Love's Labor's Lost

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ferdinand is perhaps based upon the actual Henry of Navarre, who became King Henry IV of France. The play is set within the court world of 16th century Europe, but takes any real historical characters merely as a jumping-off point from which it develops its own playful, romantic, fictional plot.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Unlike some of Shakespeare's plays, there are not obvious source texts for *Love's Labor's Lost*. The play often alludes to the Bible and classical mythology in its references to Cupid, Hercules, and Samson, as well as the performance of the Nine Worthies.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Love's Labor's Lost*
- **When Written:** 1590s
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1598
- **Literary Period:** The Renaissance (1500-1660)
- **Genre:** Drama, comedy
- **Setting:** Navarre, Spain
- **Climax:** Marcade arrives and announces that the princess' father (the king of France) has died. Ferdinand asks for her love and she tells him to wait for a year while she grieves.
- **Antagonist:** The princess and her three ladies are the antagonists to Ferdinand and his three lords, who try to woo their French counterparts.

EXTRA CREDIT

Love's Labor's Won. Some sources contemporary with Shakespeare mention a comedy of his titled *Love's Labor's Won*. Today, no play by this name survives. Some believe it to be a lost comedy written as a sequel to *Love's Labor's Lost* (perhaps following the exploits of Ferdinand after his year of waiting for the princess to mourn), while others think it may be an alternate title of one of the other Shakespearean romantic comedies that has survived.

PLOT SUMMARY

Ferdinand, the king of Navarre, establishes an oath for his entire court, including his three lords Dumaine, Longaville, and Berowne. The oath forbids anyone from spending time with a woman for three years, in order to spend all that time studying. The oath also mandates that everyone will eat only once a day and sleep only three hours per night. Longaville and Dumaine quickly agree to the oath, but Berowne argues against it, saying that excessive studying is bad. He also informs Ferdinand that the princess of France is set to visit the court on official business. The king says that he will then have to violate his own oath "on mere necessity." Seeing how easy it is to get out of the oath, Berowne finally agrees to sign it. Ferdinand also tells Berowne that the Spanish musician and singer Armado will be enough entertainment for them for the three-year period of the oath. A constable named Dull enters with Costard and a **letter** from Armado. The **letter** says that Armado saw Costard with a woman named Jacquenetta, in violation of the oath of Ferdinand's court. Costard tries to get out of punishment with some clever wordplay, but the king sentences him to a week of fasting and orders for Armado to be in charge of carrying out this punishment.

Elsewhere, Armado confesses to his page Mote that he is in love with the "base wench" Jacquenetta. This love has made him melancholy, and he asks Mote to name him some "great men" who have also been in love. The page names Hercules and Samson. Dull enters with Costard and Jacquenetta, informing Armado of Costard's punishment. Armado tells Jacquenetta that he loves her. Dull takes Jacquenetta away and Mote leaves with Costard. Alone on stage, Armado calls love "a devil," but takes some comfort in the fact that even strong men like Hercules and Samson have been affected by love. He says that he will "turn sonnet" and write out his love.

The princess of France arrives in Navarre with her attendants: Boyet, Katherine, Rosaline, and Maria. Aware of Ferdinand's oath, she sends the male Boyet ahead to speak with him. Boyet comes back and tells the princess that they are to camp out in the field, as women are not allowed in Ferdinand's court. Ferdinand arrives with his three lords and apologizes to the

princess. While Ferdinand and the princess negotiate over the exchange of the territory of Aquitaine, Rosaline and Berowne flirt by exchanging witty one-liners. Dumaine asks Boyet about Katherine and Longaville asks him about Maria, both clearly infatuated by these two women. The two groups part, and Boyet tells the princess that he thinks Ferdinand is in love with her.

Armado has Mote free Costard so that he can give him a **letter** to be delivered to Jacquenetta. He gives Costard a coin as remuneration for the favor and Costard mishears him, thinking that the coin is called "a remuneration." Berowne then finds Costard and gives him a **letter** to deliver to Rosaline. Berowne bemoans his intense love for Rosaline and refers to it as a plague that Cupid is punishing him with. Meanwhile, the princess goes on a hunting trip with her attendants. Costard finds them and tells them he has a **letter** for Rosaline. However, he delivers the **letter** from Armado by mistake. Boyet reads out the over-wrought **letter** expressing Armado's love for Jacquenetta. The princess laughs at the ridiculous **letter**. Maria, Boyet, and Rosaline trade quips back and forth involving romantic puns on hunting terms. Everyone but Costard leaves, and Costard is amazed at their "sweet jests, most incony vulgar wit."

A schoolteacher named Holofernes, a curate named Nathaniel, and Dull discuss the princess' hunting trip. Holofernes and Nathaniel alternate English with Latin phrases, which Dull misunderstands, to their amusement. Jacquenetta and Costard enter. Jacquenetta gives Nathaniel a **letter** that Costard gave her, supposedly from Armado. However, it turns out to be Berowne's **letter** to Rosaline, which contains a love poem. Holofernes tells Jacquenetta to bring the **letter** to Ferdinand. Alone at court, Berowne laments his love for Rosaline. He sees Ferdinand approaching and hides. Ferdinand reads out a poem he has written for the princess. He hears someone coming and hides. Longaville enters and laments his love for Maria, reading a poem he has written for her. He sees that someone is coming and hides, as well. Dumaine enters and describes his love for Katherine. Longaville jumps out and scolds Dumaine for loving Katherine. But then Ferdinand comes out of hiding and chastises both of them. Finally, Berowne comes forward and calls all three of them hypocrites, criticizing them for breaking Ferdinand's oath. But then, Costard and Jacquenetta enter with Berowne's **letter**. Berowne tries to rip up the **letter**, but Dumaine reads it and sees what it is. Berowne confesses that he is also in love. Jacquenetta and Costard leave, and the king and his lords discuss their beloveds. Ferdinand asks the clever Berowne to reason some justification for their breaking the oath and pursuing their loves. In a long speech full of clever wordplay, Berowne says that the object of the oath was study and that they will learn more from beauty and from being in love than from any books. Ferdinand, Longaville, and Dumaine are persuaded and excitedly go forth to begin courting their respective women. Ferdinand suggests they woo the French women with "some entertainment."

Holofernes and Nathaniel discuss Armado, and Holofernes criticizes his way of speaking and pronunciation. Armado enters with Costard and Mote. Mote pokes fun at Holofernes and Nathaniel, teasing and outwitting them. Armado asks Holofernes for advice on what show he is to present to the princess on Ferdinand's behalf. Holofernes suggests the pageant of the **Nine Worthies**, a presentation of nine famous mythological, Biblical, and historical figures. He casts Armado, Nathaniel, Costard, Mote, and himself in the performance.

The princess and her ladies discuss and laugh at the **love letters** and gifts they have received from Ferdinand and his lords. Boyet enters and tells them that Ferdinand and his men are planning to come visit them disguised as Russian ambassadors. The princess plans for all the ladies to wear masks and exchange their gifts so that the men mistake their identities. Mote, Ferdinand, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine arrive in Russian dress. The men try to get the women to dance, but they refuse, teasing them. The men then attempt to woo the wrong women, misled by the gifts the women have traded with each other. The women continue to tease and mock the men wittily, and they leave disappointed. Soon after, Ferdinand and his lords return without their disguises. Ferdinand tells the princess that she is now welcome in his court, but she says she doesn't want to make him break his oath. She says that has enjoyed staying in the field and was just visited by a group of Russians, whom Rosaline describes as foolish. Rosaline then hints that the women know the Russians were Ferdinand and his men in disguise. Ferdinand confesses and apologizes. The princess asks Ferdinand to repeat what he had whispered into his lover's ear when he was in disguise. He does so, and Rosaline says that this is what her lover told her. Ferdinand is confused, but Berowne realizes that the ladies had traded their gifts with each other.

Costard enters and announces that it is time for the performance of the **Nine Worthies**. Costard appears first as Pompey, and Boyet, Berowne, and Dumaine heckle him. Nathaniel then enters as Alexander the Great and is also teased. Holofernes and Mote enter, Holofernes playing Judas Maccabaeus and Mote playing the young Hercules. The audience continues to heckle and tease the performers. Armado enters as the Greek hero Hector, to more heckling. Costard suddenly announces to everyone that Jacquenetta is pregnant with Armado's child. Armado is upset and prepares to duel Costard. Just then, though, a messenger named Marcade arrives from France and tells the princess that her father has died. Berowne tells all the actors to leave, and the princess announces that she will leave for France immediately. Ferdinand begs her to stay and avows his love for her. The princess says that she assumed the men's love was all "pleasant jest and courtesy," and she didn't realize how seriously they felt

about it. The princess says that she will consider Ferdinand's suit if he spends a year at "some forlorn and naked hermitage," while she takes time to grieve. Similarly, Katherine tells Dumaine to wait for a year before continuing to court her. Maria gives Longaville a similar offer, but Rosaline has something else in store for Berowne. She tells him that he must spend a year at a hospital, using his wit to make the seriously ill laugh. Then, he will have a chance with her. The men all agree to these conditions. Berowne comments that their loves have not come to happy endings befitting of a comedy. Armado enters and says that there was supposed to be a song at the end of the performance of the **Nine Worthies**. All the actors come back to perform the song in two groups, one representing spring and one representing winter. The groups each sing a short song about their respective season, and the play ends.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ferdinand – The king of Navarre (a region of Spain). Ferdinand aspires to glory through intense study. He writes an oath (and gets all the men of his court to agree to it), which forbids spending any time with women, eating more food than is strictly necessary, and sleeping more than a few hours per night—all in order to devote all time and energy to studies in an all male "academe." However, the visit of the princess of France throws a wrench in these plans. Ferdinand quickly falls in love with her and spends most of the play desperately trying to woo her. In the end, the princess tells him to wait for a year while she grieves the loss of her father. At the end of this year, he may have a chance with her.

Berowne – Probably the most clever of Ferdinand's men, Berowne is reluctant to agree to the king's oath from the start. However, he signs the oath when he sees how easy it is to weasel out of the agreement. He falls in love with the princess' attendant Rosaline and, when asked by Ferdinand and his other attendants, provides a clever justification of breaking the oath for love. At the end of the play, Rosaline asks him to spend a year making people laugh with his wit at a hospital before continuing to woo her.

Longaville – One of Ferdinand's three main attendants. He eagerly agrees to Ferdinand's oath at the start of the play, but before long falls in love with Maria and attempts to woo her as Ferdinand, Berowne, and Dumaine try to woo their own French women. Like Dumaine, he is somewhat witty but less so than Berowne.

Dumaine – Another of Ferdinand's attendant lords. Like Longaville, he is quick to agree to the oath at the beginning of the play, but then falls in love with Katherine and attempts to woo her for the rest of the play. Like Longaville, he is clever, but not as witty as Berowne.

The Princess of France – The princess comes to visit Ferdinand on an official diplomatic mission from France, concerning the exchange of the territory of Aquitaine. But after an initial meeting with Ferdinand, most of her time is spent fending off his advances. The princess is very clever and outwits her host, pretending not to realize it is Ferdinand and his men in disguise when they come to her dressed as Russian ambassadors, and getting her ladies to pretend to be each other behind masks, in order to trick Ferdinand and his men. In the final scene of the play, the princess' fun is put to an end by the serious news of her father's death.

Rosaline – One of the princess' ladies who comes with her on the visit to Ferdinand. She is able to hold her own in witty back-and-forths with Berowne, who falls in love with her. At the end of the play, she tells Berowne to spend a year at a hospital, trying to make the sick laugh, before continuing to woo her.

Boyet – The only male who comes with the princess to Navarre. Boyet helps move along the plot and alerts the princess and her ladies to the imminent arrival of Ferdinand and his men disguised as Russians. He is fond of the princess, but—in contrast to most of the play's characters—does not seem romantically interested in anyone.

Armado – A Spaniard at Ferdinand's court, Armado entertains the king and his attendants with song and music. He is extravagant in his speech, speaking and writing in overly ornate language and often inventing his own words (to the chagrin of the pedantic Holofernes). He oversees the punishment of Costard for spending time with Jacquenetta, but falls in love with her himself and successfully woos her.

Mote – Armado's young page, Mote (spelled "Moth" in some editions) is surprisingly intelligent given his young age and relatively low social status. He is able to outwit and poke fun at his superiors, including Armado, Holofernes, and Nathaniel, of whom he quips, "they have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps."

