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Shakespeare's Comedies

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***Love's Labour's Lost***

**The Debating of Debate:**

**Dichotomy in Action**

There is great tendency to read *Love's Labour's Lost* as a grand argument betwixt "Art" and "Nature,"<sup>1</sup> with the ladies of the cast naturally placed stage right; with the gentlemen artfully to stage left and moving in concert with the plays thematic tendency towards the fairer and superior perspective of the ladies' side. The stage, from this view, is set and Art necessarily plays the deceptive villain ultimately revealed as loser. In fact, although this duelling duality serves well as conceptual rubric of ontological matter, Art and Nature are not so much rivals in arms as philosophers in debate; and though there does seem to be *some* concluding resolution, *Love's Labour's Lost* finally is a play that can never be won.

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, this paper is partly in response to the general tendency of class discussion. Although I was reluctant to go against that particular reading--hence the extensive use of quotations to uphold my argument--I was encouraged by a chapter in William Carroll's *The Great Feast of Language* which supported my own impressions.

The objective then is to examine not the general Art vs. Nature issue, but the more specific extended and extensive dichotomous forms which undermines that issue, disallowing ultimate conventional resolution and instead insisting that the debate is altogether *unsolveable*.

The most conspicuous binate appears in the *Dramatis Personae*. Ferdinand, Biron, Longueville and Dumaine find counterparts in ladies, the Princess of France, Rosaline, Maria and Katherine. More particularly, Biron's idiosyncratic personality is balanced with Rosaline's unorthodox features: psychology and physiognomy as two sides of the same coin. The exactness of the King and Princess as counterparts might at first seem problematic, at least according to the Art vs. Nature thesis, which claims--in a delightfully Petrarchan vein--the natural superiority of the ladies; however, Ferdinand and the Princess both are denied the limelight most fitting their status, which falls instead upon Biron, lover of paradox and odd man out and Rosaline, the incongruous black beauty.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Longueville and Dumain, Maria and Katherine all share indistinguishable anonymity. Similarly, the low characters, pretentious Armado, Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel, are matched with the straightforward Costard, Dull and Jaquenetta. In addition, the wit of the court is paired by the witless alternative court of Armado. High and high, low and low, high and low, each grouping provides a counterpoint

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<sup>2</sup>Incongruous in the context of the Petrarchan convention.

to the other, with, as we shall see, none wholly good, none wholly bad. Although G. R. Hibbard, in his introduction to the Oxford edition, suggests this formal structure is a matter of stylisation,<sup>3</sup> which indeed is true, traditional form is here turned to an entirely untraditional use, setting the stage for a play of part and counterpart, an early indication of movement not from stage left to stage right--Art to Nature, Books to Experience--but by both towards stage centre, ushering in the dichotomous interplay that becomes not only the stuff of form but the exponent of theme.

#### **Plot<sup>4</sup>**

Just as there is a mirroring of character, so too is there between plot and sub-plot: the courtship of the court is matched by Armado's designs towards Jaquenetta.

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<sup>3</sup>Armado, Holofernes, Sir Nathaniel and Costard as the Braggart, the Pedant, the *Zan* and the Clown respectively, clearly shows Shakespeare borrowing from *commedia dell'arte*. Indeed, Biron himself lists a modified version of these: "the pedant, the braggart, the hedge-priest, the fool, and the boy." (5.2.536-7). This particular scene is clearly self-referential, displaying both learning and artfulness, for these characters are indeed in a play, the text was written: learning and artfulness are, in essence, not negative but the essence of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

<sup>4</sup>I have been informed that this paper is "a difficult read," and therefore flaunt convention and include subheadings.

Although both plots ostensibly deal with the apostasy of transcendental study for irreverent courtship, the movement from scene to scene rarely demonstrate anything like an unfolding story, rather a music hall production where individual acts appear, joke their joke and jig their jig, in a steady parade of set pieces. Act I opens with relative restraint: the abstemious plot to study is revealed until the arrival of the princess of France is recalled, whereupon Costard enters the scene embroiled in a concrete example of the complications outlined by Biron:

COSTARD I suffer from the truth, sir, for true it is  
I was taken with Jaquenetta, and Jaquenetta is a  
true girl.(1.1.298-299)

