

## Love's Labour's Lost

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## Introduction

This LibGuide was created to accompany the Visions & Voices event: **Love's Labour's Lost**. On Saturday, November 21, USC students will have a chance to attend Shakespeare's Globe Theater's performance of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Shakespeare's celebration of young love is a festive parade of every weapon in the youthful playwright's comic arsenal—from excruciating cross-purposes to silly impersonations, drunkenness, bust-ups and pratfalls. It's also his most joyful banquet of language, groaning with puns, rhymes, bizarre syntax, grotesque coinages and parody. [Read more about the event at the Visions & Voices website.](#)

About the play: "A splendid satire, with some of Shakespeare's best early poetry with masterly scenes and excellent characterizations. The play tells how the King of Navarre and three of his lords vow to spend three years in study and not see any women. But when the Princess of France arrives on a diplomatic mission with her three ladies, the men fall in love with them. At the news comes of the death of the King of France and the ladies depart, refusing to marry until their suitors undergo a year's probation, hence the play's title."

## William Shakespeare

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### Sources

#### [The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare online](#)

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 Michael Dobson , Anthony Davies "Love's Labour's Lost" *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Ed. Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells. Oxford University Press, 2001. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. University of Southern California. 21 October 2009

**Love's Labour's Lost** At once Shakespeare's most airy comedy and his most sustained discussion of language, *Love's Labour's Lost* was probably composed in 1594 and 1595 . It is listed among Shakespeare's works by [Meres](#) in 1598 , and appeared in the same year in a quarto edition which boasts that the play was acted before Queen Elizabeth 'this last Christmas' (which may mean either 1597 – 8 or 1596 – 7 ) . The play's heavy use of rhyme suggests it belongs to the 'lyrical' period initiated by *Venus and Adonis* ( 1592 – 3 ) : in rare vocabulary it is closely linked to *Romeo and Juliet* ( 1595 ) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ( 1595 ) , but stylistically it seems to be earlier. Probable allusions in Act 5 to the Christmas revels at Gray's Inn in 1594 suggest that the play was composed, or at least completed, early in 1595 .

### Text

The surviving 1598 quarto of the play claims to be 'Newly corrected and augmented', but in all probability this is an exaggeration and the edition is merely a reprint of a now lost earlier edition of the same year. The text seems to have been set, fairly carelessly to judge by certain passages which seem to preserve two successive drafts of the same speech (in 4.3), from Shakespeare's own [foul papers](#) . The play was reprinted in the [Folio](#) in 1623 , directly from the quarto text, but with some corrections made apparently from a promptbook.

### Sources

No specific source is known for the play's plot, although it clearly alludes to the historical French court: King Henri of Navarre did have two lords called the Maréchal de Biron and the Duc de Longueville, who served as commanders in the French civil war from 1589 to 1592 . Biron was widely known in England, since he became an associate and adviser of the [Earl of Essex](#) when he led an English force to Henry's aid. It has been conjectured that the main story of *Love's Labour's Lost* may derive from a now-lost account of a diplomatic visit to Henry in 1578 made by Catherine de Médicis and her daughter Marguerite de Valois, Henry's estranged wife, to discuss the future of Aquitaine, but this is by no means certain. What is much clearer is that the play's sub-plot is peopled by Shakespeare's variants on familiar comic types from Italian [commedia dell'arte](#) , which abounds in pedants (like Holofernes), braggarts (like Don Armado), rustic priests (like Sir Nathaniel), rural clowns (like Costard), and pert pages (like Mote).

### Synopsis

#### 1.1

Ferdinand, the King of Navarre, has three of his lords, Biron, Longueville, and Dumaine, sign a declaration vowing that they will study with him for three years, not seeing a woman throughout that time: Biron is sceptical about the scheme, but eventually signs anyway. The rustic constable Dull, on the instructions of the Spaniard Don Armado (from whom he brings an affected letter), brings the country swain Costard to the King; Costard is condemned to a week's fasting for having been caught in the royal purlieu with the wench Jaquenetta.

