

Love's Labour's Lost

Act IV, sc. 3 (line 285)

Dumaine

Some salve for perjury.

BEROWNE

'Tis more than need.

Have at you, then, affection's men at arms.

Consider what you first did swear unto,

To fast, to study, and to see no woman;

Flat treason 'gainst the kingly state of youth.

Say, can you fast? your stomachs are too young;

And abstinence engenders maladies.

And where that you have vow'd to study, lords,

In that each of you have forsworn his book,

Can you still dream and pore and thereon look?

For when would you, my lord, or you, or you,

Have found the ground of study's excellence

Without the beauty of a woman's face?

From women's eyes this doctrine I derive;

They are the ground, the books, the academes

From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire

Why, universal plodding poisons up

The nimble spirits in the arteries,

As motion and long-during action tires

The sinewy vigour of the traveller.
Now, for not looking on a woman's face,
You have in that forsworn the use of eyes
And study too, the causer of your vow;
For where is any author in the world
Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?
Learning is but an adjunct to ourself
And where we are our learning likewise is:
Then when ourselves we see in ladies' eyes,
Do we not likewise see our learning there?
O, we have made a vow to study, lords,
And in that vow we have forsworn our books.
For when would you, my liege, or you, or you,
In leaden contemplation have found out
Such fiery numbers as the prompting eyes
Of beauty's tutors have enrich'd you with?
Other slow arts entirely keep the brain;
And therefore, finding barren practisers,
Scarce show a harvest of their heavy toil:
But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,
Lives not alone immured in the brain;
But, with the motion of all elements,
Courses as swift as thought in every power,
And gives to every power a double power,

Above their functions and their offices.
It adds a precious seeing to the eye;
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind;
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound,
When the suspicious head of theft is stopp'd:
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible
Than are the tender horns of cockl'd snails;
Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste:
For valour, is not Love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?
Subtle as Sphinx; as sweet and musical
As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair:
And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.
Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;
O, then his lines would ravish savage ears
And plant in tyrants mild humility.
From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
They are the books, the arts, the academes,
That show, contain and nourish all the world:
Else none at all in ought proves excellent.
Then fools you were these women to forswear,

Or keeping what is sworn, you will prove fools.

For wisdom's sake, a word that all men love,

Or for love's sake, a word that loves all men,

Or for men's sake, the authors of these women,

Or women's sake, by whom we men are men,

Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,

Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths.

It is religion to be thus forsworn,

For charity itself fulfills the law,

And who can sever love from charity?