Jacquenetta – Jacquenetta is seen with Costard as the play begins, leading to Costard's punishment for violating the no-women oath of Ferdinand's court. However, it is Armado who falls in love with her, and courts her. Armado is presumably successful in his wooing, as Costard announces at the end of the play that she is pregnant with Armado's child.

Holofernes – A pedant, or schoolteacher. He mixes in a good deal of Latin phrases into his everyday conversation, and is rather arrogant in his ostentatious learning. He exemplifies traditional education and book-learning, and though he considers himself to be probably the most intelligent person in the play, he is easily outwitted by the supposedly simple page Mote.

Monsieur Marcade – A messenger from the French court who arrives near the end of the play to announce to the princess the death of her father. While a minor character, his announcement

importantly puts an end to the merriment and joking of the play, signaling the conclusion of the play's light comedy and a return to more serious matters.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Maria – One of the princess' three attendants. Longaville falls in love with Maria, but—like the rest of the French women—Maria resists the advances of her suitor and teases him.

Katherine – The third of the princess' attendants, who comes with her to visit Ferdinand. She is witty and holds out against the advances of Dumaine, telling him to wait a year, like Ferdinand, before pursuing her.

Costard – A "clown," who is spotted with Jacquenetta in the beginning of the play, in violation of Ferdinand's oath. Armado and Berowne both give him **love letters** to deliver to their respective beloveds (Jacquenetta and Rosaline), and Costard foolishly mixes up the letters, delivering the wrong one to each.

Dull – A constable whose name accurately reflects his mental capacities. As a contrast to the sharp wit of most of the play's characters, he offers a good number of opportunities for laughs in the comedy.

Nathaniel – A curate (member of the clergy) who spends most of his time in the play with the schoolteacher Holofernes. He likes to think of himself as smart and well-educated, and so fawns sycophantically over Holofernes.

Forester – A minor character who goes hunting with the princess and her attendants in act four.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LOVE

It is no surprise that the topic of love is central to *Love's Labor's Lost*. The entire plot of the play revolves around love and various characters' attempts at courtship. Characters swear off love, talk endlessly about it, admit their powerlessness before it, and devote themselves entirely to its pursuit. But, somewhat ironically, while love is so important to the play, one of its central questions left unanswered is: what exactly is love? The king's oath at the beginning of the play seems to view love as a distraction from important work and as a bodily desire like sleep or appetite (which the oath also restricts). But as Ferdinand and his men fall in love, they come to view it as a more serious feeling, something more than a mere physical urge. By the end of the play, the king and his lords are assuring the princess and her ladies that their love was serious, not a joke. Shakespeare also presents different conceptions of love through different metaphors used to describe it. There are many references to Cupid, with his bow and arrow, and "Cupid's army." This kind of military metaphor implies that love assaults the lover, is powerful, and brings the lover entirely under the control of love. Love is also continually compared to an illness or plague. According to this metaphor, love afflicts the lover like a disease, harming him mentally and even physically. These two dominant metaphors both present love as a negative thing, which is consonant with how most of the male characters view it. When Armado realizes his love for Jacquenetta, he worries that this passion might compromise his masculinity. Thus, he asks Mote to remind him of strong men who have also been in love, seeking assurance that love is not a sign of weakness.

Despite all this, though, the play can be seen as also presenting love in a positive light. As Berowne argues to Ferdinand's court, one can learn a great deal from beauty and from being in love. Moreover, the very idea of study is predicated on a love of wisdom and knowledge. Love also inspires characters to write, as the numerous love letters and sonnets of the men show. Berowne even argues that love heightens the senses and increases one's powers of observation. Love is thus not wholly bad. In any case, the play shows that it cannot be avoided. Ferdinand tries to remove love from his life and the lives of his attendants, but before long they are all madly in love. Whatever love is, however one understands it, and whatever one thinks of it, Shakespeare suggests that the only thing we can know about love for sure is that it happens to everyone—for better or for worse.

MEN AND WOMEN

Men and women operate in separate groups for much of the play, largely because of Ferdinand's oath to keep women out of his court. The main plot of the play centers around a group of four male companions (Ferdinand, Longaville, Dumaine, and Berowne) and a group of four female companions (the princess, Katherine, Maria, and Rosaline). Shakespeare is thus able to represent men and women as they socialize with their own gender, in order to probe questions about masculinity and femininity. Men in the play aspire to some stereotypical ideas of masculinity: strength, power, self-control, and intelligence. However, they generally fail to live up to these ideals. Almost as soon as Ferdinand and his men agree to their oath, they lose self-control and fall helplessly in love with the princess and her ladies. They try to be clever in wooing them, but are continually outwitted by the women they are supposedly better educated than. Love itself poses a threat to the characters' ideas of masculinity: Armado

worries that his love for Jacquenetta is a sign of weakness and so asks Mote to remind him of famous strong men who have also been in love. The men of the play are again comically unable to live up to standards of masculinity in the performance of the Nine Worthies, nine mythological, biblical, and historical great men. As the audience of the pageant continually points out with their heckling, the performers pathetically fail to embody the strength and greatness of their roles.

Through the eyes of the male characters, the play also shows how faulty male assumptions about women can be. The men in the play tend to see women only as passive objects of desire. Ferdinand's oath implies that one would only spend time with a woman for romantic or sexual purposes. Moreover, the oath seems to assume that any women would gladly become romantically involved with Ferdinand and his men, that the only thing preventing love is the men's abstinence. Even Berowne's speech in favor of women objectifies them. He justifies love by saying that women can help men learn, but he only considers women as objects of study or aids to male learning—never as people able to learn themselves. The princess and her ladies, however, prove otherwise. They also have a say in the matter of love, as they resist the men's wooing and laugh at how foolish the men's love letters are. They outwit the men, wearing masks and switching identities, for example. And, in the end, the women exert some power over their romantic situation, making Ferdinand and his men wait for a year before continuing to woo them.

However, while the play mostly explores the comically incorrect assumptions of men about women, it also evidences some of the reverse: the princess and her ladies assume that the men are jesting and having fun with their proclamations of love and don't believe they are really in love, when they actually are. Thus, some stereotyping about gender runs both ways. But, the deal at the end of the play for a year's hiatus from courtship holds out the possibility of actual love at some point in the future—love that would bridge the gap between the male and female communities of the play, bringing people together beyond facile assumptions about the opposite gender.

LANGUAGE

One of the most notable features of *Love's Labor's Lost* is its exuberant use of language. Nearly every line contains some pun, a piece of wordplay, or a character's overly literal misunderstanding of someone else's language. Shakespeare's play is a comedy, and all this wordplay serves the simple purpose of making the audience laugh. However, it also contributes to a deeper exploration of language. At first glance, puns and wordplay might seem to be marginal aspects of language, coincidentally allowed for but not important parts of how we communicate. However, *Love's Labor's Lost* reveals an element of play to be at the center of language. It is important to note that many of the play's instances of wordplay are not intentional, but comic misunderstandings. Characters try to communicate with each other, but end up accidentally taking phrases in the wrong way and playing on the multiple meanings of a word or phrase.

Language is inevitably a system of words that can't be pinned down to any one meaning. This has significant consequences for the important uses of writing in the play: namely, Ferdinand's oath and the various love letters of the men in the play. These love letters are supposed to communicate deep, earnest feelings of sincere love, and the oath is supposed to establish an important law and bind the king and his men to an official promise. But if language is perpetually open to misinterpretation, ambiguity, and play, can writing adequately serve these purposes? The princess and her ladies underestimate the seriousness of their men's love, thinking they are mostly joking. And, of course, Ferdinand's oath does not last long. Berowne easily reasons his way out of the oath, mostly through some ingenious wordplay about "study." Thus, despite some attempts to pin language down, it is always flexible and inexact, often not adequately carrying out the intentions of a speaker or writer. Even the title of the play reflects this. Different editions have different versions of the title—is it *Love's Labors Lost* or *Love's Labor's Lost*? Does it mean that love's labors are lost in the play (as the men don't end up with their women), or that love is labor lost (because love wastes time that could have been used for important work), or something entirely different? It is unclear what Shakespeare's intentions may have been, and it is perhaps best to read the title as embodying the very confusion, ambiguity, and proliferation of multiple meanings that so much of the play's language delights in.

INTELLIGENCE

Shakespeare's play is filled with characters representing different kinds of learning, intelligence, and cleverness; and it tends to pit these different kinds of intelligence against each other. Characters repeatedly trade one-liners and clever quips in battles of the wits. Most of the wealthy, male characters exemplify traditional, formal education. Ferdinand and his men swear off of love, food, and sleep in order to devote themselves fully to study, seeing learning from books as the most important kind of intelligence. Somewhat similarly, the schoolteacher Holofernes and Nathaniel offer two more examples of traditional education, both of whom intersperse Latin phrases in their erudite speech. But they are also ridiculous characters; the play seems to poke fun at their overly pedantic conversations. Also, the clever page Mote is able to outwit them, and jokes that "they have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps."

As for Ferdinand and his lords, Berowne persuades them all

when he argues that they can learn as much from love as from books. Importantly, as the oath at the beginning of the play illustrates, women are generally excluded from the limited model of traditional education. However, they are perhaps the most clever characters in the play, tricking the men by wearing masks and exchanging their identities, for example. The play thus raises serious doubts about the simplistic model of intelligence exemplified by Holofernes and idealized by Ferdinand. Holofernes and Ferdinand like to think of a particular kind of learning as real intelligence, but the play shows this to be only one kind of learning (and one that is more often than not simply used to assert social class and authority). Real intelligence isn't necessarily learned from intense study or arcane scholarship, and can come from nobleman or commoner, man or woman.

WORK, PLEASURE, AND COMEDY

At the beginning of the play, Ferdinand plans to dedicate all his time and energy to serious intellectual pursuits, denying all bodily pleasures. And the princess of France comes to visit him on an important diplomatic mission about the exchange of a territory. However, the rest of the play is filled not with serious business, but with merriment, jokes, and amusement. The king ends up caring less about negotiating with the princess than about entertaining and wooing her. Even the schoolmaster character Holofernes seems to care more about fun riddles and clever jokes than any real education. The play thus questions the importance of supposedly serious business and the distinction between labor and pleasure.

As the play's many efforts of wooing—from writing, to strategizing meetings, to putting on the pageant of the Nine Worthies—show, fun can be serious work. The play's justification of amusement and pleasure can be seen partially as Shakespeare meditating on his own writing of comedy. Indeed, the play has a significant meta-theatrical strain: the women's hiding their true identities in masks, the men's dressing up as Russian ambassadors, and the show of the Nine Worthies can all be seen as performances within the main performance of *Love's Labor's Lost*, allowing the play to reflect on its own status as a comedic production. In the final scene, Berowne even reflects on whether his and his friends' loves have a suitably happy ending for a comedy.

Just as the play's characters take time away from serious pursuits to devote energy to amusement, the play's actors, producers, and audience devote time and energy to creating and enjoying an amusing production. The play's consideration of work and pleasure can thus be seen as partially justifying its own existence as an amusing comedy. However, the pure merriment of the play cannot last forever. The sudden announcement of the death of the king of France effectively puts an end to the play, suggesting that at some point jokes must be set aside. As the princess decides to take a year for mourning, there appears to be a time for amusement and a time for more serious matters. The play ultimately argues for the importance of moderation and balance: rather than trying to abstain from all enjoyment or indulge in pure play forever, one must recognize that life is a mixture of both fun and work, love and labor. It is important to appreciate light comedy, then, while also realizing that every comedy must come to an end.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE NINE WORTHIES

In Act Five, Scene Two, Armado puts on a performance of the Nine Worthies, a pageant showing nine famous men from mythology, history, and the Bible. These men—such as Pompey and Alexander the Great—are exemplary ideals of masculinity in their strength, bravery, and military prowess. The actual performance of the Nine Worthies is somewhat farcical, though, as those playing the nine heroes fall pathetically short of their roles. The Nine Worthies can thus be seen as symbolizing the ideal masculine gender roles that the actual men of the play aspire to but comically fail to live up to. Additionally, the performance provides a valuable way to test the intelligence of various characters of the play. For example, Boyet, Berowne, and Dumaine mix up Holofernes' character Judas Maccabaeus (of the Old Testament) with Judas Iscariot, who betrays Jesus in the New Testament. Finally, as a play within the play, the pageant can be seen as a microcosm of the performance of *Love's Labor's Lost* itself (and its heckling audience could even be Shakespeare's nod toward the rowdy theater audiences of his day).

