

OATHS FORSWORN IN

Love's Labour's Lost

Ruth Loyd Miller



Necessity will make us all forsworn
Three thousand times within this three years' space,
For every man with his affects is born,
Not by might master'd, but by special grace.

Berowne (1.1.150-53)



IRTUALLY all orthodox Shakespearean editors of the past 280 years have considered *Love's Labour's Lost* the author's earliest play.¹ They have viewed it as a beginner's effort, filled with stilted rhyming couplets and elaborate puns (estimating that the work contains some 240 puns and other word-play) though they have been unable to explain their meaning. Of course puns and word-play are usually extremely topical, and tend to lose impact as the circumstances that engendered them are forgotten. The historic vacuum and erroneous time-frame in which Shakespeare's works have traditionally been studied preclude recognition and understanding of allusions to contemporaneous events in the canon.

The meaning of the word-play in *Love's Labour's Lost* has been a mystery because Stratfordian editors are shackled by their assignment of too late a date for its composition. As Hamlet might say, their time is "out of joint."

William Shakspeare of Stratford-on-Avon was born in 1564, thus, according to orthodox chronology, *Love's Labour's Lost* cannot have been composed much before 1590; or, as editor Furness states, we would have "the lad leaving home to seek his fortune in London with the manuscript of the comedy in his pocket" (Furness 325). Even a genius has to have time to grow up, acquire education, experience and knowledge. An early editor wrote: "In the play we recognize roles requiring a courtier's acquaintance with things courtly." He did not document when, where or how the Stratford man had the opportunity to gain "a courtier's acquaintance with things courtly."

Love's Labour's Lost is a comedy of Court and courtiers, but not just any Court. It is the Court of Elizabeth, of whom and for whom it was written. And I submit it is not a comedy of the Court as it existed in 1590, where traditional chronology anchors it, but that it is in fact about the Court of Elizabeth ten to twelve years earlier, circa 1578 to 1583. I submit that when we place the play within the true time-frame of its composition, and view the events contemporary to that time in relationship to the situations in the play, all the puns and allusions become crystal clear.

I offer here two situations in the play (*situation* as defined by the OED as a "particular conjunction of circumstances, especially of one of a striking or exciting nature, under which the characters are presented in the course of a novel or play") that have never been addressed by Stratfordian

editors, but that can be comprehended in relation to the contemporary events giving rise to them.

It is instructive that *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is teeming with the words *sworn* and *swear*, *forswear* and *forsworn*, *perjure* and *perjury*, *vows* and *oaths*, *breach* and *break*, and their relevant synonyms. *Vows* and *oaths* are earnest promises and pledges that bind one to perform a specified act or to behave in a certain manner. To *forswear* is to break an oath or vow, to renounce or forsake, repudiate, to perjure or to swear falsely. To *perjure* is to testify falsely under oath; to give willfully misleading or incomplete testimony under oath. About ten per cent of Shakespeare’s usage of these words and their derivatives can be found in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

The context in which these key words are used in the play tells us that the author was uncomfortable with broken promises. Accordingly, he gives us the courtier’s concept of virtue and honor as set forth in Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, translated in 1571 from the Italian into Latin by Bartholomew Clerke. For it the Earl of Oxford wrote a stunning Latin preface, as Gabriel Harvey noted in 1579: “Let that Courtly Epistle—more polished even than the writings of Castiglione himself—witness how greatly thou dost excel in letters. I have seen many Latin verses of thine, yea, even more English verses are extant . . .” (Ward 157).

Situation I: Elizabeth cleans house

Our late edict shall strongly stand in force . . . (1.1.11)²
Ferdinand, King of Navarre

Historical event: The Queen’s sweeping edict of 1561 to Archbishop Matthew Parker forbidding “all resort of women to the lodgings of Cathedrals or Colleges”:³ Every year, during the summer months, Queen Elizabeth went on progress through some part of her kingdom with an entourage numbering several hundred persons: her ladies, courtiers, officers of government, attendants and servants. Along with them went some three hundred or more carts filled with luggage, the number of carts permitted to each person being determined by the Council. Special permission had to be obtained by anyone who needed additional carts. Several days, perhaps a week at a time, would be spent at the country estates of those of her majesty’s subjects whom she most wished to favor—or punish—with a visit. Entertainment in the evening hours would consist of plays, devices, skits, orations, and addresses, dancing and music.

