

Synopsis of *Love's Labor's Lost*

King Ferdinand of Navarre and his lords Berowne, Longaville and Dumaine have sworn an oath to live and study together for three years. In the interest of scholarly pursuits, the men vow to fast, to sleep only three hours a night and, most importantly, to abstain from the company of women. Berowne questions the severity of the oath but signs the contract despite his reservations. Constable Dull, the local officer, arrives with his prisoner Costard. Costard has been apprehended for consorting with the country maid Jaquenetta, thereby breaking the new law against socializing with women. King Ferdinand orders that Costard be put in the custody of Don Adriano de Armado, a Spaniard known for his boasting.

As Don Armado confesses to his servant Moth that he is in love with Jaquenetta, Constable Dull arrives with Costard and Jaquenetta. He delivers Costard to Armado's custody and leaves to take Jaquenetta to the park where she will be employed as a dairymaid. Before Jaquenetta is led out, Armado makes plans to meet her at her lodge. Moth takes Costard away to prison.

The Princess of France arrives with her ladies, Rosaline, Katherine and Maria. King Ferdinand greets them but will not allow them inside his court. The Princess tells the King that she has come on behalf of her father to collect the repayment of a loan. The King denies receiving the money, and the Princess calls for her servant Boyet to retrieve the receipt. Boyet informs the Princess that they will not be able to get the receipt until the next day. In the meantime, the ladies set up tents in the field and King Ferdinand assures them they will be well treated. Berowne and Rosaline share a few words, while Longaville and Dumaine show interest in Maria and Katherine. After the King and his lords leave, Boyet remarks on how the King seemed to be taken with the Princess.

Don Armado frees Costard from prison in exchange for delivering a love letter to Jaquenetta. As Costard is about to leave he runs into Berowne who asks him to deliver a letter to Rosaline. Costard leaves to deliver the letters, and Berowne confesses his love for Rosaline. Costard finds the Princess and her ladies hunting and mistakenly gives the letter from Armado to the ladies.

The pretentious schoolmaster Holofernes, the church cleric Nathaniel and Constable Dull are discussing the deer shot by the Princess when Costard and Jaquenetta arrive. Jaquenetta asks Holofernes to read the letter sent by Don Armado. As Holofernes reads, he discovers it is the letter from Berowne meant for Rosaline. Holofernes tells them to deliver the letter to King Ferdinand.

Berowne is composing another sonnet to Rosaline when he sees the King and decides to eavesdrop on him. The King is reading a letter that he has composed to the Princess when he overhears Longaville entering. The King hides as Longaville professes his love for Maria; Longaville, in turn, hides and overhears Dumaine




Photo by Carol Rosegg

Alene Dawson, Libby Christophersen, Enid Graham and Melissa Bowen in the Shakespeare Theatre Company's 1994-95 production of *Love's Labor's Lost*.

profess his love for Katherine. One by one, the men come forward to scold those they have overheard. Berowne is the last to step out and rebuke the men for their betrayal. As he is admonishing them, Costard enters with the letter. Berowne's own love is found out, and he admits his guilt to the others. Berowne then convinces the men that they must give up their oaths in order to truly find themselves, and the lords set off to woo the ladies with dances, masques and entertainment. The King orders Armado to provide entertainment. Armado consults with Holofernes who suggests a pageant of the Nine Worthies.

The ladies are showing each other the presents sent to them by the lords when Boyet enters to tell them that the King and his men are coming disguised as Russians to court the ladies. The Princess decides to foil their plan by having each lady wear a mask and exchange the gifts sent to them. Each lady will wear another's gift so that the King and his lords will mistake their love for another. The men arrive and entertain and dance with the ladies, and then one by one they break off to woo their respective loves. Once the men leave, the women discuss what the men said and determine to ridicule them for their mistakes when they return. The King and his men return and are mocked by the ladies. Costard enters and introduces the pageant of the Nine Worthies.