The truth then is that the corporal might not entirely be usurped by the cerebral. The truth, of course, is purely comic in this case, yet it does provide a link with the counterpart main plot and is an early indication that certain "truths" will ironically--though typically for a Shakespearean piece--be revealed by the lower characters. This point is especially important here, however, for it provides advance evidence of a thematic balance between both sides of dichotomous forms, where both contain some element of the compound "truth." Although the plot now leads to Armado's "court," where Costard is to serve his confinement, on arrival, it is clear that we have all been lead up the proverbial garden path. Plot suddenly gives way, sometimes to theme, sometimes to pure comedy. Armado and Moth debate: the difference between

melancholy and sadness; the virtue of "tough senior" and "tender juvenal" as proper pronouns; whether or not Moth is pretty and his saying apt, or vice-versa; eels; the heating of blood; the relationship between words--"study three years"--and their reference; Hercules; Samson; identification of the "humours" and so on. 2.1 returns to the main plot, with the arrival of the ladies and the meeting with the academics. 3.1 seems likewise to the point, when Armado quickly orders:

Sweet air! Go, tenderness of years, take this key,  
give enlargement to the swain, bring him festinately  
hither. I must employ him in a letter to my love.  
(3.1.4-6)

From here, however, words are similarly bandied about until Costard makes his appearance. From the order "give enlargement" at line three, 120 more lines of departure must be dallied until Costard is finally sent on his way. So much for plot development. Similarly, just as verbal witticisms confound the traditional notion of drama, so too various forms are utilised to confound the notion of unified text: the sonnets, the pantomime of Muscovites, the parade of the Nine Worthies, the tangential conundrums, such as, "What was a month old at Cain's birth that is not five weeks old as of yet?"(4.2.34-35), as well as Holofernes' extemporal epitaph:

The preyful princess pierc'd and prick'd a pretty  
pleasing pricket;  
Some say a sore; but not a sore, till now made sore  
with shooting.  
The dog did yell; put 'ell to sore, then sorel jumps

from the thicket;  
 Or pricket sore, or else sore'll the people fall a-  
 hooting.  
 If sore be sore, then 'ell to sore makes fifty  
 scores--  
 O--sorel!  
 Of one sore I an hundred make, by adding one more  
 L.(4.2.56-67)

Here, although ostensibly part of the fabula, since the subject is the hunted deer, we really have a weird and unwieldy poem, a contrast with the sonnets, where the deer itself finds its *raison d'être* in a text within a text. This, like the other examples, is a divergent passage that disturbs the possibility of a homogenous text and shows *Love's Labour's Lost* not only as experimental but even *avant garde*.

It is this series of jokes and jigs, caricatures and capers which take the place of action in driving the play forwards. Here then we see Shakespeare not only offering a structure which moves systematically, scene by scene, between the high and low characters, but generally supplanting the tried and tested for the untried and undetermined. Besides this, it seems clear that just as the plot itself is hardly a plot, so then the sub-plot is hardly a sub-plot. Point and counterpoint.

### **Language**

Above all else, *Love's Labour's Lost* is a labour of love in which language is both suitor and suited; and even here we find a masterful play of dichotomous forms. High and low language in *Love's Labour's Lost* is particularly piquant, for

the familiar contrast between the versified nobles and prosaic commoners is augmented by Armado's parody of high language:

O well-knit Samson, strong jointed Samson! I do  
 excel thee in my rapier as much as thou didst me in  
 carrying gates. I am in love too.

The parody, of course, comes not solely from Armado's use of copia, but from his "mint of phrases"(1.1.164). In this case, that mint, "well-knit Samson, strong jointed Samson," proves entirely worthless as true praise and is indicative of the succeeding self-flattery.

Another form of parody particularly abundant is the malapropism:<sup>5</sup>

DULL Señor Arm--Arm--commends you. There's villainy  
 abroad. This letter will tell you more.  
 COSTARD. Sir, the contempts thereof are as touching  
 me.

In the case of Dull, his "commends you" in place of commends to you is mostly an example of corrupt language; Costard, however, offers an "accident" which reveals an extra-textual truth: the letter is filled with "contempts" for what he understands to be the natural order of things, for, "Such is the simplicity of man to hearken after the flesh"(1.1.214-215). And yet the refined audience understands that man is not quite so simple, that he is formed both of art and nature, has learned something of what he is and is something of what he

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<sup>5</sup>Parody in that the "wrong" word impersonates the "right" word.

has learned.

Although the economy of language manifest above is generally as rare a beast as a pricket in a thicket, there is nevertheless a dichotomy of economy and excess, with Armado's copia--his frequent redundancies are an ironic key to the worth of his plethoric excess<sup>6</sup>--providing the point, and the one-liners of Dull, Costard and Jaquenetta the counterpoint. The common criticism of *Love's Labour's Lost*, namely its general superfluity of language, is disarmed from this perspective, for the palaver of Armado is a parody of the free-flowing verbal play of the academics, which actually avoids superfluity by being everything that the parody is not. Certainly there is talk and still more talk, but the academics, and the ladies also--for they are equally fond of extended word play--provide a middle ground between the lack of refinement manifest in both copia and economy.