The scene of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is laid in Navarre and the names of the main characters are French, but the story is largely based upon incidents of Elizabeth’s progress through her eastern counties during the summer of 1578. I submit that the part of the play concerning “house-keeping” was written as a device to be presented on progress at some nobleman’s house, and that this device was composed of elements and circumstances relating to events taking place on three earlier progresses; to Ipswich and Castle Hedingham in 1561, to Cambridge University in 1564 and to Oxford University in 1566.

Scene one of the first act is devoted to dialogue between the King and his “attendant lords” concerning an oath: the lords have sworn to forgo the presence of women during the three years they attend the academy. The King declares:

Our late edict shall strongly stand in force (11)
. . . .
[You] have sworn for three years term to live with me,
My fellow scholars, and to keep those statutes
That are recorded in this schedule here.
Your oaths are pass’d, and now subscribe your names. (15-19)
. . . .
If you are armed to do as sworn to do,
Subscribe to your deep oaths, and keep it too. (22-23)

They sign, but then Berowne complains of certain “strict observances,” required by the “statutes,” among them: “As not to see a woman in that term.” (37) They discuss the ramifications of their agreement, Berowne agrees to accept all the statutes, then reads the item that most distresses him:

Item: that no woman shall come within a mile of my court. (121)
. . . .
This article, my liege, yourself must break;
For well you know here comes in embassy,
The French king’s daughter with yourself to speak. (131-33)
. . .
Therefore this article is made in vain,
Or vainly comes th’admired princess hither. (138-9)
. . . .

King: We must of force dispense with this decree;
She must lie here on mere necessity (147-8).

Berowne: Necesssity will make us all forsworn (148)
. . . .
If I break faith, this word shall speak for me,
I am forsworn “on mere necessity.”
So to the laws at large I write my name;
And he that breaks them in the least degree
Stands at attainder of eternal shame:
Suggestions are to other as to me,

But I believe, although I seem so loath,
I am the last that will last keep his oath. (152-58)

In the first scene of Act II, the Princess and her ladies approach the King’s Court, where they are barred entry. When the King greets them, she remonstrates with him:

I hear your grace hath sworn out house-keeping.
'Tis deadly sin to keep that oath, my lord,
And sin to break it. (103-05)
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.
You will the sooner I were away,
For you’ll prove perjur’d if you make me stay. (111-12)

After discussing the terms of her embassy, the King responds:

King: Mean time, receive such welcome at my hand
As honour (without breach of honour may)
Make tender of to thy true worthiness.
You may not come, fair Princess, within my gates,
But here without you shall be so receiv’d,
As you shall deem yourself lodg’d in my heart,
Though so denied fair harbour in my house. (168-174).

Earlier in Act II the Princess’s attendant, Boyet, discusses the housing situation:

Boyet: You are not ignorant all-telling fame
Doth noise abroad Navarre hath made a vow,

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Till painful study shall outwear three years,
No woman may approach his silent court. (21-24)
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.
.
He rather means to lodge you in the field . . .
Than seek a dispensation for his oath,
To let you enter his unpeopled house. (85, 87-88)

Though an edict against consorting with women and barring them from the King’s Court is the dominant theme of the play, no Stratfordian scholar of whom I am aware has ever connected these spirited sallies about celibacy to an actual Elizabethan statute. The first to make a suggestion that an existing edict (a decree or proclamation issued by authority, having the force of law) might have been the source of this allusion was pioneer Oxfordian scholar Eva Turner Clark.⁴ In her study of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Mrs. Clark briefly mentioned the possibility of a statute restricting students from associating with women during the academic term, but gave no citation or further explanation.

