INTRODUCTION

Approaches to the play

MALE FRIENDSHIP AND HETEROSEXUAL DESIRE

Naive young man swears he will avoid women; attractive young woman appears; young man falls in love; marriage (after a few mishaps and problems) follows. Fade to black. Such a scenario could be *Much Ado About Nothing*, where Benedick (as well as Beatrice) denies the power of desire to move him; or, in a nearly tragic vein, it could be Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, a 'man of stricture and firm abstinence' who 'scarce confesses / That his blood flows; or that his appetite / Is more to bread than stone' (*MM* 1.3.12, 51–30), but once he sees Isabella 'feels / The wanton stings and motions of the sense' (1.4.58–9). It could be any number of plays built on what Northrop Frye called the comic 'Oedipal situation', in which there is an internal rather than an external 'blocking figure'.[1] *Love's Labour's Lost* may not have an obvious source for its plot (see below), but in one sense it employs one of the most basic plots in literature – times four. The old ballad of 'The King and the Beggar' that Armado invokes (see 1.2.91 n.) is a version of the same story in popular culture. It tells of King Cophetua, who 'cared not for women kinde, / but did them all disdaine', until he saw the beggar maid; then, 'What sudden chance is this quoth he, / That I to love must subject be, / Which never thereto would agree, / but still did it defie.'[2] It is a relatively short step to Berowne's rueful admission, 'And I, forsooth, in love! I that have been love's whip' (3.1.151 ff.). The young lords almost immediately discover that the 'war against your own affections / And the huge army of the world's desires' (1.1.9–10) is a lost cause, but their discovery will not be quite as dark as Claudio's admission that 'Our natures do pursue / Like rats that ravin down their proper bane, / A thirsty evil, and when we drink we die' (*MM* 1.2.128–30). Still, there is death in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and, unusually in Shakespeare, the promise of 'dying' sexually is radically postponed by the 'dying' of the French king.

Earlier criticism of the play focussed, with great effect, on the process of 'self-discovery' in the play, as the four lords come to grips, under the mockery and tutelage of the ladies, with their own desires and their lack of self-knowledge.[3] The story of the play, C. L. Barber pointed out, 'is all too obviously designed to provide a resistance which can be triumphantly swept away by festivity'.[4] The Armado–Costard–Jaquenetta subplot

[1] Northrop Frye, 'The Argument of Comedy', *English Institute Essays 1948*, ed. D. A. Robertson, 1949, pp. 58–73.
[2] Richard Johnson, *A Crowne-Garland of Goulden Roses* (1612), D4^{r}.
[3] E.g. Barton, p. 417, on Berowne: 'he is slowly becoming, as the play progresses, a more convincing and attractive figure, and his love more real'.
[4] Barber, p. 88. Barber's essay is still one of the best on the play.

parodies the main plot, as the supposedly heroic soldier Armado, like the legendary predecessors Hercules and Samson that he invokes, falls in love with the wench–damsel–virgin-maid. The underlying premise of this reading of the play registers the lords' opening plan to retreat from desire as 'unnatural', and their acceptance of heterosexual desire and their movement towards marriage as a process of a normalised growth to maturity.

Feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to the play in recent years have added to and complicated this reading of the play. Some of Shakespeare's other comedies represent same-sex relations as, at times, more powerful than heterosexual desire. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and, at the end of Shakespeare's career, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, act out the tenets of male-friendship theory in the early modern period, in which the bonds of male friendship trump all other bonds and desires, and the male friend would rather abandon his quest for a woman or even die so that his male friend can flourish.[1] Inevitably, though, heterosexual desire arises in the male and splits apart the unitary perfection posited in the Ciceronian formula: 'The summe of friendship is, that of two soules / One should be made, in will and firme affect.'[2] Shakespeare reflects this idea quite openly in *The Winter's Tale*, when Polixenes describes his youthful relation with Leontes, now in the past tense:

> We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th' sun,
> And bleat the one at th' other. What we chang'd
> Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
> The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
> That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
> And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
> With stronger blood, we should have answer'd heaven
> Boldly, 'Not guilty'; the imposition clear'd,
> Hereditary ours.

Hermione's ironic reponse – 'By this we gather / You have tripp'd since' (*WT* 1.2.67–76) – confirms that childhood innocence is always already lost, and that 'stronger blood' will prevail.

Women's relations, too, approach an ideal union of two into one until maturity (or one's fallen nature) intervenes, as seen in Helena's reminiscence to Hermia in *Dream*:

[1] On friendship theory in the early modern period, see Alan Bray, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England', in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg, 1994, pp. 40–61; Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England*, 1994; Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts*, 2002; and Carroll, *Two Gentlemen*, pp. 3–35. On friendship discourse across the ages, see Alan Bray, *The Friend*, 2003. For a powerful psychoanalytic reading of this pattern, see Janet Adelman, 'Male Bonding in Shakespeare's Comedies', in *Shakespeare's Rough Magic*, ed. Peter Erickson and Coppélia Kahn, 1985, pp. 73–103. As Adelman notes, p. 75, 'in the early comedies it is not the father but the complications posed by male identity and male friendship that threaten marriage, that in fact make marriage as much the problem as it is the solution'.