#### 1.2

Armado confesses to his punning page Mote that he is in love with Jaquenetta. Dull brings Costard with the King's instruction that Armado guard him and make him fast for a week. Armado undertakes to write poetry about his love.

#### 2.1

The Princess of France arrives on an embassy to Navarre from her father, accompanied by three ladies, Maria, Catherine, and Rosaline, and three lords, one named Boyet: having heard of the King's vow she sends Boyet ahead to him, and while he is away the three respective ladies discuss the King's three respective fellow students. When the King and his three colleagues arrive the Princess presents him with a letter from her father, demanding back a share of Aquitaine in recompense for the full repayment of a loan: while the King reads it Biron is wittily rebuffed by Rosaline, with whom he attempts to flirt. The King agrees to accommodate the Princess while they await the arrival of documents which will establish whether or not the whole loan has already been repaid. Each of his lords privately asks Boyet the name of one of her ladies: Dumaine is attracted to Catherine, Longueville to Maria, and Biron to Rosaline, while Boyet tells the Princess he thinks the King himself is falling in love with her.

#### 3.1

Armado sends Mote to fetch Costard, with whom he means to entrust a love letter to Jaquenetta. Costard, after a bantering quarrel with Mote about hurting his shin, is left with three farthings for delivering the letter. Biron arrives and gives Costard a shilling to deliver a letter to Rosaline; left alone, he reflects on the demeaning absurdity of his having fallen in love with her.

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## 4.1

The Princess, out hunting with her ladies, meets Costard, who does not know which of them is Rosaline: he gives the Princess Armado's letter by mistake, which Boyet reads aloud to general amusement. Costard jests with Boyet and the ladies.

## 4.2

The schoolmaster Holofernes and the priest Nathaniel are being learnedly witty at the expense of Dull, and Holofernes is showing off his pedantry to Nathaniel, when the illiterate Jaquenetta and Costard arrive to ask Nathaniel to read them the letter Jaquenetta has received from Armado: unfortunately Costard has given her Biron's letter to Rosaline, which Holofernes tells her to take to the King.

## 4.3

Biron has been writing more poetry for Rosaline: hiding, he overhears the King reading aloud his own poem to the Princess. The King in turn hides when he sees Longueville approach, and both he and Biron overhear Longueville reading out a poem he has composed for Maria. Longueville then hides, and all overhear Dumaine sighing in rhyme for Catherine. Longueville steps forward and reproaches Dumaine: the King steps forward and reproaches Longueville for hypocrisy: then Biron steps forward and reproaches all of them. His triumph is short-lived, however, as Jaquenetta and Costard arrive with his own letter to Rosaline, which he at first tears up but then confesses to. Biron urges his colleagues to lay aside their unnatural vow and set about their wooing.

## 5.1

Nathaniel and Holofernes, discussing Armado's pretensions to linguistic style before a silent and uncomprehending Dull, are interrupted by Armado's arrival, with Costard and Mote: he has been sent confidentially by the King to commission an entertainment to be performed for the Princess. Holofernes decides they shall stage a pageant of the Nine Worthies.

## 5.2

The Princess and her ladies scoff at the respective love letters they have received. Boyet brings news that the King and his three lords are approaching, disguised as Muscovites: the women exchange masks, so as to trick their suitors into wooing the wrong people. The men arrive, posing as Muscovites, prefaced by a speech from Mote which, despite prompting, he forgets: all four are taken in by the trick and each is dashed by the witty rebuffs of his partner before they leave, discomfited. The women scoff behind their backs, and when they return undisguised they pretend not to have recognized them, lamenting that they have had their time wasted by foolish Russians. Biron forswears all affectation and pretence to wit in his future wooing, and finally understands how he and his companions have been ridiculed. Costard arrives to ask whether the Nine Worthies should perform, and despite the King's misgivings the Princess insists the pageant should proceed. Mocked by their spectators, speaking in archaic verse, Costard impersonates Pompey the Great, Nathaniel (who forgets his words) plays Alexander the Great, Mote plays the infant Hercules strangling snakes in his cradle, but Holofernes' performance as Judas Maccabeus is dashed by heckling. Armado appears as Hector, and is even more dashed by Costard's public claim that Jaquenetta is two months' pregnant by him: the two nearly come to blows, but at this point the entertainment is interrupted by the coming of a messenger, Mercadé. He brings the news that the Princess's father has died. The women at last listen seriously to the men's love-suits, but will give no answer until they meet again in a year and a day: Rosaline makes Biron promise to spend the intervening period telling his jokes in a hospital. Armado returns, and before the King and his lords and the princess and her ladies part he and the rustics perform a song of spring and winter, 'When daisies pied'.