LOVE LETTERS

Berowne and Armado both write letters to their beloveds and, unwisely, entrust them to Costard to have them delivered. Costard delivers the letters to the wrong people, giving Berowne's letter to Jacquenetta and Costard's to Rosaline. Along with Ferdinand's written oath and the love poems of some of the male characters, these letters are an important instance of writing in a play that explores the intricacies of language. As they don't accomplish what they are intended to and don't reach their intended audience in the way their writers wished, they can be seen as symbolizing the instability and difficulties of language itself. All words can be seen as similar to these letters: they are sent out from their speaker for a purpose but often received in the wrong way. This

doesn't mean that language and writing are completely ineffective or don't work, but rather that they work too much: their words often work in more ways than a speaker or writer intends.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Love's Labor's Lost (Folger Shakespeare Library)* published in 2005.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

Therefore, brave conquerors, for so you are,
That war against your own affections
And the huge army of the world's desires,
Our late edict shall strongly stand in force.
Navarre shall be the wonder of the world;
Our court shall be a little academe,
Still and contemplative in living art.

Related Characters: Ferdinand (speaker), Berowne, Longaville, Dumaine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.1.8-14

Explanation and Analysis

These lines come from the play's opening speech, in which Ferdinand, King of Navarre, introduces his oath and his plan to devote three years time to study only. He invokes honor and fame, which will outlive them well beyond their deaths and the passage of time. Here, he refers to Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine as "brave conquerors" in "that war against [their] own affections / And the huge army of the world's desires."

The effort to conquer their own desires and affections hints at the contents of the king's "edict" which the men will all sign and agree to. This oath will be to devote three years only to the serious study of academics, with the purpose of making Navarre "the wonder of the world," and the court like "a little academe" (academic community). Ferdinand idealizes intelligence and places it as his highest priority. He swears to pursue intelligence and academics with a serious, solemn dedication, and appears to have no time for pleasure, play, or love. This intense plan to work is made more explicit by the specific contents of his oath, below.

O, these are barren tasks, too hard to keep,
Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep.

Related Characters: Berowne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.1.48-49

Explanation and Analysis

Longaville and Dumaine agree to and sign the oath without revealing the exact contents; we only know it is a three-year fast during which they will live and study with Ferdinand. Berowne, though, says he has already sworn to the three years of study, and he doesn't want to swear to anything more, believing it to be too harsh. We then learn that the oath requires them not to see women during the three years, to fast one day out of every week, to eat one meal only on all other days, and to sleep but three hours each night.

Berowne says all of these requirements are too strict and "too hard to keep." He also ends in a rhyme, quickly re-summarizing the oath with "not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep." Note that his rhyme launches a pattern of rhyming that will continue for much of the remainder of the scene. The oath shows Ferdinand's view on women and work: women (and love) are a distraction to study, and discipline and diligence are required for excellence, intelligence, and achievement. Through his denial, we also learn that Berowne has a more relaxed worldview, and that even from the start of the play he desires the company of women (and the ability to nap during the day).

Item, If any man be seen to talk with a woman within the term of three years, he shall endure such public shame as the rest of the court can possible devise.

Related Characters: Berowne, Ferdinand (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.1.132-135

Explanation and Analysis

After a brief argument in which Berowne cleverly argues that overstudying is harmful, we finally are given a glimpse at the contents of the written document that comprises the oath, binds Ferdinand and his court to its terms, and outlines the punishments of breaking it. The first item that Berowne reads stipulates that a woman cannot come within

a mile of court or else she will have her tongue cut out. We can note that women were thought to talk too much, and Ferdinand clearly views them only as distracting temptresses.

Here, Berowne reads another item, which says that if a man is seen talking to a women within the next three years, "he shall endure such public shame as the rest of the court can possible devise." First, note that even just talking to a women causes punishment. This is because women supposedly talk too much and are distractions from male study, but also because talking to a women implies romantic and sexual purposes. In Ferdinand's mind there is no other reason a man would spend time with or talk to a woman. We can also note that the punishment has not yet been devised, but will consist of public shame. Honor and fame, which were cited as the purpose of such a rigorous course of study, here resurface as what is at stake when someone violates the terms of the oath.

We must of force dispense with this decree.
She must lie here on mere necessity.

Necessity will make us all forsworn
Three thousand times within this three years' space;
. . .
If I break faith, this word shall speak for me:
I am forsworn on mere necessity.

Related Characters: Berowne, Ferdinand (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.1.150-158

Explanation and Analysis

Berowne tells the king that he himself will have to break the oath, since the daughter of the King of France is scheduled to visit his court on official business. Ferdinand says that he had forgotten about the visit, and says (in the opening couplet of the excerpt) that they will have to make an exception to the oath out of "mere necessity."

At this, Berowne realizes how easily the oath can be broken and slipped out of, predicting it will occur countless times in the three year span. He says that if he does break the oath, the single word that will absolve him is "necessity." Ferdinand's oath is made of language, and it is with language (not even particularly clever language) that the oath can be broken or put on pause. It is only after realizing this gaping loophole that Berowne consents to sign his name to the written agreement.

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

I will hereupon confess I am in love; and as it is base for a soldier to love, so am I in love with a base wench. . . . I think scorn to sigh; methinks I should outswear Cupid. Comfort me, boy. What great men have been in love?

Related Characters: Armado (speaker), Jacquenetta

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.2.57-65

Explanation and Analysis

Armado and his page Mote begin this scene with an exchange of wits, discussing the nature of melancholy and the predicament of studying with King Ferdinand for three years. Here, Armado confesses that he is in love with a woman named Jacquenetta. He describes this woman as "a base wench" whom he seems to wish he did not love in the first place. He believes it is "base" for him to be in love, and believes that love is dangerous since it takes away his self-control.

Armado also feels emasculated by his love, thinking it makes him weak and less of a man. Here, love is dangerous, unwieldy, womanly, and unwanted. Wishing to feel better, he asks his page to remind him of the "great men" of history who have previously been in love. He believes that thinking of these great men will help him, since it will signal that even masculine heroes feel love. The two then discuss these great men, a scene which seems to look forward to the play's exploration of the Nine Worthies in later acts.

I do affect the very ground (which is base) where her shoe (which is baser) guided by her foot (which is basest) doth tread. I shall be forsworn (which is a great argument of falsehood) if I love. And how can that be true love which is falsely attempted? Love is a familiar; love is a devil. There is no evil angel but love, yet was Samson so tempted, and he had an excellent strength; yet was Solomon so seduced, and he had a very good wit. Cupid's butt-shaft is too hard for Hercules' club, and therefore too much odds for a Spaniard's rapier. . . . Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I am sure I shall turn sonnet. Devise wit, write pen, for I am whole volumes in folio.

Related Characters: Armado (speaker), Jacquenetta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.2.167-185

Explanation and Analysis

Armado closes Act 1, Scene 2 with this soliloquy, in which he says he loves the very ground Jacquenetta steps on. He makes a play on *base*, saying that the ground is base, Jacquenetta's shoe is baser, and her foot is basest, using base both literally (low) and figuratively (inferior or bad). For Armado, love appears to be a negative experience. He says that if he really loves, he will be "forsworn" (a liar), and relates love to falsehood. Love, he says, is a devil.

He moves on, however, to remind himself of the strong men of history and and legend who have also loved, like Samson (who "had an excellent strength"), and King Solomon (who "had a very good wit"). Even the hero Hercules fell under Cupid's power. We can note that Armado must constantly reaffirm his manliness, his strength, and his intelligence, since he believes that love is a sign he is lacking in all three areas.

Moving from a devilish, false picture of love to masculine heroic love, Armado concludes with an apostrophe (a rhetorical call to someone who isn't present) to the gods of rhyme. Armado has been inspired by love to write poetry, saying that he will "turn sonnet." (A sonnet is an extremely popular form of love poem comprised of 14 lines—Shakespeare wrote and published many, and included some inside his plays). What's more, by the end of this speech, Armado himself has become a text: "I am whole volumes in folio." Armado takes many views on love, but ultimately concludes that love is rooted in language and poetry, and the possessive power of love is so great that he as a lover embodies whole volumes of poetry.

If my observation, which very seldom lies,
By the heart's still rhetoric, disclosed wi' th' eyes,
Deceive me not now, Navarre is infected.

With what?

With that which we lovers entitle "affected."

Related Characters: The Princess of France, Boyet (speaker), Ferdinand

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.1.240-244

Explanation and Analysis

The Princess of France has arrived with her attendants, Boyet, the only man in her company, and three ladies: Katherine, Rosaline, and Maria. Boyet is initially sent to court ahead, and Ferdinand and his men eventually greet the Princess and her ladies, apologizing that the women must sleep in the fields. Within the interaction the women display their dazzling, sharp wits, and the men all flirt. As they leave, each asks Boyet for one of the women's names.

After the departure of the men, the women begin making clever jokes with each other, but the Princess says they would make better use of their intelligence and gift of language in a "civil war of wits" with Ferdinand and his men. After this assertion, Boyet makes the observation quoted here. He says that, "by the heart's still rhetoric, disclosed wi' th' eyes... Navarre [Ferdinand] is infected." Here he touches on two tropes describing love: first, it is rooted in language and rhetoric. We have already seen this develop in Armado's thinking. Second, love is communicated and seen in the eyes.

To the suggestion Navarre is infected, the Princess responds with the simple, "with what?" Boyet responds by completing his wordplay: "With that which we lovers entitle "affected," meaning love. Thus Boyet suggests that Ferdinand is in love with the Princess, and at once continues their game of wordplay, puns, and witticisms.

Remuneration. Why, it is a fairer name than "French crown." I will never buy and sell out of this word.

Related Characters: Costard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.149-150

Explanation and Analysis

After moments where Mote's intelligence is showcased and praised, this comedic moment hits particularly well. Costard has been imprisoned since he has been seen with Jacquenetta (Armado's beloved), violating Ferdinand's oath. Armado frees Costard on the condition that he delivers a love letter from Armado to Jacquenetta. In addition to freeing Costard, Armado gives him remuneration in the form of a coin for his troubles. Remuneration simply means

payment for a service, but here Costard confuses the meaning and comically things it is a fancy word ("fairer name") for a French crown.

We can also note that despite the failures in language, both on the part of Armado and Costard, Armado places his hopes for love on a fool (Costard) and only in the written word (his love letter). These decisions will provide fuel for comedy, as Costard will later mix up love letters and deliver Armado's letter to the wrong person.

> And I forsooth in Love! I that have been love's whip,
> A very beadle to a humorous sigh,
> A critic, nay, a nightwatch constable,
> A domineering pedant o'er the boy,
> Than whom no mortal so magnificent.
> This wimpled, whining, purblind, wayward boy,
> This Signior Junior, giant dwarf, Dan Cupid,
> Regent of love rhymes, lord of folded arms,
> Th'annointed sovereign of sighs and groans,
> Liege of all loiterers and malcontents,
> Dread prince of plackets, king of codpieces,
> Sole imperator and great general
> Of trotting paritors—O my little heart!
> Am I to be a corporal of his field
> And wear his colors like a tumbler's hoop!
> What? I love, I sue, I seek a wife?
> . . . It is a plague
> That Cupid will impose for my neglect
> Of his almighty dreadful little might.
> Well, I will love, write, sigh, pray, sue, groan.
> Some men must love my lady, and some Joan.

Related Characters: Berowne (speaker), Rosaline

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.184-215

Explanation and Analysis

Berowne has just given Costard a love letter to deliver to Rosaline. Now, alone on stage, Berowne reflects on how possessed he has become by love, which he finds ironic, since he has previously been so critical of love. He cries out against Cupid with a long list of harsh adjectives suggesting at first Cupid's incompetence and then his power, until Berowne breaks off with "O my little heart!"