Still on the issue of language, *Love's Labour's Lost* features one stylistic device perhaps exceeding all others: paradox, particularly conspicuous since it is itself composed of double imagery. One particularly well-suited example refers to Cupid and ". . . his almighty dreadful little might"(3.1.196).<sup>7</sup> His youthful *agedness*, like "heirs of all eternity"(1.1.7), provides another indication of dichotomous

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<sup>6</sup>Yes, I realise "plethoric excess" is itself redundant.

<sup>7</sup>Yes, and there is polyptoton as well as a pun on might, mite.



forms not so much in opposition, but advocating mutual acceptance and intimates that the delineation of love<sup>8</sup> can most effectively be achieved by paradox. Paradox, of course, is central to the Petrarchan convention. The epigraph of Petrarch's Sonnet XIV, for example, reads: "WHEREIN HE LIKENS HIMSELF TO A PILGRIM." Here, religion appears in the form of a pilgrim's struggle and pain; and yet the sonnet speaks irreligiously of a married woman and corporeal desire: the inherent inescapable paradox of Love. Not surprisingly, such paradox is found in the sonnets of *Love's Labour's Lost*, most particularly in, "If love makes me forsworn, how shall I swear to love?"(4.2.102), posing a question which, for the academics and ladies alike, is at once crucial and pivotal.

From these specific dichotomies we move to the two principle figures of speech employed in *Love's Labour's Lost*, outlined by William Carroll, which together form another double unit: synonymy and paronomasia. True synonyms, in reality, are as different as identical twins,<sup>9</sup> for some shift in character, in meaning, inevitably takes place. It is this very shift in meaning which reveals Shakespeare's twofold treatment of synonymy.

He is too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd,  
 as it were, too peregrinate, as I may call it  
 (5.1.13-15)

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<sup>8</sup>And life?

<sup>9</sup>And according to the authority of linguists.

Armado's synonymy is humorous not merely because he flaunts lexical variation like pearls, but because those pearls are entirely lacking in wisdom; because he is entirely unaware of their changes in meaning; and because his synonymy is often rooted in absurd designs: a contorted demonstration of his own witless wit and uneducated education or transparent flattery:

KING (*reads*) "Great deputy, the welkin's vicegerent,  
and sole dominator of Navarre, my soul's  
earth's god, and body's fostering patron.(1.1.16-  
18)

In this example that shifting of meaning is intensified by absurdity: "welkin's vicegerent," for instance, joins the Germanic *volke* with the Latin *vicem gerens*, *-entis*, producing a coin as valuable as it is counterfeit;<sup>10</sup> by convolution, as in "soul's earth's god" for soul's god on earth; and by misapplication, as in "*dominator* of Navarre" (my italics).

Although synonymy is left most often to Armado and Holofernes, suggesting a catalogue of words bereft of definition and so demonstrating superficial knowledge, there are examples where synonymy is used to its proper effect, revealing, as mentioned above, Shakespeare's twofold strategy. One such instance, at first glance, seems remarkably like Armado's written greeting to Ferdinand:

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<sup>10</sup>Although Germanic and Latinate vocabulary in part provide the foundations of English, Armado manages to highlight the inherent absurdities of this circumstance.

This wimpled whining, purblind, wayward boy  
 This Signor Junior, giant dwarf, Dan Cupid  
 . . . . .  
 .  
 Dread prince of plackets, king of codpieces,  
 Sole imperator and great general  
 Of trotting paritors . . . (3.1.172-179)

Although in form--a catalogue of absurd synonyms--identical, Biron's composition differs in intent: his design is to portray the absurd twofold paradox of Cupid, and he does so with binary terminology: his absurdities are fitting absurdities that hit the mark, while Armado's attempts to flatter entirely miss their target.

A more conventional example is Biron's renunciation of refined speech:

Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,  
 Three-pil'd hyperbole, spruce affection,  
 Figures pedantical; these summer flies  
 Have blown me full of maggot ostentation.  
 I do forswear them;(5.2.406-410)

The joke, of course, is that the whole thing is articulated in refined speech.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Biron's use of synonymy demonstrates a keen understanding of shades of meaning: indeed, the shades of meaning are the very ratiocination of the synonymy, rather than--as with Armado and Holofernes--the unfortunate by-product. And yet we should observe that Biron's

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<sup>11</sup>The irony, of course, clearly points to the positive benefits of learning, and indeed *book learning*.

speech is indeed a renunciation--of sorts--and thus a connotive declaration that cultivated speech fails when it reaches such a point of refinement that the primitive sentiment is entirely lost. Again, it is a question of balance, of middle ground.