The pageant is interrupted by Costard's announcement that Jaquenetta is pregnant by Armado. Armado challenges Costard to a duel but is interrupted by the messenger, Mercade, bringing news of the King of France's death. The Princess must leave that same night. The King tries to continue wooing and proposes marriage, but he is reprimanded by the Princess for breaking his first oath. The Princess states that if he will spend a full year in a remote hermitage, away from worldly pleasures, she will have him. Each woman in turn gives similar ultimatums, to which the men agree. The performers return to sing a final song after which everyone goes their separate ways. 

The Commedia Connection



Photo by Gerry Goodstein, 2004.

Mandy Olsen as Jacquenetta and Eric Hoffmann as Don Adriano de Armado in *Love's Labor's Lost* at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. Jacquenetta and Don Armado are based on *commedia* stock characters.

Throughout history, writers have based some of their finest works on stories that have already been written or performed. William Shakespeare was no exception. Shakespeare often “borrowed” story lines from other authors as inspiration for his plays. Shakespeare used many popular stories to fuel his plot lines, including Roman plays by Terence, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, and he even sought inspiration from the Bible. Another important source from which he may have derived his characters is tales from the rich Italian tradition of *commedia dell’arte*.

Commedia dell’arte began as Italian street theatre, and its origins can be traced back as far as the 14th century. *Commedia* plays were presented by troupes of actors traveling together from town to town performing in public spaces, squares, fields or markets. Unlike Shakespeare’s plays, *commedia* plays were improvised around an outline with stock characters and comic bits called *lazzi*. Plot lines and characters from *commedia* can be found in many popular forms of entertainment even today. Stock characters in *commedia* included servants, masters, lovers and merchants. These characters are the heart

again in different story lines. Most *commedia* performances included 8 to 10 stock characters.

One example of a *commedia* stock character found in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* is the *Innamorati*, or the Lovers. The Lovers in *commedia* plays are wealthy nobles who will do anything, no matter how silly or ridiculous, to win the affections of their love interest. In *commedia*, the Lovers do not wear masks like most of the other characters. They are true leading men and ladies, wearing the most fashionable clothing of the day and speaking in flowery poetry. In *Love’s Labor’s Lost* we find not one but four sets of lovers fitting into this *commedia* stock character description. Lovers in *commedia* often express their love for one another through letters and poems. The Lovers in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* do the same, which creates some wonderful comic moments.

There are also some middle class stock characters in *commedia* who appear in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, including *Il Dottore* and *Il Capitano*. These characters care about their own social advancement above all else. They will often do anything to make money or create the façade that they are smarter or braver than they really are. *Il Capitano*, or the Captain, is best

described as a cowardly soldier. He often pretends that he is a very brave man who has fought in numerous battles; in reality, he is a coward and would probably run in fear if he were ever forced to actually fight someone. *Il Capitano* often speaks in a Spanish dialect, wears a striped tunic with golden buttons and a feathered hat, and he carries a long sword. He is also usually unmasked. The Captain commonly pursues beautiful women who are totally out of his league and would never return his affections. Don Armado is a classic *Il Capitano* character in nearly everything he says and does. Armado sees himself as a great warrior yet gives no evidence to support this image. He pretends to be a great man and a great soldier and pursues the beautiful Jaquenetta with reckless abandon. She, of course, has no interest in him and his dreams of wooing her go unfulfilled. Much like *Il Capitano*, Armado is seen as a big joke and a fool to everyone around him and serves as a great source for laughs.