He then asks if he is going be "a corporal" in Cupid's army, playing with the common notion that love is like a battlefield. In this metaphor and Berowne's context, love is combative, violent, and destructive, and Berowne is just a foot soldier following the orders of a higher power. He goes on to call love a "plague," and we can remember Boyet's description above of a lover as "infected." Berowne believes he is inflicted by love because of his neglect of Cupid's "almighty dreadful little might," an incredible phrase which simultaneously shows Cupid's power and small size. Berowne ends by admitting to himself that he does love Rosaline, and must act accordingly: "I will love, write, sigh, pray, sue, groan." This list of single-syllable actions shows rhythmically the repeating, dramatic nature of the different steps in the course of falling in love. Berowne also says that some men must love women like Rosaline, and others must love less-esteemed women, and the steps and trouble he must take to woo Rosaline are more difficult because she is a member of a royal court.

> By heaven, that thou art fair is most infallible, true that thou art beauteous, truth itself that thou art lovely. More fairer than fair, beautiful than beauteous, truer than truth itself, have commiseration on thy heroical vassal. . . . Shall I command thy love? I may. Shall I enforce thy love? I could. Shall I entreat thy love? I will.

Related Characters: Boyet, Armado (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.1.68-89

Explanation and Analysis

The Princess and her train are on a hunt, when Costard enters with a letter he claims is from Berowne and for Rosaline. However, Costard mistakenly delivers Armado's letter meant for Jacquenetta. Boyet receives the letter and quickly recognizes Costard's error, but he still reads the letter out loud to the bemusement of the Princess and the other women. The excerpt contains the beginning of the long letter, and another line towards the end.

Armado's letter is ridiculous, over-wrought, and verbose. In the first sentences we see the roundabout way in which he declares Jacqueneta's beauty. His lines say that she is the superlative of beauty, fairness, and loveliness, but at the same time they are so convoluted that they say nothing at all. The ladies ultimately mock him extensively for his letter, saying that it shows he is much less intelligent than he

thinks he is. The final lines excerpted are from later in the speech, in which he finally makes a direct request for Jacqueneta's love. However, he still does so in an over-the-top way. The "shall I... I may/could/shall" phrasing is pure dramatic excess, and more evidence that the over-educated Armado (whom we know seems less intelligent than his page, Mote) thinks much too highly of himself.

If love make me forsworn, how shall I swear to love?
Ah, never faith could hold, if not to beauty vowed!
Though to myself forsworn, to thee I'll faithful prove.
. . .
If knowledge be the mark, to know thee shall suffice.
Well-learned is that tongue that well can thee commend.
All ignorant that soul that sees thee without wonder;
Which is to me some praise that I thy parts admire.
. . .
Celestial as thou art, O pardon love this wrong,
That sings heaven's praise with such an earthly tongue.

Related Characters: Nathaniel, Berowne (speaker), Rosaline

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.2.126-143

Explanation and Analysis

This scene begins with Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Dull discussing the Princess's hunt and their own intelligence, the first two making fun of Dull for not knowing latin. Then Jacquenetta and Costard enter, with the latter carrying the letter he thinks is from Armado for Jacquenetta, but is actually the letter from Berowne for Rosaline. The excerpt here contains three sections of the letter, which contains verses of love poetry. Berowne attempts to use poetry, rhyme, and skillful language to woo Rosaline, but as is becoming common in this play, the words reach the wrong audience with the wrong effect.

In the opening lines, he assures Rosaline that although he is breaking the oath he made with Ferdinand by talking to her, he will never break oaths to her and will always be faithful. Here Berowne seems aware of the irony in pledging his faithfulness while simultaneously breaking a vow. In the next section, Berowne says that knowing Rosaline will give him all the knowledge he needs, and that "well-learned is the tongue" that can properly praise her. This point foreshadows the argument he will make in the next scene, and that will justify everyone breaking the oath: true knowledge and study comes from women and love as much as from books and fasting. Finally, Berowne concludes his poem by apologizing for describing such a "celestial" woman with his meager "earthly tongue," a common poetic technique in which the author acknowledges that his or her subject matter is beyond mortal capacity for language.

Act 4, Scene 3 Quotes

I will not love. If I do, hang me. I' faith, I will not. O, but her eye! By this light, but for her eye I would not love her; yes, for her two eyes. Well, I do nothing in the world but lie, and lie in my throat. By heaven, I do love, and it hath taught me to rhyme, and to be melancholy.

Related Characters: Berowne (speaker), Rosaline

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.3.8-13

Explanation and Analysis

Berowne enters and begins this scene alone, launching into a soliloquy which he delivers in prose. It is notable that he speaks in prose here, since we have just heard Nathaniel read his love poetry in the preceding scene. In these lines, Berowne considers his love for Rosaline. He at first refuses to love, saying "If I do, hang me." He plays on the common trope that love is dangerous, and that his love is killing him.

But Berowne then exclaims, remembering Rosaline's beautiful eyes. If only it weren't for those eyes, Berowne might have been able to escape her love. He then admits to himself that he has been lying to himself and to the world. He swears that, "By heaven, I do love, and it hath taught me to rhyme, and to be melancholy." Despite his desire and refusals to fall in love, he cannot help that he has fallen for Rosaline and her eyes. He has become a stereotypical lover, writing poetry and possessed by the melancholy that overtakes those who are denied their beloveds. Berowne finishes his speech when he sees Ferdinand coming and decides to hide.

Now step I forth to whip hypocrisy.
Ah, good my liege, I pray thee pardon me.
Good heart, what grace hast thou thus to reprove
These worms for loving, that art most in love?
. . .
O, what a scene of fool'ry have I seen,
Of sighs, of groans, of sorrow, and of teen!
O me, with what strict patience have I sat,
To see a king transformed to a gnat!
To see great Hercules whipping a gig,
And profound Solomon to tune a jig,
And Nestor play at pushpin with the boys,
And critic Timon laugh at idle toys.

Related Characters: Berowne (speaker), Ferdinand

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.3.158-178

Explanation and Analysis

Ferdinand is scolding Dumaine and Longaville for violating their oaths, but Berowne, who has been hiding, knows that Ferdinand has also violated the oath. Here, he comes out of hiding to "whip hypocrisy" and criticize the King and his other friends. He asks Ferdinand how he can call out Dumaine and Longaville for loving when he himself is in love as well.

In the second part excerpted, Berowne speaks of the foolishness he sees in the other men, saying that until now he has sat patiently. But now he has seen "a king transformed to a gnat," and "great Hercules whipping a gig," as well as other historical figures acting ridiculously. By comparing them to great, heroic men in pitiful states, Berowne suggests that love has made Ferdinand, Longaville, Dumaine act like fools and hypocrites. Of course, the irony here is thick, as we know that Berowne himself is in love too! Just as he tells them he feels betrayed, Costard and Jacquenetta will enter and reveal that Berowne, too, is in love and has broken the oath.

O, we have made a vow to study, lords,
And in that vow we have forsworn our books.
For when would you, my liege, or you, or you,
In leaden contemplation have found out
Such fiery numbers as the prompting eyes
Of beauty's tutors have enriched you with?
Other slow arts entirely keep the brain
And therefore, finding barren practicers,
Scarce show a harvest of their heavy toil.
But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,
Lives not alone immured in the brain,
But with the motion of all elements
Courses as swift as thought in every power,
And gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices.
It adds a precious seeing to the eye.
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind.
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound,
When the suspicious head of theft is stopped.
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails.
. . .
Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were tempered with love's sighs.
. . .
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.

Related Characters: Berowne (speaker), Ferdinand, Longaville, Dumaine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.3.312-347

Explanation and Analysis

Ferdinand, Longaville, Dumaine, and Berowne have all discovered that each other man has fallen in love with a woman and is temped to break the vow; Berowne's letter for Rosaline, mis-delivered by Costard to Jacqueneta, has also been revealed. Realizing that everyone is in love and wants to break the oath, King Ferdinand asks Berowne to use his intelligence and clever language to get them out of it with their honor still intact.

Excerpted is Berowne's clever argument, which allows the men to forget about their vow to work and study for three years while keeping good conscience. He says that they "have made a vow to study" and have given up their books. But this practice is responsible and even in line with their vow, he argues, since the men could never have learned

from their books what they learned from the "prompting eyes / Of beauty's tutors." Love, he says, much more than the other arts or anything else, leads to usable, important knowledge that cannot be learned anywhere else. Love, seen in a lady's eyes, teaches everything they need to know. At one point, he suggest that no poet ever wrote "until his ink were tempered with love's sighs." Women, he says, are the "books, the arts, the academes / That show, contain, and nourish all the world."

This argument presents a stark reversal from the initial vow and Ferdinand's apparent position at the start of the play, which suggested that women were only sexual distractions from true work and study. Now that they are in love, the men justify their oath-breaking by saying that women are the best tutors for true knowledge. What's more, they *are* the books, the arts, and the academies that sustain the world and the pursuit of knowledge.

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

Related Characters: Mote (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.1.38-39

Explanation and Analysis

Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Dull have been conversing in some Latin, making fun of one another, and bragging about their intelligence as they usually do. But here, Mote makes a clever aside to Costard, implying that Holofernes and Nathaniel aren't as smart as they think they are. Again, we see Mote's wittiness and brilliance on display. In this play, we see constant reversals of who is supposed to be intelligent and witty and who actually is. The educated men are ridiculous, and Mote (a servant) and the women (supposed to be less intelligent because of their gender) demonstrate the most wit and skill with language in the play. Mote hasn't had access to as much education as the other men (who've had access to "a great feast of languages") but he still knows more than the "scraps" they've taken.

> The very all of all is—but sweetheart, I do implore secrecy—that the King would have me present the Princess, sweet chuck, with some delightful ostentation, or show, or pageant, or antic, or firework.
>
> . . .
>
> Sir, you shall present before her the Nine Worthies.
>
> . . .
>
> Where will you find men worthy enough to present them?

Related Characters: Armado, Holofernes, Nathaniel (speaker), The Princess of France

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.1.109-125

Explanation and Analysis

After failing to present himself as intellectual, Armado tells Holofernes and Nathaniel that Ferdinand is planning on making some sort of theatrical production to impress the Princess. This production (or "delightful ostentation, or show, or pageant, or antic, or firework") will make a play within the play, and will mirror and (self-ironically) mock *Love's Labor's Lost*itself. Armado asks what he should prepare and present.

Holofernes suggests that they present "the Nine Worthies," a pageant of nine famous, heroic men from ancient and Biblical to medieval times. This production follows the pattern which has developed in the play, where men, feeling self-conscious or emasculated by love, remind themselves of the great men of history and lore who have loved before them. Nathaniel then asks where they will ever find men "worthy enough" to play the Nine Worthies, prompting Holofernes to cast himself, Armado, Nathaniel, Costard, and Mote in the play, noting that he will play three parts himself. This production is ultimately a hysterical failure which prompts the women to say that, of course, these men were *not* worthy to portray the Worthies.

Act 5, Scene 2 Quotes

> We are wise girls to mock our lovers so.
>
> They are worse fools to purchase mocking so.

Related Characters: The Princess of France, Rosaline (speaker), Ferdinand, Berowne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.2.63-64

Explanation and Analysis

The Princess, Katherine, Rosaline, and Maria have all received gifts from the men courting them. The ladies proceed to make fun of the gifts and the men, continuing their pattern of constantly displaying their wits, their intelligence, and their desire for humor. Here the Princess says that they are "wise girls to mock [their] lovers so," reversing the stereotypical role of women in courtship. Rosaline responds that the men are "worse fools to purchase mocking so," at once reinforcing the Princess's claim that the women are wise and adding an insult to the men. She goes on to joke how she wishes she had an opportunity to make Berowne fawn after her and do ridiculous tasks, reveling in the possibility of more mockery. Below, the women will devise a scheme to further make fun of and embarrass their gentleman suitors, continuing to one-up the men in terms of wit and levity.

> The gallants shall be tasked,
> For, ladies, we will every one be masked,
> And not a man of them shall have the grace,
> Despite of suit, to see a lady's face.
> Hold, Rosaline, this favor thou shalt wear,
> And then the King will court thee for his dear.
> Hold, take thou this, my sweet, and give me thine
> So shall Berowne take me for Rosaline.

Related Characters: The Princess of France (speaker), Rosaline, Ferdinand, Berowne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.2.133-140

Explanation and Analysis

As the women talk about how foolish their lovers are, Boyet enters and informs them that the men plan to come in disguised as Russian ambassadors. With this knowledge, the Princess concocts a plan to "task" (make fun of) the "gallants." The ladies will all wear masks, and will refuse to show the men their faces. They will also switch gifts, so that when the men enter, they will mistake the women for each other and court the wrong people. This plan will result in embarrassment for the men, who will whisper private words of love to women they aren't in love with. The effect of her plan, says the Princess a few lines later, is to mess up the plan of the men, and to mock them (in merriment) for the trick that they planned to play on the women.

