

Language and People in *Love's Labour's Lost*

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Abstract

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, language is one of the main characteristics. In the play how it happens, or more precisely, how it is described is more important than what happens. Particular person comments the action of other characters using particular language. Words are more important than the plot. And most of the actions consist of verbal exchanges between characters. Among Shakespeare's plays, there are three plays which do not have sources: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. They are all in a sense artificial; the first two use magic and the last uses the magic of language. 'The world of Navarre has the appearance of a playground, a special place marked off from the pressures of social reality and the unpleasant implications of a world of fallen nature'(Montrose 529). The society itself is an artificial one where artificial people exist.

The characters in the play can be grouped by their birth, their social rank and their usage of language. The King of Navarre and Biron are intoxicated with their elaborate words but they do not know the way to communicate with others using their language. Costard believes the power of language and tries to learn new words by interpreting them as he likes. Armado is a braggart making play with synonyms. Holofernes and Nathaniel use Latin, which is no longer used in the world. The Princess of France prefers sincere words to flattery. The aim of this paper is to examine the language of characters independently.

1. King of Navarre and his noble followers

Written language is seemingly more valuable than spoken language for the King of Navarre. He and his three noble followers have decided to renounce any worthy pleasure and are about to seclude themselves from society.

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live registered upon our brazen tombs,
And then grace us in the disgrace of death...
(1.1.1-3)

The very opening lines show the attitude of the king toward language. His wish in this stage is that 'fame' or honour will live on their tombs for ever after their death. For men especially those in high birth in the Elizabethan age, 'fame' is one of the most valuable aims to pursue while living. According to the king's point of view, they live only for 'hunting after' fame. The written honour on tombs is more

valuable than their present pleasure in the world. Therefore he resolves to retire from this world with his male friends and concentrate on studying for three years.

A written contract is necessary for the King to confirm their pledge of stoicism. While Longueville and Dumaine willingly enter into a contract with the King, Biron hesitates to subscribe to the agreement. He insists that he only agreed with studying for three years with the King and that he never consented not to meet ladies for the duration nor admitted other strict items. Biron intrinsically perceives the nonsense of the plan and asks King what 'the end of study' is.

King. Why, that to know which else we should not know.

Biron. Things hid and barred, you mean, from common sense?

King. Ay, that is study's god-like recompense.

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Biron. Come on then, I will swear to study so,
 To know the thing I am forbid to know:
 As thus---- to study where I well may dine,
 When I to feast expressly am forbid;
 Or study where to meet some mistress fine,
 When mistresses from common sense are hid;
 Or, having sworn too hard-keeping oath,
 Study to break it and not break my troth.
 (1.1.56-66)

If 'the end of study' is to know 'things hid and barred from common sense' and if that is known only by study segregated from the real world, what would be gained by that kind of study? Is that not worthwhile in this common world? The question of Biron is essential for some types of scholars like those of literature, whose work seems to have no 'benefit' on the world, 'save base authority from others' books' (1.1.86).

These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights,
 That give a name to every fixed star,
 Have no more profit of their shining nights
 Than those that walk and wot not what they are.
 (1.1.87-91)

Astronomers, who give names to stars, would not have more 'profit' than ordinary people who walk under the stars without knowing their names. The argument that the purpose of study should be connected with the 'profit' of the knowledge is too difficult for Biron to draw a conclusion. His persuasion is too subtle and tricky to change King's declaration. 'Navarre's most intelligent courtier so compulsively twists wisdom into wit that the King cannot disentangle his good counsel from the sophistry which surrounds it' (Kerrigan 15). While complaining the absurdity of the King's project, Biron is not brave enough to forsake the company and subscribes prospecting that he would be the last to break the oath. 'It is a commonplace that Berowne has his special depth in this play from being both the man who participates and also the man who can see the folly of participation. He is that which he mocks' (Edwards 42). Biron cannot help contradicting

himself.

No sooner the young men decide to start their 'study', than the report arrives that the Princess of France will visit the court. In spite of their desperate projects of renouncing female contact, the King and his followers need to face the four ladies. Immediately after seeing the ladies, they fall in love with them. When they realize that they are in love, they write sonnets to their beloved ladies. Just as they believe in epitaph written on tombs, they believe in sonnets written on paper. The intensity of their love, they believe, is shown in their elaborate sonnets. That is why they strive to write sonnets, which is fashion for lovers in the Elizabethan age. The beautifully written sonnets may remain in the heart of his lady, however, sonnets as a tool of conveying love have one defect. They are not reciprocal, only one-sided. The fact that the letter of Biron is delivered to wrong person shows that sonnets, written message, might not reach the right person. Actually, four ladies exchange their presents attached to sonnets and mock the four lovers. The young lovers need to learn how to communicate with others by using language, which is used not only as epitaph or sonnets but as a tool of conversation between two people.