Moving now to the second figure of speech: paronomasia. Although the pun is lately dismissed as profitless humour, Shakespeare's obsessive coining reveals a conceit valued for its traditional ability to suggest deep truths<sup>12</sup> and implicit irony. During the hunting scene, for example, an elaborate chain of puns are strung together:

BOYET Who is the shooter? Who is the shooter?

ROSALINE Shall I teach you to know?

BOYET Ay, my continent of beauty.

ROSALINE Why, she that bears the bow.

Finely put off!

BOYET My lady goes to kill horns, but if thou marry,

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<sup>12</sup>Particularly in oral societies, words of similar sound were understood to have similar natures and origins; besides this the word was seen not as separate from the object it denotes, but sharing the same essence, where the signifier *is* the signified, the word containing some fundamental of its referential. Debate over the respective virtues of oral and written communication is key to *Love's Labour's Lost*; and the stress on "word"--its power to make black seem white--suggests that the heavy punning plays an important part of that larger exploration of the nature of word and language.

Hang me by the neck if horns that year  
miscarry.

Finely put on!

ROSALINE Well then, I am the shooter.

BOYET And who is your deer?

ROSALINE If we choose by the horns, yourself come  
not near.

Finely put on indeed!

MARIA You still wrangle with her, Boyet, and she  
strikes at the brow.

BOYET But she herself is hit lower. Have I hit her  
now? (4.1.105-119)

The play on "shooter" (suitor), clarified by "deer" (dear), besides being playful, promotes hunting as a courtship metaphor and places it within the "nature" parallel. "Horns," taking its primary sense from the deer yet suggestive of cuckold, turns the banter bawdy, a process completed with "hit lower." The play on "brow" is particularly resonant: firstly, meaning that Rosaline strikes at the head; secondly, at the appearance--the appearance of secondary meaning in words--and so therefore she strikes at the puns themselves; thirdly, the brow-antler, the first tine of a deer's horn, allows the pun to function also within the hunting discourse; and lastly, the word offers another cuckold innuendo. With the general tendency here to place ideas of courtship and carnality within the sphere of "nature," it seems evidence that indeed the ladies do represent that side of the Art/Nature dichotomy and so supports the conventional reading of *Love's Labour's Lost*. The key point, however--both here and elsewhere--which undermines that reading is the learned constitution of the

scene, for the intense word play is as artful as educated, shifting the manner of the ladies towards the manners of the men. This observation, for now, will surface, though further comment, as well as an examination of the "continent" pun--which also leads to larger questions of the scene as a whole--will be deferred until the proper examination of the ladies themselves.

Of the numerous duties performed by the well practised pun, perhaps the most important is its ability to comically execute and maintain thematically important imagery. Referring to Cupid, Biron reflects, "And I to be a corporal in his field"(3.1.180) The pun on corporal firstly refers to the Petrarchan convention and its military imagery and secondly alludes to the dichotomous nature of love itself--much like the pun on hitting the "mark"--with this sensible side as vital as the spiritual. A more complex instance, demonstrating the organic nature of the text, begins with a pun on "complexion" where Armado's understanding "temperament" is transformed by the wordy Moth into the modern sense and allows Armado to conclude, "Green is indeed the colour of lovers"(1.2.83). Green itself offers two meanings, both the love laden jealousy and, more importantly, spring, intimating the thematic spring/autumn imagery which germinates throughout the play and finally flowers into the closing songs.

Since paronomasia is the antithesis of synonymy: where one word conjures two meanings, two (or more) words enchant one, it seems clear that as functional devices--and together as a

binary unit--they provide an emblematic key to the whole play.<sup>13</sup> Both paronomasia and synonymy allow language a peculiar elasticity, and, with the word sovereign of *Love's Labour's Lost*, we find ourselves in a world which defies normal discourse and so defies normal reality.

What then is the actual value of that sovereign--the word--its authority and its puissance? Once again, the answer is equivocal. Biron, for example, repeatedly demonstrates the word's ability to right wrong. Even amongst the low characters, we find examples which clearly warn against the inherent problematics of the word's potential puissance.

ARMADO The way is but short. Away!

MOTH As swift as lead, sir.

ARMADO Thy meaning, pretty ingenious?

Is not lead a metal heavy, dull, and slow?

MOTH *Minime*, honest master, rather, master, no.

ARMADO I say lead is slow.

MOTH You are too swift, sir, to say so.

Is that lead slow which is fired from a gun?

