THE MAN

DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO

THE PLAY

“LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST”

THE FACTS

WRITTEN: Shakespeare and many scholars confuse us on the issue of “date written”. It appears that he began writing the play in the last half of 1588 shortly after the Summer victory of England over the seemingly-unconquerable Spanish Armada. (His creation of Don Adriano de Armado – the similarity of the words is deliberate -- is in many ways a mockery of the Spanish as perceived by the English at that time of victory; more on that later.)

Some scholars point to the fact that “it is doubtful that the play” could possibly have been written in its present form after 1593. It was in that year that King Henry of Navarre agreed to turn his back on Protestantism and embrace Catholicism, a condition of his being crowned King of all of France. A King of France would not be favored for a role in a high-profile play in Protestant England after that action.

The dates 1594-95 are most often indicated in play books and by most scholars. (Refer to the note in “First” ahead.)

PUBLISHED: The play was not published until its inclusion in the 1598 First Quarto.

AGE: If we select the “start” date of 1588, then the Bard was 24 years old when he began writing the play; if 1594 then he was 30 years old. (Shakespeare B.1564-D.1616)
CHRONO: Based on the official 1594-95 date the play falls in 10th position in the canon of 39 plays immediately following the successful “Taming of the Shrew”.

GENRE: The play is most often placed as the first in the genre of “High Comedies” followed chronologically by “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, “The Merchant of Venice”, “Much Ado About Nothing”, “As You Like It” and “Twelfth Night”. It is also referred to as a “conceited comedy -- a play whose verbal wit and ingenuity must have dazzled its original audiences and can occasionally baffle modern ones.” (Arden Shakespeare)

SIGNIFICANCE: It is important to note that the play marked a significant turning point in Shakespeare’s career as a playwright. Acclaimed Shakespeare critic C.L. Barber has called the play “a strikingly fresh start, a more complete break with what he had been doing earlier in his career....The discovery that his verbal resources were limitless freed Shakespeare for the lyrical crescendo of 1595-97 with ‘Romeo and Juliet’, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, ‘Richard II’ and the astonishing Act V of ‘The Merchant of Venice’.”

It is also interesting to note that the 1598 First Quarto of the play is the earliest dramatic text to have ‘by W. Shakespeare’ on its title page.

SOURCE: The play “does not have a readily identifiable narrative or dramatic source though affinities have been discerned with both literary and real-life accounts of courtly activities.” (Arden Shakespeare.) Other scholars claim that “the plot is Shakespeare’s own, probably based on a report of a French diplomatic mission to Aquitaine.” (Simon and Schuster, Shakespeare’s Plays)

FIRST: Isaac Asimov states that “the play does not seem to have been intended for wide public popularity and may have been written for private performance. One possibility is that [the earliest draft] was intended for celebration at the home of the Earl of Southampton. If so, the play must have been an astounding success for Southampton then became Shakespeare’s generous patron.
“Altered in 1597” the first recorded performance of the play was for Queen Elizabeth I on Christmas Day in 1597.

Claims have been made that there were apparently no revivals until the nineteenth century.

CRITICISM: “Love’s Labour’s Lost” is referred to by Moth the page as “a great feast of languages...”

The Arden Shakespeare observes that “Not only the supposedly sophisticated courtiers but also the lower-class characters play endlessly with language, achieving effects which can be brilliant, pedantic or bathetic with its unintentional effect of anticlimax and are very frequently connected with obscenity. This has been one cause of the play’s relative unpopularity.”

“The play is a satire on pedantry, and its complicated verbiage and intrusive Latinity would have appealed to the sense of humor of the Elizabethan educated. [However], both the elaborateness and the Latinity have also tended to diminish the popularity of the play considerably in later years.” (Asimov)

OTHERS: James Agate (1923): “a Watteau....of that significance in ordered beauty which unity alone can give.”

John Barber (1980): “The folly of acting love and talking love without being in love.”