> White-handed mistress, one sweet word with thee.
>
> Honey, and milk, and sugar—there is three.
>
> Nay then, two treys, an if you grow so nice,
> Metheglin, wort, and malmsey. Well run, dice!
> There's half a dozen sweets.
>
> Seventh sweet, adieu.
> Since you can cog, I'll play no more with you.
>
> One word in secret.
>
> Let it not be sweet.
>
> Thou grievest my gall.
>
> Gall! Bitter.
>
> Therefore meet.

Related Characters: Berowne, The Princess of France (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.2.246-257

Explanation and Analysis

Here Berowne, disguised as a Russian, is speaking to the Princess of France, whom he believes to be Rosaline. The two exchange witty quips, and the Princess, whose plan is working flawlessly, outwits and and outspeaks her suitor. Berowne begins by calling her "white-handed mistress," white (along with pink or red) being one of the classical colors evoked in European love poems. He then requests "one sweet word" with her.

The quick-witted Princess uses his language against him, listing "honey, and milk, and sugar" as three literally sweet words, denying his intention. When Berowne tries to match her by naming three more sweets to make half a dozen, she responds cleverly with, "seventh sweet, adieu," continually shutting him down. The two complete each other's lines and rhymes in shorthanded verbal sparring, trying to outwit and flirt with one another. Beyond the humor in the puns and

jokes, the scene is also funny because Berowne is flirting with the wrong woman.

Write "Lord have mercy on us" on those three.
They are infected; in their hearts it lies.
They have the plague, and caught it of your eyes.

Related Characters: Berowne (speaker), Ferdinand, Longaville, Dumaine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.2.457-459

Explanation and Analysis

The confused men have left in their Russian disguises and returned as themselves; the women have continued to laugh at their expense, and slowly hinted that they knew it was the men in the Russian disguises all along. The women then reveal the trick they themselves have played by switching gifts. Embarrassed, here Berowne admits to the Russian trick and professes his true love for Rosaline. He says that he is sick, playing on the classic trope of being love-sick. He says that his friends, too, are in love, and that the three (Ferdinand, Longaville, and Dumaine) are "infected." They are afflicted with the "plague" (remember, Berowne has characterized love as a plague earlier in the play), and caught it from the eyes of their beloved, the classical method that love is transferred (think love at first sight). It is the eyes of the ladies that infected the men with love, and the eyes that Berowne has previously cited as being the great tutors of knowledge that enable them to justify breaking the oath.

Judas I am—

A Judas!

Not Iscariot, sir.
Judas I am, yclept Maccabaeus.

Judas Maccabaeus clipped is plain Judas.

A kissing traitor.—How art thou proved Judas?

Judas I am—

The more shame for you, Judas.

Related Characters: Holofernes, Dumaine, Berowne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.2.662-670

Explanation and Analysis

The presentation of the Nine Worthies - a play within the play- is underway, and it is going terribly. Here Holofernes enters as Judas Maccabeus, a famous leader from the Old Testament, but introduces himself only with "Judas I am." This introduction allows Dumaine to make fun of Holofernes, shouting out "A Judas!" and implying that Holofernes is playing Judas Iscariot, the famous traitor to Jesus in the New Testament. Though he tries to correct Dumaine, Holofernes is interrupted again with the assertion that Judas without Maccabeus is definitely the other Judas, and Berowne interjects that he must be a "kissing traitor" (as Judas Iscariot famously betrayed Jesus with a kiss).

This interaction is a prime example of how poorly the presentation of the Nine Worthies is orchestrated, and the continual need of the male characters to assert their wit. The women, who already know that they have the superior wits, tend to wait for the actors to finish before interjecting their ironic praises and jokes.

God save you, madam.

Welcome, Marcade,
But that thou interruptest our merriment.

I am sorry, madam, for the news I bring
Is heavy in my tongue. The King your father—

Dead, for my life.

Even so. My tale is told.

Worthies away! The scene begins to cloud.

Related Characters: Monsieur Marcade, The Princess of France, Berowne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.2.790-797

Explanation and Analysis

Everyone has become completely captivated by the play and their desire to enjoy its humor. Costard and Armado are preparing to duel, and the audience members (within the play) are joking that the characters which Costard and Armado are playing are going to fight. But Marcade suddenly interrupts the pure merriment and comedic high point with a more serious, tragic note: the King of France (the Princess's father) is dead. We can note that before he can say this news, the Princess prophetically predicts that he is "dead, for my life." Upon this knowledge, Berowne ends the play within the play and banishes the actors with "Worthies away! The scene begins to cloud." This line can be seen as meta-theatric, as the very scene in *Love's Labor's Lost* has become clouded with bad news and the introduction of a tragic element. Here we also begin to get the indication that this play will not end in the classic comedic form of happy marriages with all loose ends tied up.

We have received your letters full of love;
Your favors, the ambassadors of love;
And in our maiden council rated them
As courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy,
As bombast and as lining to the time.
But more devout than this in our respects
Have we not been, and therefore met your loves
In their own fashion, like a merriment.

Our letters, madam, showed much more than jest.

So did our looks.

We did not quote them so.

Related Characters: The Princess of France, Dumaine, Longaville, Rosaline (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.2.852-862

Explanation and Analysis

Ferdinand begs the Princess to not let the bad news interrupt their courtship and love, and Berowne explains that the men have broken their oaths for the sake of love. But here, the Princess explains that the women never took the courtship seriously. They received the love letters and the gifts—"ambassadors of love," typical tokens that might signal affections—but the women believed in this case they merely indicated "pleasant jest, and courtesy." For this reason, the women have met the love from the men in what they believed to be the fashion of the courtship—"like a merriment." In other words, the women here claim they believed the men have only been joking the whole time, framing the entire romance as comedy instead of genuine passion. The men all quickly respond that they meant "much more than jest" and were attempting to be genuine.

Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Berowne,
Before I saw you; and the world's large tongue
Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks,
Full of comparisons and wounding flouts,
Which you on all estates will execute
That lie within the mercy of your wit.
To weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain,
And therewithal to win me, if you please,
Without the which I am not to be won,
You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick, and still converse
With groaning wretches; and your task shall be,
With all the fierce endeavor of your wit,
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.

To move wild laughter in the throat of death?
It cannot be, it is impossible.
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.

Related Characters: Rosaline, Berowne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.914-930

Explanation and Analysis

Ferdinand, Dumaine, and Longaville have asked the Princess of France, Katherine, and Maria for their love, and each woman has given a similar response: wait a year, and then try courting me (since the Princess needs a year to mourn her father and her ladies follow suit). Rosaline gives Berowne a longer, more specific answer, excerpted here.

Rosaline says that she knows Berowne has a reputation for

a sharp wit and a tendency for "comparisons and wounding flouts," puns and jokes and insults. In order to put this wit to good use and "weed this wormwood from" Berowne's "fruitfull brain" (that is, get the meanness out of Berowne's intelligent mind), Rosaline instructs him to spend the next year visiting hospitals. There he will converse with those who are too sick to speak (speechless sick), and use his wit to try and make them laugh and smile. She says outright that only by this task will he win her heart.

Berowne responds that it is impossible "to move wild laughter in the throat of death," and says that "mirth cannot move a soul in agony." The merging of humor and the darker, more serious matters of illness and death will have the effect of dulling the sharper edges of Berowne's wit and making him more suitable for Rosaline. We can also note that this "impossibility" has been demonstrated possible by Shakespeare, who has introduced a death in the end of a comedy and has delayed the typical comedic ending by a year filled with sadness.

> Our wooing doth not end like an old play.
> Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy
> Might well have made our sport a comedy.

Related Characters: Berowne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.2.947-949

Explanation and Analysis

These lines of Berowne are rife with meta-theatricality. As the play ends, the characters within the play recognize that they are being denied the ending that is typically promised to characters within a comedy: marriage. Shakespearean comedy can most simply be thought of as a machine for marriages. Shakespeare sets up problems and confusions, hilarity ensues, and in the end, he makes as many marriages as possible happen.

But here, the "wooing doth not end like an old play." Berowne comments that his ending is not like classic Shakespearean comedy. What's more, his next line, "Jack hath not Jill," seems to reference *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another Shakespearean comedy written around the same time as *Love's Labor's Lost*. In *Midsummer*, the play ends with multiple marriages, and midway through the play, this ending is hinted at with the line "Jack shall have Jill." The typical comedic structure has been subverted and delayed by the ladies and the year they request. Berowne even says that the ladies have made their sport (wooing) a comedy, playing on the word *comedy*as a name of genre and a word to describe the ridiculousness that has taken place during their attempts at courtship.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Ferdinand, the king of Navarre, speaks to his three lords Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine, about his plan to establish an academy at Navarre. Speaking of the importance of fame and renown, by which one's name may live on after death, he reminds his lords of their promise to spend three years studying with him.

Ferdinand is concerned with the serious business of study for the purpose of attaining glory. He has not time for frivolous play and pleasure (or so he thinks).

Longaville and Dumaine each agree to this promise and sign their names to the written agreement the king gives them. Berowne, however takes issue with the strictness of the agreement, which forbids them from seeing a woman for the three-year period, mandates that they fast once a week and otherwise eat one meal a day, and demands that they only sleep three hours per night.

Ferdinand's oath forbids various indulgences of bodily desires so that one may devote oneself fully to the work of studying. The oath views women and love as mere distractions from work. Additionally, women are excluded from Ferdinand's ideal academy.

Ferdinand says that Berowne has already sworn an oath to this effect. Berowne says that he would gladly study with the king for three years, but will not abstain from women, food, or sleep. He cleverly reasons that excessive studying is not good. The king comments that Berowne has obviously read well in order to reason so well against reading.

Using his cleverness with words, Berowne is able to reason against excessive studying. Paradoxically, as the king points out, Berowne must be well educated in order to launch such a clever argument against education.

Berowne continues to argue against the strict requirements of the oath, but when the king tells him to leave if he won't swear by it, he relents. He reads some of the oath out loud. It states that no woman shall come within a mile of the king's court, or else her tongue shall be cut out. And if any man is seen talking to a woman, he will endure some kind of public shame yet to be determined.

The oath is an official written document that binds Ferdinand and his court to their promise and spells out punishments for those who break it. The oath excludes women from the court, and also assumes that men would only spend time with women for romantic or sexual purposes.

Berowne informs the king that he himself will have to break this oath immediately, as the daughter of the king of France is set to visit his court on official business. Ferdinand admits he had forgotten about this, and says that the princess' visit will be allowed as an exception, "on mere necessity." Berowne is amused and says that the oath will be easy to uphold if one can violate it so easily because of "necessity." He signs his name to the agreement.

Berowne sees how easy it is for the king to slip out of the official written oath because of "necessity." The fact that Ferdinand forgot about the imminent visit of the princess suggests he may not be as clever as he thinks he is.

Berowne asks if there will be any entertainment for them, confined to the court for three years. Ferdinand says that he has a Spaniard named Armado who sings and plays music well. Longaville says that between the entertainment of Armado and the clown Costard, the three years will pass quickly.

Ferdinand wants mostly to put aside frivolity in his ideal academy, but still arranges for there to be some entertainment. He seems to have at least some awareness of the importance of balancing work and pleasure.

A constable named Dull enters bearing a letter, along with Costard. He gives the letter, which is from Armado, to the king. Costard says the letter has to do with him and a woman named Jaquenetta. As Ferdinand reads the letter aloud, Costard interjects his own comments, attempting to defend himself. The letter (written in overly wrought, unnecessarily complicated language) says that he saw Costard conversing with Jaquenetta.

Written language serves important roles in the plot. Here, the letter effectively convicts Costard. Costard tries to use his cleverness to get out of the crime and defend himself. His only "crime", though, was conversing with a woman, showing to what degree Ferdinand seeks to exclude women from his all-male court.

Ferdinand reminds Costard that it is illegal to spend time with a wench, and Costard replies he was with a damsel. The king says that damsels count, too, and Costard says Jaquenetta was actually a virgin. This makes no difference, so Costard changes his mind and calls Jaquenetta a maid. The king doesn't care what he calls her, and sentences Costard to a week of fasting, with only bran and water. Ferdinand sends Berowne to take Costard to Armado, who is to be in charge of carrying out Costard's punishment.