ARMADO Sweet smoke of rhetoric!(3.1.53-61)

This "smoke of rhetoric," of course, is far from sweet, though aptly sums up the wondrous constitution of words, both insubstantial and yet extraordinarily substantial. If the moral merits of Biron's eloquence, above, is indeterminate, elsewhere the word, dressed in its finery and parading in rhetoric, demonstrates positive use.

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<sup>13</sup>Admittedly this seems a simple yet grandiose statement; upon reflection, however, it does seem to hold true.

BIRON What is the end of study, let me know?

KING Why, 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.

BIRON Come then, I will swear to study so,  
To know the thing I am forbid to know.(1.1.56-62)

From here Biron catalogues material excluded from their study, moving on to contemplate the dubious virtues bound within the volumes of book knowledge. Biron's methodology works from pointed question to modification of response: "should not know," in this instance, first becomes "hid and barred" and, by implication, outside common sense and so outside what *should* be known and moves to the final modification--with Ferdinand's helpful "god-like recompense"--of that which is "forbid to know." This strategy not only allows Biron to expound further in form and matter directed by his own choosing, but alludes to Eden and so provides inter-textual support for his argument. Of course, this is another sophistry, for though Adam was forbidden to taste the fruits of knowledge, it was that original sin which sent man upon his quest *for* knowledge. And yet, at the same time, there is a deeper suggestion that Adam's fall will find its counterpart in the academics' fate. There is still another binary level, for though Adam essentially sought natural knowledge, Navarre and his merry men--with the exclusion of Biron--are at the other extreme, believing initially that knowledge is only *learned* knowledge. Further, we are ironically made aware of



Adam sin through literacy, just as the literacy of *Love's Labour's Lost* seems to warn against literacy. Of course, the irony points not to an answer: right or wrong, rather a question: degree.

With the problematics of their oath revealed, we see rhetoric here not as a smoky form but as a dewy mist whose convex droplets, like the vault of heaven, magnify and clarify. Another similar example shows Biron's rhetoric once again illuminating and offering an entirely different perspective:

KING By heaven, thy love is as black as ebony.

BIRON Is ebony like her? O word divine!

A wife of such wood were felicity.

O, who can give an oath? Where is a book,  
That I may swear beauty doth beauty lack,  
If she learn not her eye to look?

No face is fair that is not full so  
black.(4.3.244-250)

This, and the previous scene, demonstrates the positive uses of rhetoric; and yet there is still lurking in there, particularly with the reintroduction of "book" and "oath," some dark shadow of darker danger. The "what is the end of study?" speech is particularly evocative of Platonic dialogues, not only in its form but in the contextual allusion to the Academe. Compare it, for instance, with an early episode in *Gorgias*:

SOCRATES . . . Isn't oratory one of those arts which  
exclusively employ speech for the  
accomplishment of their work and purpose?

GORGIAS It is.

SOCRATES Then tell me its subject. What thing is it that forms the subject of all the speech that oratory employs?

. . . . .  
.

GORGIAS I mean, Socrates, what is in actual truth the greatest blessing, which confers on every one who possesses it not only freedom for himself but also the power of ruling his fellow countrymen.

SOCRATES What do you mean by that?

GORGIAS I mean the ability to convince by means of speech a jury in a court of justice, member of the Council in their Chamber, voters at a meeting of the Assembly, and any other gathering of citizens whatever it may be. By the exercise of this ability you will have the doctor and the trainer as your slaves, and your man of business will turn out to be making money not for himself but for another; for you, in fact, who have the ability to speak and to convince the masses.(26-28)

No prizes here for guessing the direction Socrates will take in his unfolding censure. The sophistry that allows worse to appear as better, and that right might is right right are the two themes of Gorgias. The might of the "word" places *Love's Labour's Lost* firmly within that debate. Although Ferdinand is King, Biron's eloquence and particularly his rhetorical abilities allow him a superior authority which even Ferdinand acknowledges, ". . . good Biron, now prove/Our loving lawful and our faith not torn"(4.32.281). Dumaine and Longueville successively defer to Biron's superiority and so, with

unanimous approval, Biron rips into a monologue that indeed proves their "faith not torn." It is important to note, however, that for men demonstrating ultimate faith in the power of words, there is also ultimate conviction that some of this power stems from "some tricks"(4.3.285). It is clear then that this speech, and indeed the whole play, is much in line with the theme--and so dangers--outlined in *Gorgias*. It seems irrefutable then that the academics are not entirely blinded by absolute faith in words. Certainly the ladies occasionally demonstrate a more lucid view of the equivocal nature of words, as when the princess admonishes, "Good Lord Boyet, my beauty, though but mean,/Needs not the painted flourish of your praise"(1.2.13-14); nevertheless, Biron, at the play's very opening, reveals a similar awareness in his anti-intellectual speech in which he ". . . for barbarism spoke more/Than for that angel knowledge"(1.1.112-113). The juxtaposition of "barbarism" and "angel," however, also serves as a reminder--and another emblem of the play--that our nature is itself nature and nurture, a matter of twofold composition, just as it is also of spirit and flesh.