[2] John Bodenham, *Bodenham's Belvedere or the Garden of the Muses* (1600), p. 94; in this same work, Bodenham quotes several lines from *Love's Labour's Lost* (see Appendix 4, p. 200)

> We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
> Have with our needles created both one flower,
> Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
> Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
> As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds
> Had been incorporate. So we grew together,
> Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
> But yet an union in partition,
> Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;
> So with two seeming bodies, but one heart,
> Two of the first, like coats in heraldry,
> Due but to one, and crowned with one crest.
> And will you rent our ancient love asunder,
> To join with men in scorning your poor friend? (*MND* 3.2.203–16)

The power of such desire, as expressed in Shakespeare's plays, inevitably drives apart same-sex friendship, reorganising lines of relationship into a heteronormative status, with marriage as the end towards which the play's energies drive. Still, this normative pattern is not always secure. Several of Shakespeare's comedies undermine the conventional sense of the 'natural' – in producing what seem to be unworthy lovers (Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Angelo and Lucio – and the Duke? – in *Measure for Measure*, Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well*, among others), or in staging endings that disturb form or expectation. The ending of *The Taming of the Shrew* is famously difficult, the end of *Measure for Measure* uncertain, and the end of *Much Ado About Nothing* seems to stifle the feminine voice. Even in his earliest comedies, Shakespeare made his endings problematic. The resolution of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has caused no end of agitation, with its instant-seeming forgiveness of the attempted rape of Silvia and the consequent 'offer' of the female to the male friend in the name of friendship (the basic pattern of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* years later). *Dream* surprises in the return of the fairies to take over the court. But even these other plays at least present the form and structure of a comic resolution – and *Love's Labour's Lost* famously does not.[1] The play 'doth not end like an old play' (5.2.842), or one yet in the future, like *As You Like It*, with a parade of marriages, for the lords have yet more to learn, and are put off for the 'twelvemonth and a day' while they learn 'to choke a gibing spirit' in a process of 'reformation' (5.2.826, 837).

The play thus begins with the men's attempt to defer or deny desire, and ends with a deferral that now frustrates them – but accomplishes a similar end. What one critic has termed an 'anxious masculinity' seems to afflict not only the characters but the whole structure of the play.[2] The idealisation of male friendship as higher and stronger than

[1] As Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, 1965, p. 76 put it, in comedy we usually see 'a victory of the pleasure principle that Freud warns us not to look for in ordinary life'.

[2] Breitenberg, p. 147, turns the conventional reading of the ending around by noting that the deferment of desire at the end of the play reproduces the deferral at the beginning, and hence 'the structure of desire introduced at the outset of the play . . . is sustained rather than challenged by the play's lack of closure'. Thus, he argues, p. 136, deferral sustains 'men in the active position of pursuit, of doing the representing, and women in the static position of being represented'.

heterosexual desire reflects, from one point of view, a fantasy of denial, a justification of a paralysis or blockage in 'normal' psychosexual development: the movement from same-sex to other-sex erotic relations.[1] This psychic regression is, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, also embodied in its ending without closure, the main effect of which is that 'Jack hath not Jill' (5.2.843), contrary to the folk story and all expectation. And even when, in the final songs, there finally is marriage, an anxiety of infidelity attends it, for in spring the cuckoo 'then on every tree / Mocks married men; for thus sings he: / "Cuckoo! / Cuckoo, cuckoo!" O word of fear, / Unpleasing to a married ear' (5.2.863–7). The play provides an example of just this anxiety at the end when Costard and Armado nearly come to blows over Jaquenetta. Costard, who had 'Sorted and consorted' (1.1.242) with Jaquenetta even as the plan for Navarre's academy was announced, confronts Armado with the charge that Jaquenetta is pregnant: 'She is two months on her way. . . . She's quick, the child brags in her belly already. 'Tis yours' (5.2.654–7). Scholars have debated just who the true father is, Costard or Armado.[2] Such concerns are justified, it would seem, by the play's substantial thread of cuckold-anxiety jokes (see below), even in the most casual circumstances:

> LONGAVILLE Pray you, sir, whose daughter?
> BOYET Her mother's, I have heard. (2.1.197–8)

The paternity of Jaquenetta's child, however, is unknowable in any absolute terms in the text – the very ground of male anxiety.

WOMEN, PROPERTY, VISION

The lords employ various strategies to avoid encountering the women as women: there is the initial attempt to withdraw into a monastic retreat, of course, but there are also comic attempts to define and contain them through naming them (just as Petruchio does, in *The Taming of the Shrew* 2.1.181–98, when he calls Katherina 'Kate' over and over again). A woman is, in the play's comic sequence of synonyms, a 'wench', 'damsel', 'virgin', 'maid', 'the weaker vessel', and above all, 'a child of our grandmother Eve' (1.1.246–67), among others. The characters' proper names, moreover, as Katharine Maus has noted, mark their gender in terms of property: the noble ladies have no surnames, while the Princess has no name at all, just a title.[3] When the lords first encounter the ladies in 2.1 and ask their names, Boyet identifies them in terms of their potential value as property: Katherine is 'The heir of Alençon', while Maria is

[1] See Asp for a Lacanian reading of the play's deferral of desire.