Costard tries to get out of his punishment by going through all the different words he knows for a young woman. For the king, though, these different words don't change the real thing they actually refer to. This exchange foreshadows the rest of the play, as much of the play's comedy revolves around the importance of which particular words characters use.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Armado asks his page Mote what it means when a man is melancholy. The boy answers that it means the man is sad. Armado tells him sadness and melancholy are the same thing, and calls Mote "tender juvenal." The page calls Armado "tough signior," and the two argue over the appropriateness of their nicknames for each other.

Armado and Mote argue comically over the particularities of the words they use, from the difference between sadness and melancholy to their nicknames for each other. Mote is easily able to keep pace with the wit of his social superior Armado.

Armado and Mote go off on a digression of wordplay. Armado says that he has promised to study for three years with Ferdinand, and Mote says that this will be easy. He asks Armado some simple math questions (including what one plus two is), which Armado cannot solve.

Mote shows his intelligence by matching wits with Armado and toying with him with some simple arithmetic. His intelligence seems to be a natural cleverness, in contrast to the learning Armado and the other nobles seek through scholarship and books.

Armado confesses that he is in love with a "base wench." He asks Mote to name some "great men" who have also been in love. The page names Hercules and Samson. Armado asks who Samson was in love with, and Mote says that he loved a woman with a "sea-water green" complexion. Armado says that his beloved has a white and red complexion. Mote tells him to be careful, because with such a woman one cannot know when she is frightened or embarrassed, because blushing or turning pale does not alter her normal appearance.

Because the unrestrained passion of love robs one of self-control, Armado fears that love makes him weak or less of a man. So, he begs Mote to remind him of some strong men who have also been in love. Mote continues to cleverly tease his master in their conversation about Jacquenetta's complexion.

Armado asks Mote about a ballad concerning a king's love for a beggar, because he wishes to justify his love with some kind of a precedent. He finally identifies the object of his love as Jaquenetta, whom he saw with Costard. Armado tells Mote to sing to cheer him up, but they are interrupted when Costard, Dull, and Jaquenetta enter.

Armado again wishes for some encouragement that his love does not take away from his status as a noble, strong man.

Dull informs Armado that he is to oversee the punishment of Costard, and that he is escorting Jaquenetta back to the park, where she is allowed to be a "deymaid" (dairy maid). Armado blushes when he sees Jaquenetta and tells her that he loves her and will pay her a visit. She seems very uninterested in him.

Armado's thoughts about his love have been rather self-centered; he hasn't stopped to think whether the object of his affections has any feelings for him (which she currently doesn't appear to).

Dull leaves with Jaquenetta. Costard says he hopes he can begin fasting on a full stomach, and asks Armado not to imprison him. Mote takes Costard away, leaving Armado by himself. Armado says he loves the very ground Jaquenetta steps upon and calls love "a devil." He takes some comfort in the fact that even Hercules and Samson were in love, and says that he will "turn sonnet" and pour all of his affections into writing.

Costard continues with his clever joking, asking if he can eat a big meal before having to fast. Armado is powerfully affected by love and denigrates it as a negative experience. Nonetheless, he takes comfort in the examples of strong men who have also loved. Love inspires Armado to write poetry.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

The princess of France enters with her attendants: Boyet, Katherine, Rosaline, and Maria. Complimenting her beauty, Boyet reminds the princess to be charming toward Ferdinand, as she has been sent to negotiate an exchange of land on behalf of her father. The princess, having heard of Ferdinand's vow to ban women from his court, sends Boyet ahead to tell Ferdinand that she has come to see him "on serious business."

Aside from Jacquenetta, the first main female characters now enter the play, in a group of four complementing the foursome of Ferdinand and his three lords. It's noteworthy that the princess is here "on serious business," though the supposedly serious Ferdinand will, because of his love, make the majority of her visit one filled with jokes, frivolities, and entertainment.

The princess asks her attendants about the lords that have agreed to Ferdinand's vow to study for three years without women. Maria describes Longaville as wise, virtuous, and "glorious in arms." Katherine says that Dumaine is "a well-accomplished youth" with much wit. Rosaline tells the princess about Berowne, whom she describes as skilled with words, witty, and merry. Hearing such praise, the princess wonders whether her three attendants are in love with these three men.

The king's men have a reputation for their intelligence and quick wit. Visiting Navarre for important business, the princess is worried that her ladies might be distracted by their loves (similar to Ferdinand's worry that his men would be distracted from their studies by women).

Boyet returns and tells the princess that Ferdinand plans to have her and her attendants camp out in the field outside of his court, as if they were attacking enemies. Ferdinand then enters with Longaville, Dumaine, and Berowne. Ferdinand welcomes the princess, but she is offended at not being allowed into his actual court.

Ferdinand refuses to make an exception from his rule to keep women out of his court, even for the serious diplomatic business of the visiting princess.

Ferdinand apologizes and explains that he has "sworn an oath," about which the princess teases him, taking advantage of his dilemma: he wants to welcome her as a good host, but cannot violate his own oath. Meanwhile, Rosaline and Berowne flirt with each other, having recognized each other from a dance. They trade snappy, witty remarks with each other.

The princess displays her wit by teasing Ferdinand. Despite the important business of the princess' visit, Rosaline and Berowne immediately begin flirting with each other, testing each other's wit in their quick back-and-forth.

Ferdinand reads a letter from the princess' father offering a sum of money for the territory of Aquitaine. He says that it is only half as much as he requires. He says that the princess' "fair self" would make him accept the proposed deal, were it not so unreasonable. The princess insists that her father already paid Ferdinand the other half of the fee he desires. Boyet says that the papers proving this exchange will arrive tomorrow.

Ferdinand already starts to mix business and pleasure, as he notices and compliments the princess's "fair" appearance while discussing the territory of Acquitaine. Until the arrival of the papers that Boyet describes, the characters will have time to pursue their other, less official interests of love and entertainment.

Ferdinand says he will be reasonable when he sees these papers. He promises to make the princess welcome and comfortable outside of his court, even though she is "denied fair harbour in my house," then leaves. Berowne trades more witty quips with Rosaline, and Dumaine then asks Boyet what Katherine's name is, calling her "a gallant lady," before leaving. Longaville asks about Maria, whom he thinks is "a most sweet lady," then exits. Berowne asks Boyet for Rosaline's name and then leaves.

Ferdinand holds in his conviction to keep the women out of his court. However, his efforts to prevent love seem to be doomed to fail, as his men are already expressing interest in the princess' ladies.

Maria tells Boyet about Berowne, who is a constant jokester. They trade witticisms, until the princess tells them to stop "this civil war of wits" and save their cleverness for Ferdinand and his men. Boyet tells the princess that Ferdinand seemed to be in love with her, as evidenced by the way he spoke to and looked at her. Rosaline calls Boyet a "love-monger" and Maria calls him "Cupid's grandfather."

The princess and her ladies are extremely clever and good with words. The princess encourages them to save their wit for Ferdinand and his men, whom she plans to tease and toy with. The princess's serious diplomatic mission has quickly turned into a merry meeting full of love and jokes.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Armado tells his page Mote to free Costard and bring him so that Armado can have him take a **love letter** to Jacquenetta for him. Mote asks if Armado is going to try to woo Jacquenetta with song and dance, saying that such a strategy has seduced many women. Mote sings a line from a song about a "hobby horse," and Armado angrily asks if Mote called Jacquenetta a hobby horse. Mote jokes that perhaps she is a "hackney" (a horse for hire, but also a term for a prostitute).

Armado's personal affections for Jacquenetta trump his official duty of carrying out Costard's punishment. Armado and Mote attempt to come up with a strategy to seduce Jacquenetta, showing how much work goes into the business of love. Mote continues to display his astute skill with words.

Mote says that Armado loves Jacquenetta "by, in, and without" his heart: his heart cannot come *by* her, his heart is *in* love with her, and he is *out* of heart that he doesn't have her. Armado sends Mote to get Costard, and Mote says he will go "as swift as lead." Armado is confused and says that lead is a slow, heavy metal, but Mote reasons that lead shot from cannons and guns is fast, and Armado is delighted with his cleverness.

Mote uses Armado's love as another opportunity to display his quick wit and skill with wordplay. Armado is impressed by Mote's intelligence, which seems to surpass that of his master, suggesting again that book learning may not be superior to native cleverness and intelligence.

Mote leaves, and Armado compliments his "acute" wit. Mote returns with Costard and Armado greets him with the Latin greeting "salve," which Costard confuses with "l'envoi," a French term for parting words or an ending to a speech. The two disagree over these terms and try to remember a fable as an example of the usage of the terms.

The language Armado uses to try to convey his wishes to Costard backfires on him, as Costard is confused by his (overly) learned terms, leading to a comical digression about "salve" and "l'envoi."

Costard tells Armado that he fell over a threshold and broke his shin. Armado tells him to stop talking about his shin and informs him that he has been freed only on the condition that he delivers a **letter** from Armado to Jacquenetta. He gives Costard "remuneration" in the form of a coin for the favor, and then leaves with Mote. Costard examines the coin and thinks that "remuneration" is "a fairer name than 'French crown.'"

Costard comically misunderstands the term "remuneration" as referring to a particular kind of coin rather than payment in general. Despite the slight failures of his language to adequately communicate his thoughts, Armado entrusts the important task of communicating his love to Jacquenetta to his words alone, in a written letter.

Berowne enters and Costard asks him how much a "remuneration" is worth (as if remuneration were the name of a kind of coin). Berowne asks Costard to do him a favor, and Costard agrees. Berowne says he hasn't even told him what the favor is yet. He tells Costard about Rosaline and asks him to deliver her a **letter**.

Costard—with his error about "remuneration" and his agreeing to Berowne's favor before even hearing what it is—fills the role of a clown to compliment the intelligence and wit of Berowne's character.

Berowne gives Costard some money, calling it a "guerdon" (reward). Costard mishears this as "gardon," and exclaims that a "gardon" is worth even more than a "remuneration." He leaves excitedly. Alone on stage, Berowne remarks on how he, who used to be entirely against love, is now in love and under the control of Cupid.

As with the term "remuneration," Costard thinks that "guerdon" is the name of a coin. Berowne feels that he has no control over love, which completely controls him against his will.

Berowne asks if he is now to be "a corporal" in Cupid's army. He refers to his love as a plague that Cupid is punishing him with, and then resigns himself to his feelings, saying, "I will love, write, sigh, pray, sue, groan."

The image of Cupid's army implies that love is a powerful, destructive force. The comparison of love to a plague emphasizes the harm it does. Nonetheless, Berowne resigns himself to love.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

The princess, her ladies, Boyet, and a forester are hunting. The princess says that she and her attendants will return to France soon and asks the forester where they will hunt. The forester says that she will make "the fairest shoot." The princess thinks he is complimenting her beauty and thanks him, but he says he didn't mean it that way.

The princess and the forester offer another example of miscommunication. He meant to describe her shot with a bow as fair, and she assumed that he was intending a witty compliment about her own beauty.

The princess says that she will match her beauty with "merit," by killing a deer "for praise." Costard enters and asks for the "head lady," and "the highest" lady. The princess jokes that it is the tallest lady, with a head. Costard tells the princess that he has a **letter** from Berowne for Rosaline. Boyet takes the **letter** and sees that it is addressed to Jacquenetta.

The more intelligent characters continue to joke with Costard, as the princess pretends to take his language overly literally. Costard foolishly delivers the wrong letter to Rosaline.

Nonetheless, Boyet reads out the **letter**, written by Armado. In over-wrought language, the **letter** describes Jacquenetta's beauty and (in a very roundabout way) confesses Armado's love for Jacquenetta. Armado compares himself to a lion seeking a lamb for prey. The princess laughs at the ridiculous letter. Boyet informs her that Armado is a Spaniard at Ferdinand's court.

Armado's love letter is ridiculously verbose, again making fun of him as being overly "learned." The message and intent of his writing is almost lost in its excessive ornamentation. The clever princess laughs at Armado, because from his writing it is clear he thinks he is much more intelligent than he is.

The princess tells Costard that he has mixed up his **letters**. Everyone but Maria, Rosaline, Boyet, and Costard leaves. Boyet and Rosaline joke about hunting: she says that she is the "shooter," hunting "horns" (cuckolds, men with unfaithful wives, were imagined with horns). Maria joins in the jesting, saying that the princess "strikes at the brow" with her wit.