We reach now the final issue of language: the omnipresent dichotomy between words and deeds.

ARMADO: I have promised to study three years with  
the Duke

MOTH: You may do it in an hour, sir.

ARMADO: Impossible.

MOTH: How many is one thrice told?

. . . . .

.  
ARMADO: It doth amount to one more than two.

MOTH: Which the base vulgar do call three.

ARMADO: True.

MOTH: Why, sir, is this such a piece of study? Now  
here is three studied ere ye'll thrice wink;  
and how easy it is to put "years" to the word  
"three," and study three years in two words,  
the dancing horse will tell you.

Here then we find the signifier, "three years" becoming the signified, three years of time. The transformation is comedic, yet the heightened importance of the "word" becoming concrete, becoming that which it represents, occurs consistently throughout the play<sup>14</sup> and has important ramifications for the vow, the binding word which the academics sign. It is by no means insignificant then that this breaking of a word is a source of tremendous and constant consternation for both gentlemen and ladies and repeatedly resurfaces as *the vital*

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<sup>14</sup>Perhaps one reason for renewed interest in *Love's Labour's Lost* stems from the new popularity of word intense comedy. Compare the functional components of this scene with the *avant garde Goon Show*, which essentially ushered in the modern variant:

SPIKE Thank you Jim, now here folks is Chief Ellinga  
to say Thursday in Swahali.

RAY Ma ar la toola, yarga toola marngo, me ar gar  
tula la margu uta meel tick arrs fargoola tol  
dommmmmmmmmmm . . .

SPIKE You see how long days are in Africa,  
folks. (21)

issue.

The dichotomy between word and deed oftentimes results from a clouding of reality, for the word, by its twofold ability to represent both signifier and signified, has also the ability to subvert our sense of reality. One notable example of this provides a veritable shifting of reality:

ARMADO: Most sweet Hercules! More authority, dear boy, name more. And, sweet child, let them be men of good repute and carriage.

MOTH: Samson, master. He was a man of good carriage, great carriage, for he carried the town-gates on his back like a porter, and he was in love.

Firstly, we note that reversal so often at work in *Love's Labour's Lost*, moving from one side of the binary to the other: in this case the student is the teacher. Secondly, and more to the point, the pun on carriage not only alters the reality of Samson, who becomes a block-head when reduced to a mere cart horse, but carries us to a distant temporal reality in addition to another literary reality: the story of Samson transporting the gates of Gaza, told in Judges 16:3.

### **Learning**

An examination of linguistic dualism leads naturally to the nature of learning and again we find Shakespeare playing one side against the other. Most playfully, we find the whole question of knowledge undermined, as in the reversal of master and student in the roles of Moth and Armado. Similarly, the repeated resort to vacuous copia, either through circumlocution or synonymy, is a telling indictment against

false knowledge, knowledge that barely scratches the surface of real understanding. Of course, the irony is Shakespeare's: we laugh at the lower characters for their limited language skills and admire the true author of those same words. The other side of this paradigm appears when Biron speaks of the scientific tendency towards nomenclature:

Study is like the heavens glorious sun,  
That will not be deep-searched by saucy looks;  
Small have continual plodders ever won,  
Save base authority from others' books.  
These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights  
That give a name to every fixèd star,  
Have no more profit of their shining nights  
Than those that walk and wot not what they  
are.(1.184-90)

The point is clear: although Biron lambastes book-learning, he also offers a heated argument in favour of a poetic understanding--one which delves into the spirit of physics and one which itself cannot, obviously, be rationally removed from learning. The leaning here offered as true learning finds focus in the real world, finds meaning in schooling, and finds expression in original synthesis.

Although Biron seems to speak often for common sense--showing a certain affinity therefore with Moth--his manner of speaking, as we saw above, is far from common. Clearly, plain speaking, though being free of artifice and so providing a certain honesty, demonstrates also a poverty of language that will not do. At the same time, G. R. Hibbard, in his introduction, correctly points out that Biron displays, in his

proverbial speech, a knowledge garnered from common experience and common sense.