The statute to which Shakespeare is alluding was issued by Her Majesty in August 1561 at Ipswich while on progress in Suffolk and Essex. It provided for a general “housekeeping” of university, church and cathedral premises. The “housekeeping” edict was a “sweeping” order to sweep the premises clean of woman and children. As John Nichols tells us:

This summer the Queen went on progress to Ipswich. Here her Majesty took a great dislike at the imprudent behaviour of many of the ministers and readers; there being many weak ones among them, and little or no order observed in the public service Particularly she was offended with the clergy’s marriage, and that, in Cathedrals and Colleges there were so many wives, widows and children seen; and so much tending to the interruption of the studies of those who were placed there. Therefore, she issued out an order to all dignitaries, dated Aug. 9 [1561] at Ipswich, *to forbid all resort of women to the lodgings of Cathedrals or Colleges; and that upon pain of losing their ecclesiastical promotions.* And this order was to be entered into their books of statutes, and to be reputed as parcel of the statutes. The copy of this Order was sent [to] . . . the Archbishop of Canterbury, [to] . . . the Archbishop of York, and to the Chancellors of the two universities. (1.96, emphasis added)

The close relationship and interlocking leadership of the ecclesiastical and educational institutions account for the Church and universities being brought together under this “housekeeping” edict. The Queen flung her thunderbolt from Ipswich on August 9th. Four days later she was at Castle Hedingham in Essex—the seat of John de Vere, sixteenth Earl of Oxford. There we find the eleven-year-old Edward, Lord Bolebec, heir to the earldom of Oxford. No doubt Edward was all ears, absorbing the gossip about the consternation caused by the Queen’s proclamation. No doubt the talk in 1561 was similar to this dialogue from Act I Scene 1:

Berowne: . . . that no woman shall come within a mile of my court
hath this been proclaimed?

Longaville: Four days ago. (119-22)

That last is the telling line. The edict was issued at Ipswich on August 9. On August 14 Elizabeth was at Hedingham, four days having intervened from the time the edict was issued to the time of her arrival at Lord Oxford's. No doubt the Queen was still swearing over the effrontery of ecclesiastics and scholars; no doubt swearing at Cecil, Chancellor of Cambridge University; and at Robert Dudley, Chancellor of Oxford; and most of all swearing at her Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, who was himself married with children.

A year after the Queen's visit to Hedingham, the sixteenth Earl was dead. The now twelve-year-old Lord Bolbec was elevated to seventeenth Earl and taken by Sir William Cecil, Master of the Court of Wards, into London to Cecil House. There for the next nine years young Oxford would have a ringside seat for the greatest show on earth: the Court of Gloriana.

IN her forty-five year reign, Queen Elizabeth would make only three visits to the universities: to Cambridge in 1564; to Oxford in 1566, and to Oxford again in 1592.⁵ In 1564 her Majesty sent word that she would visit Cambridge in August—university officials had only three weeks to prepare for her visit.

Cecil, Chancellor of Cambridge, sprang into action. With characteristic thoroughness, he attended to arrangements for the momentous occasion. Couriers and correspondence flowed back and forth between the chancellor, his vice-chancellor, and the college deans. Cecil arrived early at the University to personally supervise final arrangements and accommodations, among them a place for his two young wards, the Earls of Oxford and Rutland, where they and he would each receive Master of Arts degrees during the Queen's visit. Elizabeth and her Maids of Honour were housed in the Long Gallery at King's College, *lodged on the premises in direct violation of her own royal edict* issued three years previously. Accordingly, the King of Navarre declares in the play: "We must of force dispense with this decree. She must lie here of mere necessity." And Berowne observes: "Necessity will make us all *forsworn*."

Two years later the identical situation arose when the Queen visited Oxford University. Again she was lodged in the halls of one of the Colleges in violation of her own decree. Again the Earl of Oxford was present—now sixteen, he received another Master of Arts degree. Twelve years later, in 1578, we find him on another royal progress, along with almost all of those who had accompanied the Queen in 1561, 1564 and 1566, including Cecil, Dudley and de Vere.

