



A Playgoer's Guide

“Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
 Jack hath not Jill: these ladies courtesy
 Might well have made our sport a comedy.”
 (– V. ii.867-9)

Love's Labour's Lost

Love Labour's Lost is one of Shakespeare's earlier plays, written in 1594-5 and published in 1598. It was also included in Shakespeare's First Folio.



Love's Labour's Lost was first performed during Christmas time on December 26 and December 27 in 1594-1597. In the Elizabethan era there was a huge demand for new entertainment and *Love's Labour's Lost* is speculated to have been produced immediately following the completion of its composition. This allows researchers to believe that the play was acted before Queen Elizabeth.

The play concerns the subject of love and included many rhetoric and witty exchanges between the characters. The play does have a happy ending, although it does not end in marriage – which departs from the norm of a typical Shakespearean play.

Love's Labour's Lost has never been among Shakespeare's most popular plays, perhaps due to the pedantic nature of much of the dialogue. The legendary critic Harold Bloom, however, has recently championed this play, arguing that it is the first play to showcase the author's mastery of language. It was, in fact, titled “a conceited comedy,” referring to the “conceits,” or figures of speech, frequent in the text. Though this play is dated early among Shakespeare's canon, the advanced command of language suggests that it was either written later than suspected, or very heavily revised at a later date.

(Drawn from the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, at
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love's_Labour's_Lost)

Plot Summary

This comedy of love unfulfilled is set in the French kingdom of Navarre, where King Ferdinand and his three companions, Berowne, Dumaine and Longaville see themselves as enthusiastic students of philosophy and they resolve to forego the company of women for three years to devote their time to their studies.

Soon after the King's oath has been sworn, the Princess of France and her three ladies in waiting, Rosaline, Katharine and Maria, arrive on an embassy. On account of the King's pledge they are lodged a mile from the court in the royal park but with the aid of the Princess's chamberlain, Boyet, they are granted an audience with Navarre and his friends, and find that they have all met before.

Through a series of misunderstandings and letters delivered to the wrong recipients the king and his friends are shown each to be in love with one of the visiting French ladies. Berowne persuades Navarre that love is a lawful part of their studies so the men continue to entertain their guests. They send them gifts, and visit them in disguise, but they still pretend to maintain an indifference to the ladies' charms until they are tricked into an admission of the truth of their love; Berowne for Rosaline, Dumaine for Katharine, Longaville for Maria and Navarre for the Princess.

William Shakespeare

The first record we have of Shakespeare is the date of his baptism, which was Wednesday, April the 26th, 1564; it is likely he would have been born three days prior to this date. It is presumed that he attended the Stratford Grammar School, but did not proceed to Oxford and Cambridge.



The period between 1585 and 1592 is considered the "lost years" in Shakespeare's life. By the latter date, however, Shakespeare was already recognized as an actor, poet, and playwright, as a rival playwright, Robert Greene, referred to him as "an upstart crow" in "A Groatsworth of Wit." A few years later he joined up with one of the most successful acting troupes in London: "The Lord Chamberlain's Men."

Shakespeare entertained the Queen and the people for another ten years, until June 19, 1613, when a canon fired from the roof of the Globe Theatre for a gala performance of Henry VIII set fire to the thatch roof and burned the theatre to the ground. The next spring the company had

the theatre rebuilt, and although Shakespeare invested in the rebuilding, he retired from the stage to the Great House of New Place in Stratford that he had purchased in 1597, and some considerable land holdings, where he continued to write until his death in 1616 -- probably on the day of his 52nd birthday.

Historical Background

Love's Labour's Lost takes place in the province of Navarre which is a province in the north of Spain, bordering France. In 1572 a man named Henry became King Henry III of Navarre. When the King of France was assassinated in 1589, Henry of Navarre became King of France. Numerous anecdotes and legends about Henry bear witness to his gallantry, his Gallic wit, and his concern for the common people, which have made him probably the most popular king among the French. He was responsible for environmentally protecting the community by coming up with three lane highways to protect the destruction of trees, and ordered that more fruits and greenery be planted. He was a promoter of the arts, and was a strong asset to Samuel's Champlain's journey to found Canada. Though there never was a King of Navarre named Ferdinand, there is reason to believe that Shakespeare's audience would have recognized political implications in Shakespeare's choice of a location for his play, as Henry was known as a supporter of Protestantism (as was Queen Elizabeth).

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