Harold Bloom (1998): “Shakespeare may have enjoyed a particular and unique zest in composing ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost’; it is a festival of language, an exuberant fireworks display in which Shakespeare seems to seek the limits of his verbal resources and discovers that there are none.”

QUOTES: Berowne: “At Christmas I no more desire a rose / Than wish a snow in May’s new fangled shows; / But like of each thing that in season grows.” (Act I, Sc 1, 105-107)

Moth: “They have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps.” (Act V, Sc 1, 35-36)
Princess: “A time, methinks, too short / To make a world-without-end bargain in.” (Act V, Sc 2, 784-785)

Berowne: “Our wooing doth not end like an old play; / Jack hath not Jill; these ladies’ courtesy / Might well have made our sport a comedy.” (Act V, Sc 2, 864-866)

Parolles: “The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo. You that way, we this way.” (Act V, Sc 2, 721-722)

DIRECTORS: Following a long fallow period of recorded productions after 1597 the play made its next recorded appearance in 1839 at Covent Garden and later in 1857 at Sadler’s Wells. “From 1920 onwards... [the play] suddenly found its director and its audiences” (Simon and Schuster): 1923 at the Old Vic, 1925 at Stratford-upon-Avon, 1932 at the Westminster directed by Tyrone Guthrie, 1936 with Ernest Milton as a “marvelous peacock” of an Armado. The most highly praised production in theater history was the 1946 Stratford-upon-Avon production by a then 20-year old Peter Brook heralded as “a valuable gift to the Shakespearian theater.”

RECENT: Perhaps due to reasons referenced earlier, the play is probably the least-often produced of all the High Comedies. “A modern emphasis on the darker aspects of the play has taken more seriously such things as the breaking of vows, the cruelty of the courtiers to the amateur actors and the intrusion of death at the end.” (Arden Shakespeare)

The 1917 production at The Stratford Festival, Ontario was greatly praised and may be viewed free of charge on YouTube. (See information at the end of this document.)

FILM: Few film versions of the play have been produced. However, in 2000 director Kenneth Branagh “in an update of the play shot his film as a classic 1930’s musical” with a star-studded cast including Alicia Silverstone (The Princess), Alessandro Nivola (The King), Emily Mortimer (Katherine), Timothy Spall (Armado) and Branagh himself as Berowne. (See information below.)
THE PLAY

SETTING: The play unfolds at the court of Navarre, France at the western base of the Pyrenees Mountains adjacent to the much larger territory of the Acquitaine to the north, at that time controlled by Navarre. (Historically, the territory of Navarre was ruled at various times by France or by Spain.) The play is often performed in its entirety in a natural, outdoor setting, one beautifully ideal for the establishment of the King’s plan for Navarre to be “the wonder of the world, / Our court shall be a little academe, / Still and contemplative in living art.”

YEAR: Written for performance in and of Shakespeare’s day. Shakespeare wrote the play in the early years following England’s victory against the Spanish Armada (1588) thus heroically foiling a vast Spanish-Catholic attempt to subvert the Protestant character of the island kingdom. For this reason the play cannot rightly be set before that year. However, it has surely been set in a wide variety of periods since then. Of key importance is the sudden and unexpected tragic announcement at the end of the play; a year and setting must afford a final occurrence of similar nature (e.g. the death of a monarch, the start of WWI or WWII).

KEY ROLES:

**KING FERDINAND OF NAVARRE:** The graceful, mildly academic King with a totally unworkable idea. “Necessity,” says Berowne, “will make us all forsworn”.

**LORD BEROWNE:** The most eloquent of the lords, he blazes into glorious sophistry with fallacious arguments especially with intention of deceit. Rosaline’s description of him might be Shakespeare’s self-portrait: “A merrier man, / Within the limit of becoming mirth / I never spent an hour’s talk withal.”

**PRINCESS OF FRANCE:** Witty and responsible, she will become a distinguished Queen although perhaps not well matched with King Ferdinand of Navarre.
LADY ROSALINE: The “whitely wanton with a velvet brow”, Rosaline, matched with Berowne, is possibly another projection of the Dark Lady of the Sonnets.