## Artistic features

The play is marked by long passages of sustained punning, and by a heavy use of rhyme: even when not reading aloud from love letters, the aristocratic characters frequently speak in sonnets.

## Critical history

Until the 19th century very few critics found a good word to say about *Love's Labour's Lost*, which seemed to most commentators to represent Shakespeare simultaneously at his most self-indulgent and his most dated Elizabethan. [Francis Gentleman](#), relegating the play to the eighth volume of [Bell's](#) edition in 1774, called it 'one of Shakespeare's weakest compositions...., he certainly wrote more to please himself, than to divert or inform his readers or auditors'. Enthusiasm grew over the following century, albeit often of a qualified sort. [Hazlitt](#), though admitting it had charm, found it pedantic, while [Coleridge](#) enjoyed the play primarily as an intelligent game at the expense of the ideals of Renaissance humanism. [Victor Hugo](#) initiated one enduring strand in the play's critical history in the preface to his translation of the play, when he attempted to show that it was a specific satire on Elizabeth's court, directly inspired by the relationship between the [Earl of Southampton](#) (according to Hugo, the original for Biron, as well as for the 'Fair Youth' of the Sonnets) with [Elizabeth Vernon](#). (The quest for topical or allegorical significance in the play has been pursued more recently by [Frances Yates](#) and her followers). The play only came into its own critically with the dawning of the aesthetic movement at the end of the century, when commentators such as [Walter Pater](#) and [Algernon Charles Swinburne](#) began to celebrate the play's studied artifice and pose of insubstantiality instead of lamenting it. Since then critics have, however, looked for sterner things in the play, whether its questioning of the limitations of comedy (notably by the bereavement which cuts off its marital ending), its alleged attempt to beat the [University Wits](#) at their own game, its views of language, identity and social hierarchy, or its understanding of the pastoral and the festive.

## Stage history

The courtly tone of the play, together with its comparative brevity, has led some to speculate that it may have been written for performance at an annual revel of one of the [Inns of Court](#), but there is no direct evidence for this beyond the possibility that the missing *Love's Labour's Won* was a sequel, played the following year and depicting the renewal of the courtships postponed for a year at the end of this play. The play was certainly acted before Elizabeth (see above), and a private performance took place at [Southampton's](#) house over Christmas 1604 – 5, according to a letter from [Sir Walter Cope](#). After this, though, the play disappeared from the stage, regarded as the least rescuable of all Shakespeare's comedies (though the transplanted concluding song for many years adorned revivals of *As You Like It*): an anonymous adaptation published in 1762, *The Students*, was never performed, and when *Love's Labour's Lost* was finally staged by [Elizabeth Vestris](#) at Covent Garden in 1839 it enjoyed the distinction of being the last play in the canon to have been revived. Vestris was highly praised as Rosaline, but the play was not revived again until it flopped in 1857, with [Samuel Phelps](#) as Armado. (During the 19th century, however, an adaptation of the play in French sometimes served as a replacement libretto for [Mozart's](#) *Così fan tutte*, regarded at the time as immoral.) *Love's Labour's Lost* was chosen (partly for its obscurity) to be acted on Shakespeare's birthday at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford in 1885, but sporadic revivals there and elsewhere (including a musical version in 1919) failed to establish it in the repertory. The young [Tyrene Guthrie](#)