There is, of course, a good deal of learning which we do not immediately recognise as such: the simplicity of Dull, for example, when he cuts short all further discussion and asserts that the beast was indeed a pricket, for we have entered the woodland realm, a realm in which even Dull is blessed with knowledge. Further, Costard often serves as a counterpoint to others' folly, a counterpoint fixed also in common sense. Certainly much of his truisms are inadvertent and require the audience to spot the irony, though on more than one occasion his lucidity is wide eyed. Even Armado offers inadvertent lessons:

I will hereupon confess I am in love; and as it is base for a soldier to love, so am I in love with a base wench. If drawing my sword against the humour of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take desire prisoner and ransom him to any French courtier for a new-devised curtsy. (1.2 56-61)

The lesson, in this instance, is that affections are beyond the will of men, and that affairs of the heart are understood even by those of least understanding.

Although Armado is singularly sequacious, lamenting Petrarchan and *soneteering*, his *bookishness* is merely a hard cover for *boorishness*, and serves as a foil for the book-learning of the academics. He is also something of a scallywag: keeping Costard prisoner for doing to Jaquenetta

precisely what he himself wishes to do--the pretext of imprisonment providing an open field for his on assault--makes him a *living* lesson in impropriety.

### **The Ladies**

The time has come to disrobe the ladies--so to speak--to rob them of their fraudulent fundamental superiority which readers flatteringly see as their *natural* wardrobe.

First, to remove the illusion of their natural nature: the suggestion that their more prosaic speech is an indication of a less "artful" tendency is incorrect in the first and therefore in the second.<sup>15</sup> Although the ladies initially display no tendency towards rhymed speech, their dialogue is far from prosaic and a willingness to rhyme soon follows. The first rhyming couplet appears as early as their opening scene:

BOYET Proud employment, willingly I go.

PRINCES All pride is willing pride, and yours is  
so.(2.1.35-36)

With the arrival of the academics, Biron and Rosaline move towards a lengthy exchange of rhyming banter, beginning at 2.1.118. By 5.2, even the princess displays a willingness to rhyme which is at least equal to the academics:

None are so surely caught, when they are caught,  
As wit turned fool. Folly, in wisdom hatched,  
Hath wisdom's warrant and the help of school,  
And wit's own grace to grace a lernèd fool.(5.2.69-  
72)

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<sup>15</sup>This is a specific rebuttal of class discussion.



Close examination of the ladies' *progressive* proclivity to rhyme proves beyond doubt that they are influenced by the men as the men by the ladies, that both sides are moving towards a middle ground, our centre stage. The above quotation also demonstrates their equal penchant for word play and that they display themselves a learning which came not from solely gazing at the moon.

Moving to matters more base: we examined earlier the hunting scene--"shoot, shooter"--which functions at the level of bawdy word-play. When we add to this the pun on "continent" which, aimed at Rosaline is assisted in flight by such suggestions as, ". . . one that will do the deed"(3.1.91), we find ourselves in company which is not from heaven sent and far from the virtuous Petrarchan ideal. Indeed, this instance at least does make them "natural," but perhaps too natural: ladies who might, like Acrasia, prefer a bed of roses to one of lilies and violets.<sup>16</sup>

Most damning of all though is the ladies' inability to understand a point which is not only key, but expounded repeatedly:

BIRON Necessity will make us all foresworn  
 Three thousand times within this three years'  
 space;  
 For every man with his effects is

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<sup>16</sup>*Epithalamion* and *Faerie Queene*.

born.(1.1.148-150)<sup>17</sup>

BIRON We cannot cross the cause why we were born  
Therefore of all hands must we be  
foresworn.(4.3.15)

BIRON Then fools you were these women to foresware,  
Or, keeping what is sworn, you will prove  
fools.(4.3.330-331)

Thus the main point of contention: the ladies' unwillingness to recognise the academics' veracity according to their own "extemporal epitaph": once foresworn, always foresworn, suggests that fools *they* were to foresware those men.

It seems clear then, especially when we recollect with what pleasure the ladies secretly received the love poems,<sup>18</sup>that the

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<sup>17</sup>Indeed, Biron must open up the play ridiculing the idea of the academe, even though his final acquiescence is entirely unrealistic, for otherwise the issue of a broken vow would be deprived of its comic potential. The issue of this broken vow, as we have seen, is an issue that refuses to be cast aside. The vow itself must therefore be subverted before the audience can enjoy the humour of the men's subversion. This is, after all, a comedy.

<sup>18</sup>With the refinement of lust to love, we witness movement to the middle ground, a balance between the two extremes, for love profits from lesson just as it learns from physical desire. The sonnets, if they are meant to be good, support the idea that art and learning have due place in affairs of the

women are now revealed not as a Petrarchan ideal--this is not to deny that they display more common sense than the men, as Shakespeare's ladies often do, but that in this drama that common sense is seriously challenged--but as something particularly real, that there is no general movement in *Love's Labour's Lost* from stage left to stage right, men gradually making towards the more natural ladies; rather, both groups have learned much and both groups have moved towards a moderate centre, where both art and nature reign equally over the kingdom of Love.

