's Labor's Lost* alone is a topic that has been examined at book length. Here we will discuss only two kinds of wordplay, puns and metaphors. A pun is a play on words that sound the same but that have different meanings (or on a single word that has more than one meaning). Much of the humor of *Love's Labor's Lost* depends on puns and related kinds of wordplay, a great deal of it to be found in the rapid exchanges of wit among its speakers. Take, for example, this verbal skirmish between Berowne and Rosaline:

- ROSALINE Is the fool sick?  
BEROWNE Sick at the heart.  
ROSALINE Alack, let it blood.  
BEROWNE Would that do it good?  
ROSALINE My physic says "ay."  
BEROWNE Will you prick 't with your eye?  
ROSALINE No point, with my knife.

There are two different kinds of puns in these lines. The one on *ay* and *eye* is an example of a pun using two words that sound the same but have different meanings. When Rosaline says "ay" to Berowne, he puns on the word to tell her, in a subtle and playful way, that he loves her. That is, he invites her to pierce his heart with her eye, an invitation that arises from a belief (about which much was written in Shakespeare's time) that lovers' eyes emitted beams that entered each other's eyes and,



through the eyes, penetrated to each other's hearts. Rosaline declines Berowne's overture with another kind of pun, one that plays bilingually on two different meanings of the same word. When Rosaline says "No point," she can be understood doubly to deny Berowne because "no point" means both "not at all" (the meaning in French of *non point*) and "my eye has no point."

To give only one other example of hundreds available in this play:

KATHERINE

You sheep and I pasture. Shall that finish the jest?

BOYET

So you grant pasture for me. *[He tries to kiss her.]*

KATHERINE

Not so, gentle beast.

My lips are no common, though several they be.

BOYET

Belonging to whom?

KATHERINE

To my fortunes and me.

To refuse Boyet the kiss for which he is angling, Katherine is given one of the more complicated of the play's puns, one that exploits three meanings of the word *several*. One of the meanings of *several* is opposite to that of *common*. While *common* refers to pasture where anyone may graze stock, *several* is pasture that is privately owned and enclosed. Not just any sheep, and particularly, in this case, not Boyet, may feed on Katherine's several lips, which are also several because they are "more than one" and because they are "parted," rather than together, as she verbally fends off Boyet.

Closely related to puns are two other kinds of word-play that are widespread in *Love's Labor's Lost*, namely, polyptoton and (what we now call) malapropism. Polyptoton is simply the use, in rapid succession, of two