Boyet, Rosaline, and Maria test their wits with each other by trading quips that pun on various hunting terms with romantic associations such as deer (with "dear") and horns (a symbol of cuckoldry).

Rosaline and Boyet sing part of a song together, and then Rosaline leaves. Maria says that they both "did hit it," i.e. sang accurately. Boyet, Maria, and Costard trade some quips before Boyet and Maria leave. Alone on stage, Costard remarks upon everyone's "sweet jests, most incony vulgar wit." He then laughs at Armado's love for Jacquenetta, calling him "a most pathetical nit."

Maria continues the hunting puns with her comment that Rosaline and Maria "hit it." Costard does his best to join in the wordplay, and is impressed by the French characters' wit. He finds Armado's love ridiculous and uses it as a chance to look down on him and laugh at him.

ACT 4, SCENE 2

A schoolmaster named Holofernes, a curate named Nathaniel, and Dull discuss the princess' recent hunt. Nathaniel and Holofernes intersperse Latin phrases in their conversation. Nathaniel says that the deer the princess killed was a buck, and Holofernes says, "*haud credo*," Latin for "I don't believe so." Dull misunderstands and says that the deer wasn't a *haud credo*, but rather a pricket (a kind of buck).

Nathaniel and Holofernes exemplify traditional, scholarly learning. Their language is very different from that of the lowly constable Dull, who comically misunderstands their Latin.

Holofernes tries to explain that *haud credo* is not a kind of deer, but continues to use Latin phrases, confusing Dull. Nathaniel says that Dull has not been educated, comparing learning to eating and consuming knowledge. He says that Dull's "intellect is not replenished."

Holofernes, however, is also a ridiculous character, unable to communicate simply. His attempts to clarify his Latin with more Latin only confuse Dull more. Nathaniel pokes fun at the dim-witted (and aptly named) Dull.

Dull tests the intelligence of his two companions, asking them a riddle: "What was a month old at Cain's birth that's not five weeks old as yet?" The answer is the moon, and Holofernes gives the answer "Dictynna," an obscure name for the Roman goddess of the moon. Dull continues to misunderstand the Latinate, learned speech of Holofernes and Nathaniel.

Dull tries to match wits with Nathaniel and Holofernes by way of a riddle, but Holofernes knows the answer (which he gives by way of an obscure mythological reference).Dull continues to misunderstand the other two characters' educated, Latinate speech.

Holofernes shares with Nathaniel a short poem he composed about the princess' hunt. Nathaniel compliments it, and Holofernes says that his wit and way with words is "a gift that I have." Nathaniel praises Holofernes again, saying he is glad everyone's children are tutored by him.

Nathaniel and Holofernes are very self-satisfied about their wit and intelligence. However, their traditional learning is only one kind of intelligence in the play, and they will later find themselves outwitted.

Jacquenetta and Costard enter. She gives Nathaniel a **letter** that Costard gave her, that is supposedly from Armado, and asks Nathaniel to read it. Quoting lines of Latin, Holofernes looks at the **letter** and exclaims that it contains verses of poetry. Nathaniel reads the **letter**, which is a poem praising someone's beauty. It is the letter from Berowne to Rosaline.

Costard has foolishly delivered Berowne's love letter to Jacquenetta rather than Rosaline. In the letter, Berowne tries to woo Rosaline with his clever, skillful writing. However, like much of the language in the play, his words have not reached their intended audience in the way he wished.

In the poem, Berowne says that though he will break his oath to Ferdinand, he will be faithful to Rosaline. He says that if the point of the oath is knowledge, he will gain enough knowledge by knowing Rosaline, and says, "well-learned is that tongue that well can thee commend." The poem concludes by apologizing to Rosaline for describing her "celestial" beauty with "an earthly tongue."

Berowne's poem cleverly reasons his way out of Ferdinand's oath and compliments Rosaline through some wordplay. Love has inspired his writing and also his wit.

Holofernes says that Nathaniel read the poem's meter wrong, and examines it. He reads the top of the **letter** and sees that it is addressed to Rosaline, from Berowne. He tells Jacquenetta to bring the **letter** to Ferdinand, and she and Costard exit to do this.

Holofernes is overly pedantic, and wants to examine the poem's meter. He sends the letter on its way to the king, where Berowne's own language will come back to haunt him.

Holofernes asks Nathaniel what he thought of the poem. He says it had good handwriting. He invites Nathaniel to a dinner, where he will "prove those verses to be very unlearned, neither savoring of poetry, wit, not invention." He invites Dull, as well.

Holofernes wittily jokes that the best thing he can say about the poem is it was written with good handwriting. He wishes to continue to show off his intelligence at a dinner with Nathaniel and Dull.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

Alone, Berowne considers his love for Rosaline, saying, "it kills me." He swears he will not love her, but then remembers her eyes. He realizes that he cannot help but love, and that love "hath taught me to rhyme and to be melancholy." He sees Ferdinand approaching and hides.

Berowne considers his love a negative thing, one that only brings him pain. However, he is powerless to resist his love and realizes that it has at least inspired him to write poetry.

Ferdinand enters and reads a poem he has written, praising the princess' beauty and expressing his love for her. Then, the king hears someone coming and hides. Longaville enters and laments that he will have to break his oath. Ferdinand and Berowne both hear him read part of a poem to Maria, before he tears the paper up in frustration, resolving to write her something in prose instead.

Ferdinand and Longaville both find themselves equally unable to resist their love, despite their earlier vow not to socialize with women and not to waste time with pleasure and enjoyment.

Longaville reads another poem he has written, which justifies his love in spite of his oath by saying that he swore not love any woman, but that Maria is a goddess. Then, Longaville sees someone coming and hides. Berowne, Ferdinand, and Longaville each all overhear as Dumaine enters, bemoaning his love for Katherine. He describes Katherine's beauty as Berowne makes mocking comments to himself.

Longaville's poem uses clever wordplay to get around the wording of the oath. Dumaine, like the other three men, cannot help but love one of the French women. Berowne cleverly pokes fun at Dumaine.

Dumaine says that Katherine causes a fever in his blood and then reads a sonnet he has written for her. Dumaine is upset that he is breaking his oath, and wishes that Ferdinand, Berowne, and Longaville were in love, too. Just then, Longaville comes out of hiding and chastises Dumaine for his love. Then, the king comes out of hiding and criticizes Longaville for loving Maria.

Dumaine implicitly compares love to a sickness or disease, emphasizing the harm it does and how powerless lovers are to resist love. Ferdinand and Longaville both act as though they are unaffected by love, though each is only hiding his true feelings.

Ferdinand scolds both Dumaine and Longaville for violating their oaths, but then Berowne comes forth "to whip hypocrisy." He criticizes all of the others, including the king. He calls them all fools and says that he has now seen "great Hercules whipping a gig, / And profound Solomon to tune a jig, / And Nestor play at pushpin with the boys, / And critic Timon laugh at idle toys."

Berowne cleverly tries to criticize the others for their hypocrisy, while he is of course being hypocritical himself. He speaks of how love has made the men into fools, comparing them to great male heroes reduced to pitiful states.

Berowne says that he feels betrayed and calls the others inconstant. Then, Jacquenetta and Costard enter, carrying Berowne's **letter**. Berowne tries to leave, but Ferdinand stops him. Costard says that he and Jacquenetta have proof of treason. Ferdinand asks Berowne to read the **letter**. Berowne sees what it is and tears it up, telling Ferdinand he doesn't need to worry about what it said.

Berowne's own words, captured in a letter, now come back to harm him. His cleverness can't get him out of this situation, so he does his best to tear up the evidence of his own love for Rosaline.

Dumaine grabs the torn pieces of paper and puts them back together, seeing that it is Berowne's handwriting. Berowne confesses that he is also in love. He says that the king and all his men "are pickpurses in love, and we deserve to die." Berowne shoos Jacquenetta and Costard away. They exit.

The very men who swore themselves off of women have now all, ironically, fallen helplessly in love, showing how foolish it is to try to reject or resist love entirely.

Berowne says that it is hopeless to try to uphold the oath, and asks Ferdinand and the others to break it with him. He describes his love for Rosaline and how beautiful she is. The king says that Rosaline is nothing but "an attending star" to the "gracious moon" of the princess. Berowne continues to praise Rosaline effusively, saying "she passes praise."

Berowne and Ferdinand test their wits and wordplay skills in describing the princess and Rosaline. Love can be seen as making them more clever, inspiring them to write and speak figuratively and effusively.

Ferdinand criticizes Rosaline's dark complexion, saying "black is the badge of hell." Berowne maintains his opinion of her beauty, and the others take turns creating clever lines describing Rosaline's beauty. Dumaine, for example, says "dark needs no candles now, for dark is light." They continue to argue over Rosaline's beauty, and then Ferdinand asks the clever Berowne to find some way of their getting out of their oath.

The men take this opportunity to display their wits to one another, as in Dumaine's clever quip about Rosaline's dark complexion. Ferdinand hopes that Berowne will be able to use his intelligence to reason a way out of the written oath they have all agreed to, and which Ferdinand created in the first place.

Berowne says that their oath was to study and that they learn more from their beloveds' eyes than from books. Other studies stimulate only the brain, whereas love involves the brain and the whole body. Moreover, being in love heightens the senses, according to Berowne, and poets are inspired to write by love. Berowne calls women "the books, the arts, the academes / That show, contain, and nourish all the world."

Berowne uses some wordplay and clever reasoning to assert the benefits of love and justify breaking the oath. However, even as Berowne compliments women, he sees them only as objects either to be studied or to help the men learn. The men in the play still fail to include women within their idea of some kind of academy or intellectual life.

Berowne says that it was a foolish oath to abstain from women. He encourages everyone to "lose our oaths to find ourselves." Ferdinand is persuaded, and offers a mock battle cry. Berowne says, "advance your standards, and upon them, lords," urging the king and his men to go forth and court their ladies.

Berowne continues to use clever turns of phrase to persuade his companions to violate their oath. Ferdinand is convinced and now devotes his energy and efforts entirely to love.

Ferdinand suggests they plan "some entertainment" to woo the French women. Berowne agrees and says that they should invite the women into the king's court, before entertaining them with "revels, dances, masques, and merry hours." Ferdinand, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine all leave, eager to pursue their loves.

Ferdinand now wants to turn the princess' official visit into an opportunity for entertainment. The men begin to plan their courtship as elaborately as if they were working on serious business.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Dull have just come from dinner. Nathaniel compliments Holofernes' wit, and mentions that he spoke with Armado earlier in the day. Holofernes says he knows Armado, and calls him ridiculous, criticizing his habits of speech especially. Holofernes can't stand how Armado pronounces "doubt" and "debt" without vocalizing the "b." Holofernes and Nathaniel converse a bit in Latin, and then Armado enters along with Costard and Mote.

Nathaniel fawns over Holofernes' apparent intelligence. Holofernes looks down on Armado primarily because of how he speaks, though his own habits of speech (including unnecessary bits of Latin) can be seen as equally ridiculous.

Mote pokes fun at Holofernes and Nathaniel, saying "they have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps." He gives Holofernes a riddle and then asks him to name the five vowels. Mote and Holofernes trade quips at each other, and Costard is so delighted by Mote that he gives him a coin—his "remuneration."

The lowly page Mote is able to outwit and poke fun at the supposedly better-educated Holofernes and Nathaniel. Costard is delighted to see someone match wits with the men who have been teasing him about his own intelligence.

Armado asks Holofernes if he is a teacher, and then explains that the king is entertaining the princess and her ladies in the afternoon, or, as he calls it, "the posteriors of this day." Armado says that he and Ferdinand are very close friends and that he has the honor of presenting some kind of show to the princess on the king's behalf.

Armado tries to affect an intelligent diction, but comically fails, with the silly phrase "posteriors of this day." The king is now planning some kind of elaborate show to entertain the princess, which can be seen as a reflection on Shakespeare's own theatrical production of Love's Labor's Lost.

Armado asks Holofernes what he should perform, and Holofernes suggests "the **Nine Worthies**," a pageant of nine famous men from ancient and biblical to medieval times. He casts Armado, Nathaniel, Costard, and Mote in the performance and says that he himself will play three parts. Dull plans to dance along with the presentation of the pageant. Everyone is excited, and leaves to prepare for the show.