2. Costard

Costard is an unlettered clown who seeks for promotion by gaining new words. He was caught on the spot being with a woman though he knew the edict. Asked 'in what manner', he replies as follows:

In manner and form following, sir, all those three. I was seen with her in the manor-house, sitting with her upon the form, and taken following her into the park, which, put together, is 'in manner and form following'. Now, sir, for the manner---it is the manner of a man to speak to a woman. For the form--- in some form. (1.1.202-208)

The term 'in manner and form following' was a legal term. He divides the phrase into three parts and uses the term as he interprets. Being shocked to know that he is to be imprisoned for a year 'to be taken with a wench' (1.1.276), he tries to evade the punishment

saying that 'I was taken with none, sir I was taken with a damsel' (1.1.278). When he knows that the word 'damsel' is not effective, he protests that she was a 'virgin' or a 'maid'. His way to twist words as he likes infects the king, who pronounces the sentence that he 'shall fast a week with bran and water' (1.1.298). The punishment of 'a year's imprisonment' (1.1.178) is forgotten. The King, who attaches great importance on the written words of the edict, can easily change the contents of it. The behaviour of the King reveals that the written words have no authority as well as spoken words in the court of Navarre, a 'playground'.

Comic conversations occur when lower-class characters try to understand the language of higher-class characters. Costard's attitude toward new words is wondrously shown when he misunderstands the words 'remuneration' and 'gardon'. Costard is asked to deliver a letter by three farthings, which Armado gives saying 'there is remuneration' (3.1.127). Costard thinks that 'remuneration' means three farthings. And then he is asked to deliver another letter by Biron.

He gives Costard a letter

Biron. There's thy guerdon; go.

He gives Costard a shilling

Costard. Gardon, O sweet gardon! Better than remuneration, eleven-pence-farthing better. Most sweet gardon! (3.1.164-6)

It would be irrelevant to conclude that Costard is too foolish to understand the usage of words. His eagerness to learn a new word makes him use the word even though it becomes malapropisms. Later Costard uses the word correctly giving money to Moth. Since language changes by people who use it, malapropism in some cases leads to new usage of words. That is one aspect of the characteristics of words. Costard, who seems to be illiterate, is fascinated by those languages used by Armado or Biron and quickly learns the new words.

3. Armado

Armado is introduced by the four courtiers as 'A man in all the world's new fashion planted' (1.1.163),

or 'a man of fire-new words, fashion's own knight' (1.1.177). He is also mentioned as having 'a mint of phrases in his brain;/ One who the music of his own vain tongue/ Doth ravish like enchanting harmony' (1.1.164-7).

The letter written by Armado arrives before he shows himself to the audience. When the King of Navarre willingly reads the letter, he reveals his lack of belief in language saying 'I protest I love to hear him lie' (1.1.174). Armado is good at making much ado about almost nothing.

The time when? About the sixth hour, when beasts most graze, birds best peck, and men sit down to that nourishment which is called supper. So much for the time when. Now for the ground which-- which, I mean, I walked upon. It is yclept thy park. Then for the place where----where, I mean, I did encounter that obscene and most preposterous event that draweth from my snow-white pen the ebon-coloured ink which here thou viewest, beholdest, surveyest, or seest. But to the place where. It standeth north-north-east and by east from the west corner of thy curious-knotted garden. (1.1.230-241)

What Armado wants to tell is two pieces of information: time and place. The more he tries to explain precisely by using synonymous words, the less directly the information reaches the other people. His tedious, redundant letter makes it difficult for listeners to understand what he really wants to tell.

Although he is a person who seems to keep spinning a tale, the braggart Armado becomes silent being in love with Jaquenetta. His language is not useful as a communication tool to converse with others. His language is only for himself to boast with. When he realizes that he is in love, his next action to take is to adorn his beloved with his words in sonnets, like other courtiers: 'Assist me, some extemporal god or rhyme, for I am sure turn sonnet. Devise, wit; write, pen; for I am for whole volumes in folio' (1.2.173-76).