Though the 1578 progress did not take her into Cambridge, it brought her to the great Howard estate at Audley End, just twelve miles south of the University, where the dons came to deliver their orations and addresses. Their presence and proximity to Cambridge nudged the royal memory of the 1561 edict—still a valid statute—and of her two progresses of 1564 and 1566 when she had been lodged "on campus" in violation of it.

For 280 years, orthodox editors of *Love's Labour's Lost* have been unable to find Shakespeare's sources for themes in the play. H.C. Hart, editor for the first Arden Series (1906) stated: "Origin of the plot is unknown. . . . We are fairly entitled to say it is Shakespeare's own invention" (xx-xxi). Richard David, editor for the second Arden series (1951) concluded: "of all Shakespeare's plays this is the most personal. A solution of the puzzle he has set here would . . . illuminate Shakespeare's own early life and conditions that shaped his career and his first plays. . . ." (xvii). But these editors did not (because they could not) give a single example from the Stratford man's early life which is alluded to or illuminated in the play.

I submit that these editors were correct: the play *does* spring out of the author's personal observations and early life experiences, but the early life illuminated is that of de Vere, not the Stratford man. I suggest that the first part of the play dealing with the oath against consorting with women was written as a device in 1578, and was presented before the Queen on her 1578 Progress. As proof I submit a commission of the Privy Council dated 4 September 1578 which granted "viii (8) cartes to carry my Lord of Oxenfordes stuff from the court to London." In Revels accounts under the Tudors, the word "stuff" is consistently used to refer to theatrical properties.⁶ Mrs. Clark observed: "It is inconceivable Oxford would have required 8 carts to transport his ordinary luggage . . . on the Progress, or that the Privy Council would have granted such a number to the 28-year-old Earl [for ordinary luggage]" (215). Clark's conjecture was that the eight carts were used for transporting costumes and theatrical properties for use in the production of some device, mask or pageant given during the Progress of 1578.

In the coming decades de Vere's reputation as first among noble writers would be acknowledged in William Webbe's *A Discourse of English Poetry* (1586), *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), and as the "best for comedy among us" in Francis Meres's *A Wit's Treasury* (1598), though it was in 1578 at Audley End that the world at large first heard Oxford's talents praised.

What other acknowledged playwright and patron of acting companies had been more privy to Court gossip of the progresses of '61, '64 and '66? Who else was more privileged to dramatize and satirize the events? Who else would dare risk fanning the ashes of the Queen's wrath with these lines: "Berowne: I'll lay my head to any goodman's hat, *these oaths and laws will prove an idle scorn* (1.1.309 emphasis added).

Situation II: A Marriage Contract Forsworn

"O sweet Maria, Empress of my Love."

Longaville (4.3.54)

Historical event: The "forswearing" of the 1562 Hastings-de Vere Indenture of Marriage: The second situation in *Love's Labour's Lost* that has never been and cannot be explicated in terms of the Stratford man's life, but which is illuminated by our understanding of de Vere's own life rests on an original document in the Huntington Library's Hastings Collection is, as far as we know, the only extant copy of the marriage contract or indenture entered into (in duplicate originals) in July 1562,

between John de Vere, sixteenth Earl of Oxford and Henry Hastings, third Earl of Huntingdon.⁷ The indenture provides for the marriage of Oxford's son Edward de Vere (twelve-years-old at the time and known as Lord Bolebec) to either Lady Elizabeth or Lady Mary Hastings, sisters of the Earl of Huntingdon. Within a month after attaining age eighteen, Lord Bolebec was to choose either Elizabeth or Mary. Though a marriage contract is a binding agreement, and this one follows the usual legal formalities binding and bonding the parties, the contract stipulates that any one of the three young people can opt out of it.