BOYET: The Lord attending on the Princess. “Middle-aged and ‘honey-tongued’ diplomatist”, Boyet is “the play’s prophet; himself past love, he sounds forth the theme of a female anti-wit itself so fiercely witty as to destroy any possibility of erotic fulfillment.” (Bloom)

DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO: A “fantastical Spaniard” at court, his name echoes the Spanish Armada, still fresh in English minds and fodder for ridicule and mockery. His language, his “mint of phrases”, is in key with the affected “euphuism” and artificial, highly elaborate way of speaking made fashionable at the fin de siècle. “Archaic heroics, rodomontade, bombastic etiquette tower out of forgotten epochs in the person of Don Armado”. (Bloom) Shakespeare refers to him as “Armado the braggart” throughout the play. The man is melancholy from being in love and yet honor reigns strong to the end of the play. He is the only character in the play who is “matched” in the end, however questionably.

MOTH: As Armado’s clever, quick and witty page, Moth is reverently referred to by Armado variously as “boy”, “dear imp”, “my tender juvenal”, “pretty”, “little”, “apt”, “sweet my child” and “my dear Moth” among other things; although respectful on the surface and surely efficient, Moth often mocks Armado in aside comments.

COSTARD: The mildest of country youths whose clowning cleverness fails to keep him out of prison early in the play and whose confusion in the switching of love notes fuels the play’s comedy; his rash honesty and motivation at the very end of the play in announcing before all that Jaquenetta is pregnant by Armado is shrouded in mystery and believability.

JAQUENETTA: A dairymaid seduced by Costard prior to the start of the play and discovered in flagrante delicto by Don Adriano de Armado who immediately falls in love with her despite the vast
difference in social status. American-British actress and comedian, Ruby Wax, won glowing accolades for her performance at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1978 as “the village hoyden”[boisterous girl].

**HOLOFERNES:** The bristling village schoolmaster, all pedant, a man who cannot talk without unpeeling a Latin tag or pulling some curious word from the basket.

**SIR NATHANIEL:** The village curate (more like a milky mouse) who records all of the greatest words and phrases of Holofernes for possible future reference.

**DULL:** The village constable whose response to the observation of Holofernes “Thou has spoke no word all this while” is memorably “Nor understood none neither, sir.”

**OTHER ROLES:** See the additional document with visual groupings of characters: “Court of Navarre”, “Princess’ Entourage” and “The Entertainers.

**SYNOPSIS:** Ferdinand, King of Navarre, and his three noble companions, the Lords Berowne, Dumaine, and Longaville, take an oath not to give in to the company of women. They devote themselves to three years of study and fasting; Berowne agrees somewhat more hesitantly than the others. The King declares that no woman should come within a mile of the court.

Don Adriano de Armado, a “fantastical” Spaniard in the court of Ferdinand, comes to tell the King of a tryst between Costard and Jaquenetta. After the King sentences Costard, Don Armado confesses his own love for Jaquenetta to his page, Moth. Don Armado writes Jaquenetta a letter and asks Costard to deliver it.

The Princess of France and her ladies arrive, wishing to speak to the King regarding the cession of Aquitaine, but must ultimately make their camp outside the court due to the decree.

In visiting the Princess and her ladies at their camp, the King falls in love with the Princess, as do the lords with the ladies. Berowne gives Costard a letter to deliver to the lady Rosaline, which Costard switches with Don Armado’s letter that was meant for Jaquenetta. Jaquenetta consults two scholars, Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel, who conclude that the letter is written by Berowne and instruct her to tell the King.
The King and his lords lie in hiding and watch one another as each subsequently reveals their feelings of love. The King ultimately chastises the lords for breaking the oath, but Berowne reveals that the King is likewise has broken his own oath and is in love with the Princess.

Jaquenetta and Costard enter with Berowne's letter and accuse him of treason. Berowne confesses to breaking the oath, explaining that the only study worthy of mankind is that of love, and he and the other men collectively decide to relinquish the vow.