Il Dottore, or the Doctor, is another stock character that appears in *Love's Labor's Lost*. *Il Dottore* can be a medical doctor, lawyer or professor, who is unbearably pompous and loves to hear himself talk. He quotes Latin, usually incorrectly, but speaks with the utmost confidence despite his flubs. The Doctor is usually obese and wears a white collar, a black coat and a black half-mask with a long warty nose. In *Love's Labors Lost*, Holofernes is a typical *Il Dottore* character, although *Il Dottore's* role is usually a father to one of the Lovers, which Holofernes is not. Holofernes serves as an educational figure to the Princess of France and her ladies in waiting. Holofernes purports to be a teacher and an expert on all subjects when, in reality, he knows very little. And much like *Il Dottore*, Holofernes drones on and on about subjects that are of no interest to the ladies. Holofernes makes endless lists in his speeches, using upwards of 10 adjectives in a single monologue to describe something. This too is a characteristic of *Il Dottore's* speech.

Finally there are the characters of the servant class, including *Arlecchino*, *Pedrolino* and *Colombina* whose types are found in *Love's Labor's Lost*. The servant characters in *commedia* are often mischievous and cause problems for their masters. In *Love's Labor's Lost*,

Costard is a classic copy of the *Arlecchino* character—a witty servant who also serves as an errand boy for his wealthy master. He is very intelligent and witty but can always be counted on to make little mistakes that create chaos, such as sending a love note to the wrong person. In *commedia*, *Arlecchino* (also called Harlequin) wears a multi-colored patchwork costume and a snub-nosed mask. The classic *Arlecchino* character is often hungry and will do anything to get a bite to eat.

Jaquenetta resembles a character known as *Colombina*, a female equivalent to *Arlecchino*. She is often very beautiful and the subject of love and lust from several characters in the story. *Colombina* wears a patched, multi-colored dress much like *Arlecchino's* costume. She is either unmasked or wears a small black mask that just covers her eyes. *Arlecchino* and *Colombina* are often each other's love interest in a *commedia* play, which reflects Costard and Jaquenetta's relationship in *Love's Labor's Lost*.

Finally, Moth, Don Armado's faithful servant, bears similarities to a character called *Pedrolino*. This character is similar to *Arlecchino* and *Colombina* but often lacks their wit and bold courage. Usually, *Pedrolino* is the less-capable servant to *Il Capitano*, which is the exact relationship between Moth and Don Armado. *Pedrolino* is usually youthful and cute, the subject of mockery by the other characters because of his size. *Pedrolino* has a white powdered face instead of a mask and wears baggy white clothing that is clearly too big for him. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, the characters decide to cast the small-statured Moth as Hercules in the pageant of the Nine Worthies, much to the amusement of the audience.

The beauty of stock characters is that they contain universal qualities or stereotypes that nearly everyone can recognize—and are often borrowed by writers in subsequent time periods. Therefore it makes sense that Shakespeare would use stock characters like the ones found in *commedia dell'arte* to tell help illuminate the ideas and themes of his plays. **S**



Watercolor of *Il Dottore* by Maurice Sand, 1862.



Watercolor of *Il Capitano* by Maurice Sand, 1862.

Language in *Love's Labor's Lost* —

a

Fantastical

B

Folger Shakespeare Library.



Title page of *Love's Labor's Lost*, 1598 revision.

Elocution:

Power of speech; art of public speaking.

Euphuism:

Highly elaborate and artificial writing style, named after John Lyly's *Euphues*. It was very popular in England in the 1580s, when Shakespeare was first beginning to write his plays.

John Lyly:

(born c.1554, died 1606) English author; known chiefly for wordy romances, including *Euphues*, *The Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphues and His England*, both in affected style.

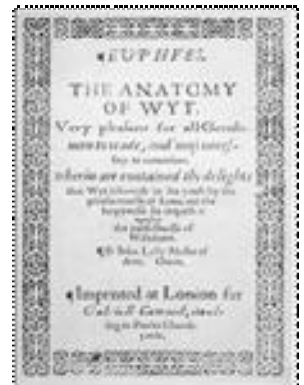
In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Benedick speaks of Claudio falling in love, complaining he "was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier, and now is he turn'd orthography—his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes" (2.3.1821). Men falling in love and losing their skills of elocution is not a new story to any audience, and in *Love's Labor's Lost* Shakespeare uses this plot device repeatedly. One of the funniest moments of this play is Moth's observation, "They have been at a great feast of languages, and stol'n the scraps" (5.1.36-37). Nearly all of the men in the play have their hearts stolen and consequently become extravagantly poetical. Love has