Either the older sister, Lady Elizabeth, exercised this option, or the contract had otherwise been set aside, for she married Edward Somerset, later Earl of Worcester, and bore him thirteen children (Shakespeare scholars will recall that it was the actors of the companies of Worcester and Oxford who “best liked the Boar's Head Tavern”).⁸

A marriage between de Vere and Hastings was not to be taken lightly: it would unite two of the most prominent houses of England. In 1562 when the marriage contract was executed, Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon was the leading Protestant candidate as Queen Elizabeth's successor to the throne.⁹ The Hastings were of royal blood, cousins to the Queen. The earldom of Oxford was one of the oldest in the realm, having descended through the male line for 500 years. We would suspect that as the three young people named in the contract grew up and were thrown together at Court, they eyed each other speculatively, wondering what their lives would be like together; or if the contract had already been breached, wondering what they might have been like.

WITHIN a month of signing the indenture, John de Vere was dead. Within thirty days of his father's funeral the twelve-year-old Edward, now Earl of Oxford, was riding into London, escorted by “seven score horse and riders clad in black.” Sir William Cecil, Master of the Court of Wards, already the most influential officer in Elizabeth's cabinet, wasted no time in gathering this young lord into the folds of wardship. For the next nine years of his nonage, Edward would live under the guidance and dominion of Cecil at his great house in London.

We find nothing in the carefully preserved papers of the meticulous Cecil telling us what happened to the Oxford/Huntingdon contract. Nothing is found in the records of the Court of Wards. Thousands of documents that went through Cecil's hands also survive in the Lansdowne and Hatfield collections, in the British Library and in the Public Record Office. As Master of the Court of Wards, Cecil originally had custody of all family papers of his ward Edward de Vere, and these are missing. It is indeed strange that de Vere's copy of the marriage contract is missing if we bear in mind that the original indenture with his father's seal is found among the 40,000 Hastings/Huntingdon papers now part of the Huntingdon Collection.

I seriously doubt that it was Lady Mary who declined the marriage. According to Lord St. John, the dashing Edward was quite a catch: “The Earl of Oxford hath gotten him wife, or at least a wife hath caught him; this is Mistress Anne Cecil; whereunto the Queen hath given her consent, and the which has caused great weeping, wailing and sorrowful cheer of those that had hoped to have that golden day.”¹⁰ Nor, as we are told in *Love's Labour's Lost*, was it de Vere who opted out— but more of this anon.

Was it his guardian, the wily Cecil, who abrogated the contract? If as guardian his first consideration was for his noble ward, would not an alliance with a family of royal blood with a close claim to the throne, be advantageous? But clearly Cecil had other plans for his ward's marriage—plans not necessarily in the ward's best interest—and annulling a marriage covenant was hardly out of the question for Cecil. In 1569, when it was politically expedient for him to have an alliance with Robert Dudley, now the Earl of Leicester, Cecil had negotiated a marriage contract between his daughter and Leicester's nephew and heir apparent Philip Sidney; but later he rescinded that agreement when he saw a more advantageous marriage for Anne to a ranking peer of the realm, the young Earl of Oxford, his ward.

There was, however, an impediment. Though a guardian had an absolute right to marry the ward to whom he pleased, he could not dispare a noble ward by marrying him beneath the his station, and Anne Cecil was not the daughter of a peer. This, however, the Queen could make right, which she did in 1571 by elevating Cecil to the peerage as Baron Burghley. In December of that year Cecil married his daughter to his ward, uniting the ancient house of Vere with the newly constructed house of Cecil.

Nevertheless, the memory of the forsworn de Vere/Hastings marriage contract survives in *Love's Labour's Lost*. One line in the play gives us the identity of the real life prototype of one of the Princess's ladies: “Maria.” Longaville, one of the King's men, says: “O sweet Maria, empress of my love!” (4.3.54), which brings us to the Russian connection in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Situation III: A Marriage Contract avoided

“I shall be foresworn, which is a great argument of falsehood, if I love.”

Armado (1.2.161)

Historical event: The attempt by Ivan the Terrible to arrange a marriage with Lady Mary Hastings: For the first twenty-five years of her reign, Elizabeth enjoyed a dominant role in trading with Russia. The English made no attempt to understand Russian life-style, language, religion, politics or social structure and, although for years Czar Ivan had accorded the English a virtual trade monopoly, Russian diplomats coming to her Court were treated with ridicule and scorn.