In this brief componential analysis,<sup>19</sup> we have seen dichotomous forms as the very body and soul of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Often there is good and bad in each, suggesting that neither side provides the solution, and that a marriage of opposites is the ultimate goal. Just as debate between gentlemen and ladies might eventually lead to understanding, so too different modes of communication, rhetorical, poetical, *witful* and simple, literary and oral debate playfully, and so too different issues play one against the other. There can indeed be no winner, for marriage insists upon give and take to offer any hope.<sup>20</sup> When we recall, also, that *Love's Labour's*

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heart: and indeed, their inclusion in other volumes of poetry--if our own judgement seems insufficient--seems proof of this.

<sup>19</sup>What's that? Not brief enough?

<sup>20</sup>I have an old divorce document as textual proof.

*Lost* closes with songs of spring and autumn, thematically connected to the play yet still not only outside the business of action and plot but devoid of action and plot, we discover further evidence a play driven by dichotomous forms and driven by debate between those forms. The Art vs. Nature issue is something of a red herring, offering a paradigm which casts a shadow of impenetrable darkness over the illuminating debates of diverse dichotomous forms. In the simplest of terms, *Love's Labour's Lost* is a multi-voiced Hegelian dialectic, resulting not in a marriage of convenience but one borne of necessity.

With such stress upon word, the debate finally and ironically shows itself beyond words. The final discourse between spring and autumn in no way sums up the play, it rather whispers a vague rustle of poetic foliage moved by the breathy wind of human complexity that defies conclusion, suggesting subliminal suggestions, offering only a sense of what can never be spoken. By extensive use of dichotomous forms, *Love's Labour's Lost* formulates a series of debates where dialogue is not merely the learned lines of player but the interplay of ideas; and, as we see in the songs of spring and autumn, the debate is often more implicit than explicit.

One problem with any such study as this is that we perhaps lose sight of the comedy. This perhaps is entirely appropriate, for the issues of *Love's Labour's Lost* are issues flagellated by Saint Anthony and investigated by Plato.

Leonardo Da Vinci might finally offer the best insight into the Art vs. Nature debate:

The painter will produce pictures of little merit if he takes the works of others as his standard; but if he will apply himself to learn from the objects of nature he will produce good results. . . . it is safer to go direct to the works of nature than to those which have been imitated from her originals with great determination and thereby acquire a bad method, for he who has access to the fountain does not go to the water-pot. (qtd. in *Renaissance*, 177)

Nature then is the source of art and not its antithesis, and it is *together* that they work in the production of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

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This book contends that in *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare sought to discover the ways in which the imagination uses and abuses language. The author's critical reading shows that the characters are endowed with a wide variety of rhetorical disguises. The term "debate"-justified by Shakespeare's use of the medieval *conflictus*-relates to both theme and structure. The author finds that the conflicting theories about the proper relation of language and imagination are resolved stylistically and thematically only in the final Debate between Spring and Winter, where the playwright reasserts the nature and value of good art. Shakespeare turns Chaucer's explication into action, converts his description into character, and translates into stage idiom what Chaucer narrates. This article is more than 12 years old. *Love Labour's lost*. Neal Lawson. In addition, it misrepresents the debate. The Tories are opposed to making anyone carry or be issued with an ID card. So, in the face of massive public unease about the project, should be the Labour party. What is the alternative? It needs to turn its recent claim to be "on your side" into incisive political action that speaks to 21st century concerns. The government's half-hearted moves on temporary and agency workers are a small step in the right direction, but much more is required. The issue of housing needs to be returned to centre-stage, and pursued even if an economic downturn renders private solutions impossible. Labour has to be bold enough to open up the issue of tax rates at the very top. *Love's Labour's Lost* by William Shakespeare chapter summaries, themes, characters, analysis, and quotes! Brush up on the details in this novel, in a voice that won't put you to sleep. Read the full text of *Love's Labour's Lost* with a side-by-side translation [HERE](#). Question: What do *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Shining* have in common? Nope, we're not being snide. We're not being funny. We're actually asking you what a Shakespearean pun-addled witfest and the movie that made "Redrum" the scariest word in the English language have in common. And we're supplying two real answers: 1) they both have the thesis statement that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" and b) they're the product of great minds left *Love's Labour's Lost* Quotes Showing 1-30 of 40. "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." Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*. tags: beauty, eyes, fire, nourishment, sustenance, women. 95 likes.