taught them "to rhyme and be melancholy" (4.3.14). Scholars and audiences often comment that the language of *Love's Labor's Lost* is difficult to understand due to the excess of puns, dated jokes and verbal acrobatics. However, when you remove the language and comic devices, you are left with a straightforward plot with little dramatic tension. The play seems to be about language itself, and the plot and characters there to give it voice. Russ MacDonald writes in *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*, "Shakespeare devotes virtually every scene of this play to an exploration, much of it conducted ironically, of the problem of appropriate expression." The dramatic tension, and therefore the comedy, comes from each person's struggle to express themselves well. The men first use language to avoid love and then as their means to advance it. The clowns employ puns and wordplay to communicate the concrete and everyday objects of the physical world rather than abstract feelings. For Holofernes and Armado, the "thinking" men, words are both the means and the end. They revel in their use of language, and to that end abuse it. The women are the standard-bearers of language in the play, fully in command of their words and mocking everyone else's use or misuse. With all of these language styles converging in one play, one could easily dismiss this play as "overwritten," but reviewing the many comic dishes at this "feast of languages," the audience is "stuffed" full with laughter.

The lovers occupy most of the play with over-the-top, excessively flowery dialogue. Scholars agree that Shakespeare was most likely parodying the artificial elegance of Euphuism, an Elizabethan style of writing first started by John Lyly that used excessive poetic devices.

Here is an example of the "elegant" language from *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* by John Lyly:

The sun shineth upon the dunghill and is not corrupted, the diamond lieth in the fire and is not consumed, the crystal toucheth the toad and is not poisoned, the bird Trochilus liveth by the mouth of the crocodile and is not spoiled, a perfect wit is never bewitched with lewdness, neither enticed with lasciviousness. Is it not common that the holm tree spingeth amidst the beech? That the ivy spreadeth upon the hard stones? That the soft featherbed breaketh the hard blade? If experience have not taught you this you have lived long and learned little; or if your moist brain have forgot it you have learned much and profited nothing. But it may be that you measure my affections by your own fancies, and knowing yourself either too simple to raise the siege by policy or too weak to resist the assault by prowess, you deem me of as little wit as yourself or of less force, either of small capacity or of no courage.




Berowne himself admits they speak with “taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, / Three pil’d hyperboles,” that only work to put off the ladies further. Each of the men decides to write a sonnet to his love in order to express his true feelings. A sonnet is a poem consisting of 14 lines in iambic pentameter. English sonnets rhyme according to this scheme: *abab cdcd efef gg*, while the rhyme scheme for Italian sonnets is slightly different, though still strict. Dumaine has the hardest time conforming to the form:

On a day, alack the day!
 Love, whose month is ever May,
 Spied a blossom passing fair
 Playing in the wanton air:
 Through the velvet leaves the wind,
 All unseen, ’gan passage find;
 That the lover, sick to death,
 Wish’d himself the heaven’s breath.
 Air, quoth he, thy cheeks may blow;
 Air, would I might triumph so!
 But alack! my hand is sworn
 Ne’er to pluck thee from thy thorn:
 Vow, alack! for youth unmeet,
 Youth so apt to pluck a sweet.
 Do not call it sin in me,
 That I am forsworn for thee;
 Thou for whom e’en Jove would swear
 Juno but an Ethiop were;
 And deny himself for Jove,
 Turning mortal for thy love. (IV.iii.99-118)