Arranging for Holofernes to entertain the ladies later, the men then dress as Muscovites and court the ladies in disguise. The Queen's courtier Boyet, having overheard their planning, helps the ladies trick the men by disguising themselves as each other. When the lords return as themselves, the ladies taunt them and expose their ruse.

Impressed by the ladies' wit, the men apologize, and when all identities are righted, they watch Holofernes, Sir Nathaniel, Costard, Moth and Don Armado present the Nine Worthies.

Oddly, the four lords and Boyet cruelly heckle the play, saving their sole praise for Costard.

At the key turning point of the play Don Armado and Costard almost come to blows when Costard reveals mid-pageant that Don Armado has made Jaquenetta pregnant. Don Armado is spellbound and unbelieving. He is suddenly faced with a heavy heart and major life decision.

Their spat is interrupted by news that the Princess's father has died. The Princess makes plans to leave at once, and she and her ladies, readying for mourning, declare that the men must wait a year and a day to prove their loves lasting.

Don Armado announces in his honor and pride that he will swear a similar oath to Jaquenetta.

Despite the suddenly somber and serious mood of the play, the enchanting song of the Cuckoo and the Owl is sung -- “an expression of the going-on power of life”. (Barber)

“With its Spring against Winter echoes, we are clearly in the world of Shakespeare’s own country youth; the land of Navarre has vanished as we listen to the cuckoo and the owl sing, and hear about “Dick the shepherd’ and ‘greasy Joan’”. (Bloom)

The play ends with the wise words of a transformed Armado to the two courts and indeed to the audience:

“The words of Mercury [travel] are harsh after the songs of Apollo [music and poetry]. You that way, we this way.”
FOR OPTIONAL VIEWING or LISTENING.....

YOUTUBE - FREE

FULL PLAY

*** “LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST”
The Stratford Festival, Ontario (2017)
Filmed-live stage performance
Includes a pre-performance conversation between the Director and the actors playing Berowne and Rosaline.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7t1sa03V5g

** “LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST”
BBC The Shakespeare Collections (1975)
Filmed entirely in outside gardens
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbbAlpRHKXU

AUDIO RECORDING

“LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST”
Arkangel Shakespeare Audiobook Production (2014)
Distinguished Company of Current British Actors including Alex Jennings (Berowne), Emma Fielding (Rosaline), Samantha Bond (Princess of France, Greg Wise (King of Navarre and Alan Howard (Armado)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2jgLpLfFqo&list=PLjo8WFWhhRkMNLaj2pGRcuFoBbnsIQtSX&index=10
FULL AMATEUR PRODUCTION (Filmed Live)

“LOVE’S LABOR’S LOST”
Kingsmen Shakespeare (2016), Thousand Oaks, CA
Outdoor Summer Shakespeare Festival
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4P8d5wkqkI&list=PLjo8WFWhhRkMNlaj2pGRcuFoBbns1QtsX&index=18

AMAZON

***“LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST” (2000 Film) (“Used – Very Good” $24.98)
Hilarious!!! “An update of the classic Shakespeare story, director Kenneth
Branagh shot the film as a classic 1930’s musical” with a star-studded cast
including Alicia Silverstone (The Princess), Alessandro Nivola (The King), Emily
Mortimer (Katherine), Timothy Spall (Armado) and Branagh himself as Berowne.
Trailer: https://www.imdb.com/video/vi1234632985?ref_=tt_pv_vi_aiv_1
Film: https://www.amazon.com/Loves-Labours-Lost-Alfred-Bell/dp/B000O4Z4WV/ref=tmm_dvd_title_0?_encoding=UTF8&amp;qid=&amp;sr=

NETFLIX – MEMBERSHIP RENT

“LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST”
BBC The Shakespeare Collections (1985) – TV Film
A stellar British cast including Maureen Lipman (Princess of France), Jonathan
Kent (King of Navarre), Jenny Agutter (Rosaline) and David Warner (Armado)
https://dvd.netflix.com/Movie/Love-s-Labour-s-Lost/70065086