

Love's Labour's Lost

July 15th

I am afraid my midweek reviews are not as detailed as one would hope. I was working all day and going straight to the Festival at night and spending the intervals promoting my book. So, what you have – *Titus Andronicus* aside, as I saw it on Saturday also – are merely what I can recall. I may add to them later but hopefully I will not need to as you will have written in with your own views.

Director Jason Moore's presents us with a more restrained version of *Love's Labour's Lost* than I have seen for a while. By that I mean the bawdy, or one might more correctly say: filthy-verging-on-depraved, elements, were not stressed. The problem that arises from this is that what you are left with is a rather cerebral, and very literary, play about words and poetry.

If you have studied the play's language intimately you can follow most of these and the crucial historical importance of the much repeated word, "forsover". However, you do so only with a dutiful respect as opposed to outright humour. If you have not got a solid background on the wordplay then, I am afraid, it does not easily travel down the centuries and so the play becomes quite a difficult one to stage.

The solution to the problem comes via an incredible performance by Timothy Weston, who is simply sensational as Don Armado. Weston gives a bravura display, bringing about its own well-deserved and spontaneous round of applause, mid-play, after one of his set piece extravaganzas.

Moore tries to inject as much bodily humour (bawdy aside) as he can into this play of wit and manners and one use of a park bench brought about one of those times when everyone laughs out loud at the same moment. Nonetheless there are slim pickings in the text when not played with extreme bawdiness, which is one reason that it so often is performed in that way.

Still, Andrew Lancaster's fine Berowne made the seeds of Benedick's character in *Much Ado About Nothing* very clear. Costard was a welcome antidote to the stuck up princes. The King was nicely differentiated; older and bigger than his 'boys' while the Queen similarly stood out from her giggling girls, albeit all the females, however silly at times, are always on another plane of maturity from the foppish males.

The courtly men in this play are just absolutely ridiculous, there is no getting away from it; a bunch of spoiled twits devoid of any contact with or knowledge of the real world. I mused to myself what it must have been like for the spoiled sons of nobility in Shakespeare's day to see this play. Were they self-aware enough to realise he was holding up a mirror in which they could see themselves? If they were, they must have been a tad miffed, one would have thought.

The ending of this play somehow always comes as a shock even when you know it is coming. What an absolute bolt from the blue it must have been for its first audiences. It is a bucket of cold water over everything that had gone before and raises interesting questions over genre, a theme Shakespeare would return to again and again in later, and immeasurably richer, comedies.

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