Even so, for two decades Elizabeth was the object of perennial matrimonial proposals from Czar Ivan. The fact that sometimes Ivan had a living wife did not deter these overtures, which Elizabeth fielded with consummate skill, giving neither a “yes” or a “no,” while she kept the English ships trading with Muscovy. But Ivan's dream of an English marriage lived on. He continued to press for a bride as a condition of continued favored treatment of the English.

After some time Elizabeth named as a prospective bride a kinswoman of royal blood: Lady Mary Hastings, daughter of the Earl of Huntingdon. In 1582, to examine the prospective bride, Ivan dispatched Ambassador Theodore Andreyevitch Pisemsky to England, accompanied by a large suite. The Russian ambassador was to see Lady Mary; look at her most carefully, note her figure, face, complexion and proportions, collect information on her family and her age, and bring back her portrait.

He arrived in September. Elizabeth did not give him audience until December and not until

January did she discuss the proposal for Mary Hastings with him. The Ambassador pressed for an introduction to Mary, but was put off. He pressed for a portrait to carry to his master, and was again put off. The Lady Mary was recovering from the pox and her beauty was temporarily marred.

Finally, the meeting was scheduled in May 1583. An elaborate party was arranged in the garden of York House. A large pavilion was erected under which Mary was seated, “attended by divers great ladies and maids of honour” and a number of distinguished noblemen. The Ambassador and his attendants arrived. Mary put on “a stately countenance” to receive them. On being presented, Pisemsky “cast down his countenance, fell prostrate at her feet, rose and ran back from her, his face still towards her, she and the rest admiring at his manner” (Horsey qtd. in Lee 455). His interpreter declared “it did not suffice him to behold the angel he hoped should be his master's spouse,” commended again her angelic countenance, state, and admirable beauty.” By mid-June the portrait was finished. The envoy departed for Muscovia with the picture, but without a bride.

There was reportedly at one time a portrait of Mary Hastings shown with a crown at her feet (I have been unable to locate it). Lady Mary, after a respectful wait, refused the tender of marriage, and the Emperor retaliated by threatening to come to England and carry her away by force. Happily and fortunately, Ivan's death in 1584 prevented execution of his threat. The lords and ladies of the Court thought it hilarious. And Mary Hastings was thereafter known as “Empress of Muscovia” (DNB: Francis Hastings).

Similarities between the ludicrous scene in the York House garden and the visit of Navarre and his lords disguised as Russians in *Love's Labour's Lost* were noted by Sidney Lee in an article in *Gentlemen's Magazine* in which he quotes Jerome Horsey (196):

Both interviews take place in “a park before a pavilion,” the object of both is a “love feat”; the extravagant adulation Moth is instructed to deliver corresponds to the interpreter's address; the shapeless gear of the Muscovites which serve as disguises for Navarre's lords. Rosaline's remark, “gross, gross, fat, fat” seems reminiscent of the description of the Russians as “of large size and of very fleshy bodies, accounting it grace to be somewhat gross and burly.” (447)

I suggest that the Russian episodes in *Love's Labour's Lost* were added to the earlier device (of the Housekeeping edict) sometime between the garden party in 1583 and Ivan's death in 1584, which brought an end to his country's favorable treatment of the English, his courtship of an English bride and the topicality of any Court comedy about it. So while we can agree with the long line of editors who find that *Love's Labour's Lost* was Shakespeare's earliest effort, it's clear the Russian motif dates to 1584, not after 1590, which is where most editors place the play, despite the fact that it has been acknowledged that “Empress of my love” plays on “Empress of Muscovia,” with Maria identified as Mary Hastings (Lee 455, Hart xxvi).