The comedy arises from these feeble attempts at poetry. Shakespeare alludes to his own sonnet writing and that of the great Renaissance sonneteer Petrarch, who wrote romantic poems to a mystery woman in the mid-1300s. The gentlemen must learn that love is not won by their “taffeta phrases” as the princess explains early in the play. By the end of the play the men learn to use language responsibly,

losing the need to woo with wordy poetry. The ladies have taught them not to “trust to speeches penn’d, / Nor to the motion of a schoolboy’s tongue, / ...Nor woo in rhyme, like a blind harper’s song!” (5.2.402-5)

One of Shakespeare’s favorite comedic techniques is the pun, and, while almost all of the characters try their hand at them, the clowns have the most success using puns to entertain. One place where puns tend to work best is in the master-servant relationship of Armado and Moth. With so many out-dated references, a reader or audience member could spend more time in the footnotes trying to figure out what everything means. Experience tells us that explaining a joke is rarely funny. Samuel Johnson later wrote that Shakespeare’s love of the pun was “the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.”

The most comedy in the play is mined from the simplest of characters. Amidst the verbal cacophony, the small moments of Dull and Costard are what audiences connect with the most. At the end of the Nine Worthies rehearsal, Holofernes says “Via, Goodman Dull! thou hast spoken no word all this while.” Dull responds, “Nor understood none neither, sir” (5.1.149-51). This seems, however, to be Shakespeare’s intention. Silence is also the lesson the lovers must learn. They are so busy making linguistic fools of themselves, they very nearly lose the love they are after. Love’s labor is lost in all of the noise. Finally, the play ends not with a joyous quadruple wedding but a somber promise of devotion and silence as Berowne is ordered to care for the “speechless sick.” So must they all fast after gorging on the banquet of words. 



The Shakespeare Film Co, photo by Laurie Sparham.

Kenneth Branagh, Matthew Lillard, Alessandro Nivola and Adrian Lester as the four lords in the film *Love's Labor's Lost* (2000).

DUTY VS. DESIRE



Photo by Carol Rosegg

Jason Patrick Bowcutt, Dallas Roberts, Sean Pratt and Michael Medico swear an oath as the four lords in the Shakespeare Theatre Company's 1994-95 production of *Love's Labor's Lost*.


In *Love's Labor's Lost*, the four lords begin the play by swearing an oath to each other. They commit themselves to a life of study, vowing to sacrifice worldly pleasures in pursuit of academic glory and fame. They promise to study day and night, eat little, sleep less and see no women for three years. With the arrival of four ladies to the court, the men quickly forget their promised sacrifice. Their desire for the women overwhelms their desire for study, and they devote themselves entirely to the pursuit of their loves. At the end of the play, when tragedy brings a dark shadow over the young couples, the men are again forced to make an oath of sacrifice. They promise to prove their love by living a life of service for a year, while the women mourn the King of France's death. As the oaths increase in seriousness from the beginning of the play to the end, the men learn about the importance of making promises and the consequences of breaking them.

What is an oath? What does it mean to break it, both in Shakespeare's time and our own? Most of us have felt the conflict between our duty to keep a promise and the desires that make us break it. Whether it's a promise to finish a homework assignment before going out with friends, or a promise to take care of a pet everyday, we all make commitments to ourselves and others that we may be tempted to break. Despite the four lords' commitment to their studies and their duty to each other, they each let their desire for the women make them break faith.

Breaking an oath, or falsely swearing, is called "being forsworn." An oath is a sacred promise, made with God or another holy or revered being as a witness. Breaking an oath has more severe consequences than breaking an everyday promise. Today, people take sacred oaths, often as part of their profession. Doctors take the Hippocratic Oath, swearing to do everything they can to help a patient. The President and other officials take an Oath of Office, promising to serve the people of their

country. Witnesses in court swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Breaking an oath has serious consequences. Lying under oath is called perjury, and doctors and public service officials can be stripped of their titles if they break their sacred oaths. In Shakespeare's time, breaking an oath made with God as a witness was a serious matter—being forsworn would severely damage a gentleman's honor. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, even though the four lords solemnize their first oath of study by signing their names in an official book, they do not take their formal bond seriously. When they break their oaths, they look to Berowne to provide them with a way to excuse themselves from this breach of promise. Berowne convinces them that study without passion is meaningless—and that therefore they must pursue the women. With that reasoning, the men throw off their duty in pursuit of their desire.