The pageant presents nine famous male heroes, symbols of ideal masculinity that the play's men comically fall short of—a particularly pointed fact given Ferdinand and his men's initial desire to devote themselves to academic glory. Everyone is excited to put their efforts into producing a good performance, showing that pleasure and fun often involves work just as much as serious business does (a fact captured in the title of the play, which connects love with labor).

ACT 5, SCENE 2

The princess, Katherine, Rosaline, and Maria all examine the gifts they have received from their respective admirers. From Ferdinand, the princess has received a jewel along with "as much love in rhyme / as would be cramm'd up in a sheet of paper." Rosaline mentions how Katherine's sister became melancholy from love and died because of it.

The ladies examine the gifts and writings they have received from their lovers. The brief mention of Katherine's sister gives an example of the darker side of love, which can cause great pain as well as mirth and pleasure.

After a playfully witty exchange between Rosaline and Katherine, conversation turns again to the group's love gifts. Rosaline has received a **love letter** along with a drawing of her from Berowne. Katherine has been given gloves from Dumaine, and Longaville has given Maria pearls and a **love letter**. The women laugh at their suitors and the princess comments, "We are wise girls to mock our lovers so."

Rosaline and Katherine spar wits, again showing their cleverness. The ladies think that they are particularly "wise" to be able to see how ridiculous love has made Ferdinand and his men behave.

The women talk of how foolish their lovers are, and Boyet enters, "stabb'd with laughter." He tells the princess and her ladies that Ferdinand and his men are planning to visit them disguised as Russian ambassadors. The princess decides that she and her ladies will put on masks and exchange their gifts, so that Ferdinand and his men will mistake their identities. She assumes that Ferdinand's men are courting them "in mocking merriment," and intends to give them "mock for mock."

The men's love is driving them to act foolishly, to the delight of the clever French women and Boyet. The princess's visit now has more to do with games, performances, and disguises than any diplomatic issues. She assumes the men are not seriously in love, and so plans to match their mockery with mockery of her own.

Mote, Ferdinand, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine arrive in Russian dress. The princess and her ladies put on their masks. Mote reads out a praise of the ladies' beauty that Berowne has composed, but they turn their backs to the men. Mote leaves, and Rosaline has Boyet ask Berowne what the men's intentions are. Berowne says that he and his companions have "measured many a mile / To tread a measure with you on this grass." Toying with Berwone, Rosaline asks exactly how far they have traveled.

With the men in disguise and the women in masks, this scene can be seen as a kind of staged performance within the play, with all the characters participating for their own enjoyment. Rosaline cleverly teases the men, who aren't aware that their disguises have been seen through.

Berowne evades the question and trades some witty quips back and forth with Rosaline. Ferdinand and his men play some music and ask the ladies to dance, but they decline. Ferdinand tries unsuccessfully to persuade them to dance. Each of the men talks separately to whom he believes is her beloved. Ferdinand talks with Rosaline, believing her to be the princess. Berowne talks to the princess, thinking she is Rosaline. Dumaine and Longaville talk to Maria and Katherine, respectively, thinking each to be the other.

The princess' clever plot goes according to plan, and the men foolishly avow their love to the wrong women. Berowne and Rosaline each try to outsmart the other—both quick-witted and good with words, they appear to be a good match.

The men try to flirt, but the women tease them and turn their own words against them wittily. Boyet comments, "the tongues of mocking wenches are as keen / As is the razor's edge invisible." The men leave, disappointed, and the princess and her ladies laughs at these supposedly witty men, who have just sworn their love to the wrong women.

In the beginning of the play, the men excluded women from their academy of learning, but now the women appear to be even smarter than the men, with their sharp wit and quick words. The ladies get much comic delight from tricking the men.

The princess wonders what they should do if Ferdinand and his men return undisguised. Rosaline suggests that they tease them by talking about a group of foolish Russians who were just with them. Boyet sees Ferdinand and his lords approaching, and tells the ladies to leave. The men arrive and Ferdinand asks where the princess is. Boyet goes to get her. Berowne says that Boyet is clever and "wit's peddler." Boyet returns with the princess, Rosaline, Katherine, and Maria.

The ladies continue to have fun at the expense of the men, concerned more with pleasure and joking around than any work or serious business. Berowne admires the clever wit of Boyet. Nearly all the play's characters display intelligent wit at some point in the play.

Ferdinand greets the princess and tells her that she is welcome now in his court. The princess declines, saying that she would hate to be the reason for his breaking his oath. She says that she and her ladies have had a "pleasant game" staying in the field, as they were just visited by "a mess of Russians." Ferdinand tries to act surprised, and Rosaline describes the Russians as fools.

Rosaline and the princess tease Ferdinand and his men, continuing their "pleasant game." Ferdinand assumes that the princess will come into his court when she is allowed to, not thinking of her own wishes about the matter.

Berowne says that Rosaline sees wise things as foolish, and she replies that this means he must be very wise, for he appears to be a fool to her. Rosaline hints that they know the Russians were actually Ferdinand and his lords in disguise. The king grows pale and Rosaline jokes that he must be sea-sick, "coming from Muscovy."

Rosaline quickly turns Berowne's words around to tease him, and pokes fun at Ferdinand when he realizes his disguise may have been revealed. She is perhaps the most clever of the French women, a good match for Berowne.

Berowne admits to the Russian disguise and promises to use no more deception, avowing his sincere love for Rosaline. Ferdinand asks the princess how he can make up for his "rude transgression," and she tells him to confess. He does, and the princess asks him to say out loud what he whispered in his beloved's ear. He does, and Rosaline says that this is what her lover said to her. Ferdinand is shocked and the princess reveals her trick of switching around the gifts. Berowne criticizes Boyet for helping the ladies deceive their men in this way.

The ladies continue to have their fun at the men's expense, revealing their trick with the gifts. Berowne is upset that Boyet, a man, would help the women carry out their prank on Ferdinand and his lords.

Costard arrives, asking whether it is time for the performance of the **Nine Worthies**. He, however, calls it the "three Worthies," to the confusion of Berowne. Costard explains that there are going to be three actors, who each play three characters. Berowne says he understands, as three times three is nine, but Costard corrects him and says that he thinks three times three is not nine. Berowne sends him off to prepare for the show.

After the surplus of wit with Ferdinand and his men, and the princess and her attendants, Costard's foolishness offers some comedy. The merriment continues, as the king's entertainment is now ready for the princess.

Ferdinand worries that the performance will be so bad it will embarrass him, but the princess says that she wants to see the show. Armado enters and delivers a piece of paper to Ferdinand, then leaves. Ferdinand reads it out: it announces the cast of the show. Costard enters first, as Pompey the Great. Boyet, Berowne, and Dumaine heckle him. Costard mistakenly calls himself Pompey the Big instead of Pompey the Great.

Costard is a pathetic version of the heroic Pompey, and he even goofs up Pompey's famous epithet. The rowdy, heckling audience turns the pageant into a comedic performance not so different from Shakespeare's own.

Nathaniel enters as Alexander the Great. Berowne and Boyet again heckle the performer. Nathaniel leaves and Holofernes enters as Judas Maccabaeus along with Mote as the young Hercules. Holofernes announces Mote's character, and then Mote leaves. He says, "Judas I am," and Dumaine interrupts him, thinking he means Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus in the New Testament. Holofernes tries to clarify that he is Judas Maccabaeus, a character from the Old Testament, but Boyet, Berowne, and Dumaine continue to berate him as the traitor Judas.

The male characters continue to fall short of the heroically masculine heroes they are supposed to portray. They cannot even find someone to play Hercules, so Mote has to pretend to be Hercules as a young boy. Either Dumaine mixes up the two Judases, or (more likely) interrupts Holofernes to play a witty joke on him, pretending to confuse the two characters with the same first name.

Boyet, Dumaine, and Berowne continue to wittily tease Holofernes, until he leaves. Armado now enters, as the Greek hero Hector. The audience teases and interrupts him as he tries to make his speech. Costard suddenly goes out of character and tells Armado that Jacquenetta is pregnant with Armado's child. Dumaine, Boyet, and Berowne all laugh at this development and joke that there will be a fight between Hector and Pompey. Armado prepares to duel Costard.

Far from devoting themselves to serious studies (as the men vowed to at the beginning of the play), or pursuing diplomatic business (as the princess was sent to do), all the characters are now totally concerned with enjoying themselves and laughing at both the performance and the fight between Costard and Armado.

Just as Costard and Armado are preparing to fight, though, a messenger from France named Marcade arrives and tells the princess that he has unfortunate news: her father has died. Berowne tells all the actors of the **Nine Worthies** to leave, and says that "the scene begins to cloud." Armado and Costard leave. The princess announces that she will leave to return to France immediately, though Ferdinand begs her to stay. She apologizes if her teasing behavior has been a bit too harsh.

The pure merriment and comedy of the play is now brought to an end by the intrusion of serious news. The tone of the scene suddenly changes, and the princess apologizes for teasing the men so much. Most of the play has delighted in frivolity and comedy, but now Shakespeare shows that such enjoyment cannot last forever.

Ferdinand begs the princess not to let "the cloud of sorrow" disrupt "love's argument." Berowne tells the ladies, "for your fair sakes have we neglected time, / Play'd foul play with our oaths." He says that they have been false to their oath in order to be true to their loves, and asks for the ladies' love.

The serious news of the French king's death cannot disrupt the men's love, though, which they still feel strongly—and in fact is the continuation of their love that proves its seriousness and authenticity to the women. Berowne continues to use clever wordplay to present his suit to the ladies.

The princess says that she and her ladies assumed the men's avowals of love were all "pleasant jest and courtesy." Dumaine insists that their affections "show'd much more than jest." Ferdinand again asks the princess, "grant us your loves." The princess, though, thinks that it is too soon for love after her father's death. She tells Ferdinand to spend a year at "some forlorn and naked hermitage," before seeking her out again. She will need a year to spend in mourning her father. Ferdinand agrees to the deal.

The women had assumed that the men were only joking around with their talk of love. The men's words and letters did not adequately communicate their sincere feelings. The princess attempts to strike a balance between pleasure and more serious matters, and decides to take a year to mourn her father before seeking any kind of love.

Dumaine asks Katherine for her love, and she gives him a similar response: she will wait for a year not giving in to any suitors, and then she will be available for his courtship. Maria similarly tells Longaville to wait a year. Berowne asks Rosaline what her response to his suit is, and she gives a slightly longer answer.

The princess's ladies follow her example in trying to moderate the love of their suitors. The men have gone from completely abstaining from love to completely devoting themselves to it, and now they must try to find more of a middle ground.

Rosaline tells Berowne that she has heard of his reputation for wit. She tells him that "to weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain / And therewithal to win me," he must spend a year conversing with "the speechless sick" at a hospital, attempting to make them laugh. Berowne says that this is impossible, as "mirth cannot move a soul in agony." Rosaline responds that this is the point, and that once this experience has robbed Berowne of his overly witty, snarky character, he can woo her.

Rosaline cleverly puts Berowne's wits to the test (and hopes to "weed" out some of his excessive sardonic wit) by making him spend time in a hospital, trying to amuse patients. This would test Berowne's jesting nature against the most serious of matters: illness and death.


Berowne comments that the men's "wooing doth not end like an old play." As they have not ended up with their beloveds, they have not attained the happy ending necessary for a comedy. Armado now enters and announces that he has vowed himself in love to Jacquenetta. He says that there was supposed to be a song at the end of the performance of the **Nine Worthies**, and Ferdinand tells him to perform the song now.

Shakespeare uses Berowne's line to point out his own experimentation here, as he has written a comedy without a happy resolution. Nonetheless, Armado's love has proved successful. Before the princess must return to France and attend to serious matters, the characters indulge in one last pleasurable performance.


Holofernes, Nathaniel, Mote, and Costard return to the stage. Everyone divides into two groups, one representing spring and one representing winter. The spring group sings a short song about spring and the cuckoo bird (a bird traditionally associated with cuckolds, men whose wives cheat on them). Then, the winter group sings a short song about winter. Armado announces that the performance is finished, and the play ends.

The play ends with a final gesture of fun, with these two short songs. It has offered a finite amount of time for the characters (and the audience) to indulge in simple comedy and light matters, but now this hiatus from more serious business and darker concerns is over.

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