They have, however, failed to realize that when Shakespeare paired Maria with Longaville, he gave a clue to the real life identity of the character, that is, Edward de Vere, linked to Mary through the Oxford/Huntingdon Indenture of Marriage signed 1 July 1562. This Indenture required that Huntingdon would pay 2,500 marks for the marriage of the Hastings sister chosen by Edward, 1000

marks to be paid a year later (1563) at the Feast of All Saints (which was to be refunded by Oxford if the marriage aborted), the balance when the marriage was solemnized. Earlier in the play when the Princess asks the first Lord if he knows this “vow-fellow” Longaville, Maria speaks up: “I know him, Madame: at a marriage feast between Lord Perigot and the beauteous heir of Jaques Falconbridge, solemnized in Normandy, saw I this Longaville” (2.1.40-43).

There would have been any number of opportunities for Edward and the two Hastings sisters to be in attendance together at a marriage feast. It would have been natural for one of the two earls to have given a dinner or feast on 1 July 1562 to celebrate the signing of the Indenture, an engagement party of sorts, uniting their families. The reference in the play may be to the 1563 Feast of All Saints, when Huntingdon was to pay the first thousand marks. And there were any number of feasts held on the occasions of marriages of families at court, for instance the wedding of the Earl of Warwick held in Westminster where young Edward served as a page, and both Elizabeth and Mary Hastings, as Queen's Maids of Honour, would have been present.

Each party to the Indenture was bound in the Court of Chancery for £3000 for faithfully fulfilling the contract. The Indenture specifically bound “the heirs, assigns, administrators, and executors” of the two earls. The two persons most affected in carrying out the sixteenth Earl's Indenture were young Edward and Sir William Cecil. Thus the situation that existed after the death of Earl John was that 1) Edward was subject to the Indenture as the prospective bridegroom and heir of his father and as one of the executors of his father's will and estate, and that 2) Sir William Cecil, the Queen's principal Secretary and Master of the Wards, as guardian of the of the twelve-year-old Edward, had custody both of the person and property of the ward and, additionally, was Chief Executor of his father's will and estate.

How early on Cecil had his eye on the Queen's ward for the purpose of marrying him to his daughter we do not know. Cecil was a master strategist, never premature in showing his hand, carefully weeding official records of anything reflecting unfavorably on himself. Joel Hurstfield writes that there is “evidence of payment by noble wards for their own marriages, for example by the Earls of Rutland and Oxford, shortly before they came of age” (250). Hurstfield's statement is frustrating in that he gave neither a citation of documents nor an inkling as to whom payment was made, though clearly indicating that Oxford paid his guardian for the right to marry his daughter. This would have been strange indeed, for Cecil should himself have paid a handsome dowry to Oxford for daughter Anne's marriage to the third ranking peer of the realm. It is possible that Cecil required that Oxford pay the penalty of £3000 owed to the Earl of Huntingdon for breach of contract, even had the breach been orchestrated by Cecil, not by Oxford himself.

THE Queen and members of the Court would have had no difficulty understanding the word-play, references and allusions to Mary Hastings and Edward de Vere in the play. Maria describes Longaville in Act II Scene 1:

A man of sovereign parts he is esteem'd: well fitted in Arts, glorious in Armes: nothing becomes him ill that he would well, the only soil of his fair vertue's gloss, if vertue's gloss with stain with any soil, is a sharp wit

match'd with too blunt a Will; whose edge hath power to cut, whose will still wills it should none spare that come within his power.

Princess: Some merry mocking Lord, belike; is't so?

Maria: They say most that most his humours know. (44-53).

“Vertue” (as it spelled in both the 1598 Quarto and First Folio) was a favorite de Vere word, frequently used as a pun on his family motto, *Vero Nihil Verius* (Nothing Truer than Truth). Following Longaville’s “O sweet Maria, empress of my love!” he reads a sonnet he says he has composed for her:

Did not the heavenly rhetoric of thine eye,
'Gainst whom the world cannot hold argument,
Persuade my heart to this false perjury?
Vows for thee broke deserve not punishment.
A woman, I forswore; but I will prove,
Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee.
My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love;
Thy grace being gain'd cures all disgrace in me.
Vows are but breath, and breath a vapour is;
Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth dost shine,
Exhal'st this vapour vow, in thee it is:
If broken then, it is no fault of mine.
If by me broke, what fool is not so wise
To lose an oath to win a paradise? (55-71)

In Longaville’s testimony do we not have Oxford’s apology to Lady Mary for the broken contract?