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produced it twice, first at the Westminster theatre in 1932 and then four years later at the **Old Vic** (with **Michael Redgrave** as the King), but neither production was a hit, though the play did become something of a favourite at the **Open Air Theatre** in Regents Park in the mid-1930s. The first production really to establish the play was **Peter Brook's** delicate, bitter-sweet revival at Stratford in 1946 , with **Paul Scofield** as a melancholy Armado and designs suggestive of the paintings of Watteau. Since then it has been revived much more frequently: notable RSC productions, for example, have included **John Barton's** , set in a wooded Elizabethan park, in 1977 – 8 (with **Michael Pennington** as Biron and Jane Lapotaire as Rosaline), Barry Kyle's in 1984 (with Josette Simon as Rosaline) and Ian Judge's in 1994 – 5 , set in a *Zuleika Dobson*-esque Edwardian Oxford on the eve of the First World War.

Michael Dobson

#### On the screen

The earliest of five silent films was made in 1912 , unsuited as the medium seems to such a word-oriented play. The Bristol Old Vic production ( 1964 ) was recorded on television to mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. Elijah Moshinsky directed the BBC TV production in an 18th-century setting ( 1984 ). **Kenneth Branagh's** version, heavily cut and featuring song-and-dance routines to music by **Cole Porter** and others, which appeared in 2000 , has so far been the least critically acclaimed of his films.

Anthony Davies

#### Recent major editions

John Kerrigan (New Penguin, 1982 ); G. R. Hibbard (Oxford, 1990 ); Henry Woodhuysen (Arden 3rd series, 1998 )

#### Some representative criticism

Barber, C. L. , *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* ( 1959 )



Hoy, Cyrus , 'Love's Labour's Lost and the Nature of Comedy', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13 ( 1962 )



Yates, Frances , *A Study of 'Love's Labour's Lost'* ( 1936 )



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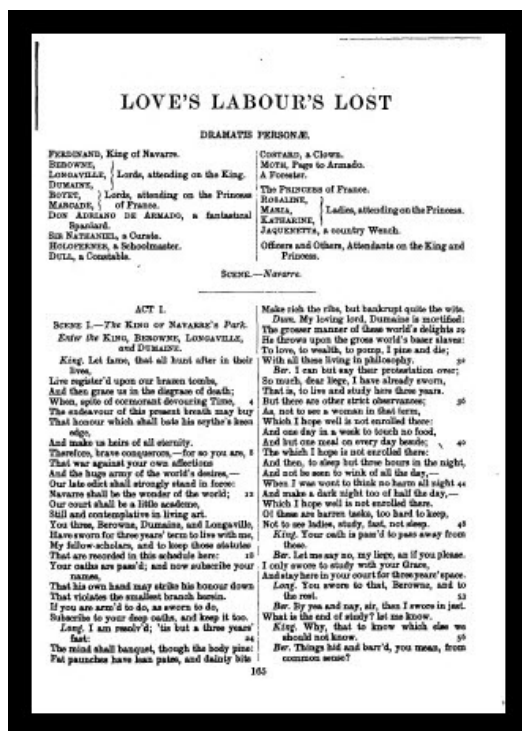
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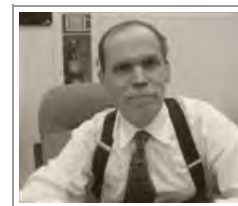
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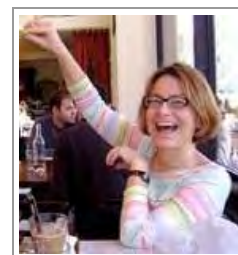
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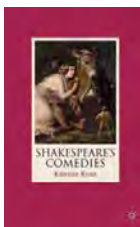
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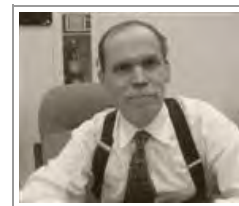


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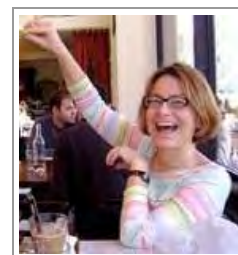
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## Featured Video







## Krapp's Last Tape



In 1971, Alan Schneider directed this historic video taped performance of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, starring Jack MacGowran. The play dramatized an old man's struggle to repossess his youth by searching through reels of audiotape. This performance was originally intended for television but never shown and subsequently put away and forgotten for nearly twenty years. The original film has been restored by Pennebaker Hegedus Films and remains a memorial to the late Jack MacGowran, Alan Schneider and William Ritman.