4. Holofernes and Nathaniel

Holofernes, a schoolmaster, and Nathaniel, a curate exist only as fools to be laughed at because of

their usage of language. Holofernes uses Latin ostentatiously and, according to the notes of the text, mistakenly. His language is dead or uncreative because he always quotes from other texts. Although Holofernes knows much more words than Costard, his words are no longer in current use. Holofernes uses Latin only for the sake of showing his knowledge. Nathaniel is a flatterer to Holofernes and keeps praising him, 'Ay, sir, and very learned' (4.2.101). It is Nathaniel who complains the lack of Dull's language.

Sir, he hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book.

He hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink.

His intellect is not replenished; he is only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts.(4.2.23-26)

While Costard attempts to learn new words by catching the usage of other people, they love to gain the knowledge of 'new' obsolete language.

Being particular over the pronunciation of some words, Holofernes insists that words should be spoken exactly as they are written. He reproaches Armado for pronouncing words differently, because Armado says 'dout, which he should say 'doubt', 'det' when he should pronounce 'debt'. 'He clepeth a calf 'cauf'; half 'hauf'; neighbour vocantur 'nebour', 'neigh' abbreviated 'ne' (5.1.21-3). Holofernes is a school master, who is proud of his vocabulary and shows off his knowledge to Nathaniel, a mediocre curate. Their language comes from books, which is no longer used. They learn the 'new' words just as Moth mentions: 'They have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps' (5.1.35-6).

However foolish they are, they are harmless and undoubtedly a member of a society. When Holofernes invited Nathaniel to the dinner 'at the father's of a certain pupil' (4.3.150), Nathaniel is pleased to accept the invitation: 'for society, saith the text, is the happiness of life' (4.3.157). In a sense that they like to communicate with others in a society, their language is not necessarily disdained.

It is Costard who suitably summarizes the three learned people: Holofernes, Nathaniel and Armado,

'O, they have lived long on the almsbasket of words. I marvel thy master [Armado] hath not eaten thee for a word, for thou art not so long by the head as honorificabilitudinitatibus' (5.1.37-40). The word reputed as the longest is mouthed in order to describe their way of using tedious words.

5. Princess of France and the other ladies

The Princess of France visits the court as her father's embassy. She is politically independent and her language is much clearer than that of the King of Navarre. In the sense of the attitude toward language, Shakespeare made a clear distinction between the King of Navarre and the Princess of France. The next conversation took place in the field because the King cannot allow them to enter the court.

King. Fair princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.

Princess. 'Fair' I give you back again, and welcome I have not yet. The roof of this court is too high to be yours, and welcome to the wide fields too base to be mine. (2.1.90-3)

King uses the words 'fair' and 'welcome' as compliments without thinking of the meaning of the words, which Princess discerns with her keen sense. 'The ladies ...know enough to distinguish language in touch with feeling from the language which does duty for feeling' (Green 317). The conversation between the King and the Princess shows two things: one is, as I mentioned before, that the King's language is superficial; and the other is that the words without meaning will not be intelligible. As Irene G. Dash mentions, *Love's Labour's Lost* is not the story of the female characters but that of the male characters. The women are touchstones for the young men, who do not yet know the way to communicate.

The difference between the King and the Princess is shown more clearly when the news of her father's death comes from the real world to this 'playground'. No modifier is used in order to report his death.

Marcade. I am sorry, madam, for the news I
bring
Is heavy in my tongue. The King your
father--
Princess. Dead, for my life!
Marcade. Even so. My tale is told.(5.2.707-9)

Among the extraordinary verbal play, the report of the King of France's death is simple. Marcade did not even tell the news because the Princess can guess the content of it. With that one word, his 'tale is told'.

Conclusion

It would be misreading that if I concluded that verbal play is denied by the words of the Princess, who prefers language without compliment. There is no discrepancy between the word 'dead' and the meaning of the word. Nor any other meaning is possible to the word. Everybody in a society will immediately catch the correct message of the word, because society is the place where people use common language. However, words sometimes have connotation, implication or innuendo, which adds one aspect of comedy to the play. In Shakespeare's plays, behind jokes or puns of language or even behind malapropism, the key to light on the theme of the play is hidden. The text is a texture of various colors and materials. Puns, jokes and malapropism provoke laughter, which is not sarcastic but enjoyable. Like Armado, Shakespeare is a factory of coinage. Like Biron, Shakespeare contradicts himself. He loves words. He loves discrepancy between words and the meaning of words. The laughter of audience is not the laughter of disdain but that of sympathy. That is because Shakespeare knows well about the defects of human beings, who cannot change himself.

* All quotations of the text are from the edition of *Love's Labour's Lost The Oxford Shakespeare*, Ed. G.R.Hibbard. Oxford:Oxford, 1990.

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