The men then swear their undying love to the ladies—but the ladies, knowing of the lords' lax attitude toward their previous oath, cannot take them seriously. The ladies make fun of the lords by disguising themselves and tricking the lords into swearing their love to the wrong ladies. The lords are doubly forsworn, having previously broken their oaths of duty and now having made oaths of love to the wrong women.

At the end of the play, the ladies force the lords to take their oaths more seriously. Even though the lords have been unable to keep their oaths throughout the events of the play, they each make an immediate offer of marriage—the most solemn vow of love. Instead of accepting their offers of marriage right away, the ladies ask the lords to take more time to think about the consequences before jumping into another oath. The lords promise to live a year of service and sacrifice to prove their love. This time, we hope the lords can uphold their end of the agreement—living a year of duty to achieve their life's desires. 

Playing

Within

the Play

The “play-within-a-play” is a theatrical device often used to parody, highlight or examine characters and themes of the greater play. The first example of a play within a play was Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* written in 1587, preceding *Love’s Labor’s Lost* by about 10 years. This device was used by Shakespeare in several plays: Hamlet uses the play at the Danish court to reveal his uncle’s guilt; in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Duke Theseus and Hippolyta’s marriage is celebrated with a performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* by the rude mechanicals; and the betrothal of Miranda and Ferdinand is celebrated in *The Tempest* with a pageant of the muses. In *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, the play-within-a-play is the pageant of the Nine Worthies. The performers, like the rude

mechanicals of *Midsummer*, are men of a lower station: schoolmaster, curate, swain, page and attendant. Their audience is the King of Navarre, the Princess of France and the lords and ladies who attend them.

The Nine Worthies were first written of together in the 14th-century French epic poem *Voeux du Paon (Vows of the Peacock)* by Jean de Longuyon. They were nine historical or legendary figures meant to represent the embodiment of the ideal, chivalrous warrior. Three of the Worthies came from the Ancient Era: Hector of Troy, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Three came from the Old Testament: David, Joshua and Judas Maccabeus, and the final three from the Christian Era: King Arthur, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon.

The Worthies from the Ancient Era:



Bust of Julius Caesar, military and political leader of Ancient Rome (100-44 BCE).



Mosaic of Alexander the Great, military conqueror of Ancient Greece (356-328 BCE).



The death of Greek mythological hero Hector of Troy, painted by Peter Paul Rubens.

The Worthies from the Old Testament:



Biblical illustration of Joshua, successor to Moses, who led the Israelites into Canaan in the Old Testament.



Judas Maccabeus, who led the Jews in a revolt against the Seleucid Empire in 165 BCE. This event is remembered in the celebration of Hanukkah.



Michaelangelo’s *David*, the most famous image of the Biblical defeater of Goliath.

The Worthies from the Christian Era:



Portrait of Charlemagne, who brought Christianity to Europe, painted by Albrecht Durer in 1512 CE.



Godfrey of Bouillon, who led the First Crusade to Jerusalem in 1096 CE.



King Arthur, the legendary English ideal of kingship in war and peace.

The Worthies were a popular subject for Renaissance plays and poetry. *The Parlement of the Three Ages* is the most famous example, though it was written anonymously. The Worthies were conquering heroes, mostly of royal birth.

In the pageant of the Nine Worthies, the performers have large shoes to fill. They are the clowns in the play, attempting to portray history's great warriors and heroes. While the performers are gravely serious about their roles, their blunders are a great source of comedy for both audiences: the King, Princess and their attendants, as well as the larger audience of the play *Love's Labor's Lost*. Within the play, the noble audience is not willing to give them a chance to perform. The players can barely get a sentence out before the heckling begins. Shakespeare, as a playwright, was constantly examining his own craft in his plays. The device of the play-within-the-play may give us an example of what Shakespeare's company and other actors had to endure 400 years ago.