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## Love's Labour's Lost

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"A NEH project, ERIC was designed to provide scholars and students at a variety of levels with access to major texts of the English Renaissance in their original versions. ERIC grows out of both contemporary critical tendencies in the field of English Renaissance studies and a commitment to providing broad access to original source materials that would otherwise be out of reach for many."

#### The Howard Furness Shakespeare Library (University of Pennsylvania)

"A collection of primary and secondary sources, including both texts and images, that illuminate the theater, literature and history of Shakespeare, Shakespearean texts, theatrical performances, and criticism, Furness Library resources are now being selectively scanned and mounted here to make them available for class and research use."

#### Play Index

"Indexes over 31,000 plays written from Antiquity to the present and published from 1949. An invaluable aid to finding the perfect plays to match any group's production resources, Play Index covers a wide range of plays written in or translated into English, including mysteries, pageants, plays in verse, puppet performances, radio and television plays, and classic drama. Search for plays by title; author; subject (sisters, culture conflict, marriage); style (symbolism, experimental theater); genre (comedy, melodrama, musical); cast type. Play Index provides the full publication details needed to locate the play in its published manifestations. For plays published separately, the publisher, date, pagination, ISBN, and LC number are given. Plays in collections link to full bibliographic information."

#### Shakespeare's Globe Theatre

"Founded by the pioneering American actor and director Sam Wanamaker, Shakespeare's Globe is a unique international resource dedicated to the exploration of Shakespeare's work and the playhouse for which he wrote, through the connected means of performance and education. Together, the Globe Theatre Company, Shakespeare's Globe Exhibition and Globe Education seek to further the experience and international understanding of Shakespeare in performance."

#### Shakespeare's Quartos Archive

"The Shakespeare Quartos Archive is a digital collection of pre-1642 editions of William Shakespeare's plays. A cross-Atlantic collaboration has also produced an interactive interface for the detailed study of these geographically distant quartos, with full functionality for all thirty-two quarto copies of Hamlet held by participating institutions."

#### The Shakespeare Collection: USC enjoys this database for free until June 2009

"Use The Shakespeare Collection to access and study an extensive collection of authoritative materials supporting literary, textual, historical, and performance studies. Resources include the most recent Arden Shakespeare editions of the complete works, as well as editions and adaptations of Shakespeare's works, other works published during Shakespeare's time, prompt books, the Gordon Crosse Theatrical Diaries, criticism, reviews, images, and reference. "

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## Introduction

This LibGuide was created to accompany the Visions & Voices event: **Love's Labour's Lost**. On Saturday, November 21, USC students will have a chance to attend Shakespeare's Globe Theater's performance of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Shakespeare's celebration of young love is a festive parade of every weapon in the youthful playwright's comic arsenal—from excruciating cross-purposes to silly impersonations, drunkenness, bust-ups and pratfalls. It's also his most joyful banquet of language, groaning with puns, rhymes, bizarre syntax, grotesque coinages and parody. [Read more about the event at the Visions & Voices website.](#)

About the play: "A splendid satire, with some of Shakespeare's best early poetry with masterly scenes and excellent characterizations. The play tells how the King of Navarre and three of his lords vow to spend three years in study and not see any women. But when the Princess of France arrives on a diplomatic mission with her three ladies, the men fall in love with them. At the news comes of the death of the King of France and the ladies depart, refusing to marry until their suitors undergo a year's probation, hence the play's title."

## William Shakespeare

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