A last clue to Longaville as Oxford comes in the final scene of the last act when the lords arrive disguised as “Muscovites or Russians.” The ladies have exchanged visors, so Longaville thinks he is conversing with Maria when actually his partner for the dance is Katharine. We find a series of puns on the English word *veal* (young beef) and the French word *ville*, both pronounced the same:

Katharine: O! for your reason! Quickly, sir; I long!
.....
“Veal,” quoth the Dutchman. Is not “veal” a calf?”

Longaville: A calf, fair lady!

Katharine: No, a fair lord calf.

Longaville: Let’s part the word.

Katharine: No, I'll not be your half. Take all and wean it;
It may prove an ox. (243-50)

“Your half,” your better self, your wife, refers to marriage. “It may prove an ox” leaves no doubt as to who is meant. An ox fording a stream had been the Oxford rebus for over four centuries.

The King also plays on de Vere’s name in Act IV, Scene 3:

You do not love Maria? Longueville
Did never sonnet for her sake compile,
His loving bosom to keep down his heart? (131-34)

The wax seal of John de Vere affixed to the Hastings copy of the Indenture of Marriage, shows his arms enclosed in a wreath. “Arms athwart” means the seal is partially turned, crosswise, as it rests on the document. The wreathed arms seal of de Vere is still attached to the Hastings copy in the Huntington Library.

With the marriage to Anne Cecil, whatever hopes Mary Hastings might have entertained that the covenant would be kept were ended. “That golden day” was not for her. Through the veil of years one can picture her picking up the wax seal of the wreathed arms of John de Vere that had been lying athwart atop the Hastings copy of the Indenture, and carefully replacing it, arms aright, upon the vellum document.

Did Mary accept the apology offered by the poet as Longaville in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*? Maria’s next to last line in the last scene of the play indicates she did. Katharine says: “You swear not, lest you be *forsworn* again.” Longaville asks: “What says Maria?” Maria answers: “At the twelvemonth’s end, I’ll change my black gown for a faithful friend.” But alas, the “Empress of Muscovia” never married.¹¹



End Notes

- 1 Howard Furness gives a comprehensive chronological review of previous editors' views in "Dates of Composition" in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* (1904).
- 2 All line endings are numbered according to the Riverside Shakespeare.
- 3 Edict issued by Queen Elizabeth, from a copy made in the late seventeenth century by Theophilus Hastings, seventh Earl of Huntingdon: Hastings MSS, Religious 1561-1691, L5A7, 9 August 1561.
- 4 Apart from her important book, *Hidden Allusions Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays* (first version published in 1930), Clark was also a founder and an original patron of the American Shakespeare Fellowship, forerunner of the present Shakespeare Oxford Society
- 5 We can dismiss the 1592 visit as a source, for if—as all editors agree—*Love's Labour's Lost* was the dramatist's earliest play, it must have been written prior to, or by, 1590.
- 6 As shown by E.K. Chambers in his quotes from the Revels accounts: pages 5, 12, 13, 17, 20, 22, 32, 33, 35-6, 38-46, and 61.
- 7 Hastings MSS #1301, Cal. Ms. Vol I, 319.
- 8 [Editor's note: Recall that it was with Worcester's Men that Oxford's Men combined sometime in the late 1590s as noted in a Privy Council letter of March 1602 (Bowen; Alexander website).]
- 9 [Editor's note: Recall that it was either Mary's brother, Henry Hastings, fifth earl of Huntingdon (b.1586) or his father, the fourth earl (who died in 1604), whom Oxford promoted (October 10, 1603), to the Earl of Lincoln as a preferable successor to Queen Elizabeth than James of Scotland (Peyton letter, PRO SP4/4/[14, 14/i], ff. 27, Nelson website.)]
- 10 Cal. Rutland MSS. 28 July 1571.
- 11 There is a second indenture in the Huntingdon's Hastings Collection, by which Mary's brother Henry provided an income for her in later years: Hastings MSS. (HAD 1140).



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