While plays-within-the-play in other comedies are successful celebrations of marriage, the pageant of the Nine Worthies proves to be a somewhat awkward choice. In addition to receiving severe heckling from the nobles, the pageant of the Nine Worthies is never completed. It is first interrupted by the announcement that Jacquenetta is pregnant and then by the news of the King of France's death. Perhaps the execution of the play-within-the-play in *Love's Labor's Lost* reflects the awkward romance of the lovers. Like the pageant, the lovers' courtship is interrupted. The players conclude their piece with two songs: a dialogue between Spring and Winter, representing both life and death, happiness and sadness. Perhaps Shakespeare interrupted the pageant of the Nine Worthies to heighten the sense of incompleteness at the end of *Love's Labor's Lost*, a play that he chooses to end without the happy resolution of a traditional comedy.



Everybody's Looking

Something

en.wikipedia.org



Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, spiritual leader.

"My mission in the world is spiritual regeneration—to regenerate every man everywhere into the values of the spirit. The values of the wholeness of life are pure consciousness, absolute bliss, absolute bliss consciousness, which is the reservoir of all wisdom, the ocean of happiness, eternal life." — Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

In *Love's Labor's Lost*, the King of Navarre and his male companions, Berowne, Longaville and Dumaine, undertake a radical quest for knowledge. In order to concentrate on self improvement through rigorous study, the four men vow that for three years, they will not see, speak to or be with a woman, will fast once per week and sleep only three hours per night. Although they all agree to these conditions, Berowne predicts that they all will break their vows. Several modern productions of the play (including this Shakespeare Theatre Company production) have compared the men to the once trendy devotees of *Transcendental Meditation* and spiritual leaders of the East.

The Maharishi was an Indian teacher of mysticism and spiritual knowledge. In 1957, he began sharing his practice of *Transcendental Meditation*, a way for the conscious mind to fathom the whole range of its existence. His practices were not a set of beliefs, a philosophy, a lifestyle or a religion. It was developed as a mental technique, practiced to achieve a state of bliss and higher wisdom. The Maharishi and his practice became famous in the 1960s and paved the way for today's American popularity of health food, yoga and mind-body awareness.

In the play, the king and his men attempt to cut themselves off from the world to study. They vow to stay away from women (to avoid the temptations of the flesh), to fast (to avoid gluttony) and to stay awake (in order to be smarter, better, more conscious and more whole). Certainly there is much to be gained from reading, writing and the pursuit of knowledge. But what is knowledge without experience? Knowledge can be transformed into

wisdom only when combined with experience. Shakespeare seems to challenge his audience through his protagonists' search to find a balance between thinking and feeling. The four men start their quest in search of knowledge; they set out to develop the intellect by abandoning romantic pursuits and the poisons of the flesh. Of course, one by one they fall prey to their desires. Their experience of women and of love alters their course. While the end of the play turns to tragedy and loss, it sends the men on the path to wisdom.

As humanity continues to make advancements in science, health and technology, the individual is allowed more opportunity to reflect. The world certainly offers a wealth of knowledge, but is it enough? What do the quick fix fads promise? Why is there is no shortage of self-help material in the bookstores? People want to be happy. They seek successful relationships and meaningful lives. The fads and the self-help books promise balance and well being. But the "wisdom" is often offered as *The Seven Rules of This* or *The 12 Steps to That*. Reading and attending a workshop is mental and intellectual. It is half of the key. Exercising, experimenting and connecting to other people is the other half. Perhaps the point of the play is that social interaction validates and augments one's education. Self awareness and a connection to the world at large through personal relationships and contemplative study together make the key that opens the door to wisdom and a meaningful life. The King of Navarre makes a mistake in avoiding women to find deep meaning in his life. It is the attraction to a woman that sets him on the path to wisdom. 