[2] For example, Dorothea Kehler, 'Jaquenetta's Baby's Father: Recovering Paternity in *Love's Labor's Lost*', *Renaissance Papers* (1990), 51, argues that Costard, the real father, has 'falsely accused Armado'. Kerrigan, 5.2.669–70 n., however, has a good explanation for why the child is Armado's, worth quoting in its entirety: 'An interesting example of Shakespearian "double-time": since 1.2.141, where Armado declares his love to Jaquenetta, he and the dairymaid have lived for months and the lords and ladies apparently only for days. Some literal-minded readers (the problem never raises itself in the theatre) have tried to resolve the two time schemes by arguing that only a few days pass for the low as well as the high characters, and that Costard got Jaquenetta pregnant several weeks before the start of the play; but Armado is very far from being fool enough to marry another man's whore.'

[3] Maus, pp. 210, 216.

'an heir of Falconbridge', her name not even spoken (2.1.191, 201). In playful banter with Boyet, the ladies have to deny that they are a 'common' – property belonging to the community as a whole – on which sheep may 'pasture' (2.1.218–19). The men's language figures them as property to be possessed, while their own names – Navarre, Berowne, Longaville, Dumaine – refer to the property passed down through the male line in each family. Navarre's proper name, Ferdinand, is never actually spoken in the play, appearing only in a stage direction and some speech headings (see Appendix 2).[1]

The linguistic miscognition of the women as property reproduces the occasion of the play itself, the dispute over the land of Aquitaine: whether the King of France has made certain agreed-upon payments, and whether the Princess's party has the documents to confirm the payments (see 2.1.126–46 n. for more detail). In the meantime, Navarre holds Aquitaine as surety. Aquitaine is said to be 'a dowry for a queen' (2.1.8), hence linked to the Princess's marital status; Navarre's possession of the land is thus premature. In the 'normal' course of events, the man wins the lady's hand, the father transfers the property (both land and daughter), and marriage follows. As it is, Navarre dismisses the current valuation of Aquitaine, 'so gelded as it is' (2.1.146) – that is, deprived of some essential part, but also emasculated (to 'geld' also meaning to castrate or mutilate). The men are less than men unless they fully possess their property. Nevertheless, we learn in the final scene that the Princess's 'great suit' was 'so easily obtained' (5.2.713), though we never see how it occurred. But as the Princess regains her 'dowry', she will – surprisingly to Navarre – also withhold herself, declining to enter into a 'bargain' (5.2.763) with him. Jaquenetta, by contrast, has apparently already delivered herself at the beginning of the play and is linked to the more traditional form of property that figures the female, the 'curious-knotted garden' (1.1.233) or *hortus conclusus*, located in Navarre's 'park' (1.1.228), a term that indicates the masculine royal equivalent of the enclosed feminine space.[2] The royal park was the site of aristocratic hunting (see 4.1 headnote and below), though in *Love's Labour's Lost*, it is the Princess and her ladies who can 'hit it' and slay the deer/dear.

In one telling metaphor that became proverbial (see 3.1.167 n.), Berowne's stunned account of having fallen in love reaches a peak of exasperation that the object of his desire should be 'A woman, that is like a German clock, / Still a-repairing, ever out of frame, / And never going aright, being a watch, / But being watched that it may still go right!' (3.1.167–70). This figure encapsulates the lords' construction of women – as elaborately constructed machines, yet constantly in need of surveillance that they not stray but 'go right'; objectification and sexual anxiety are inextricable here. The beloved is both unattainably desirable and also denigrated as sluttish, 'one that will do the deed / Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard' (3.1.175–6). Another symbolically

[1] He is Ferdinand in the opening stage direction, 1.1.0, and in the speech headings in 1.1 and 2.1.126, 155, 160, and 164. Some editors have explained this inconsistency by arguing that Shakespeare eventually decided to associate his Navarre with the historical Henri, and forgot to cancel the previous 'Ferdinand' – or the compositor missed the cancellation.

[2] 'Park': 'An enclosed tract of land held by royal grant or prescription and reserved for keeping and hunting deer and other game' (*OED sb.* 1.a).

gelded figure, 'eunuch' Argus can only, like Berowne, 'watch' that his lady go 'right'. In the mythological story, Argus's eyes were put to sleep by the words of Mercury – by charms spoken by Hermes (in the Greek) – who slew him and set Io free.

Argus's one hundred eyes, unable to see his mistress's infidelity, are a comic exaggeration of the lords' inability to 'see' and 'read' their respective lovers – to see their faces literally and figuratively. Instead, the lords, 'Following the signs' that they had themselves constructed, 'wooed but the sign of she' (5.2.469). This deep misreading derives from the lords' Petrarchan rhetoric, which continually stresses the lovers' eye – with the pun on 'I' revealing the fundamental narcissism of the imagery.[1] Love, Berowne claims, 'adds a precious seeing to the eye: / A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind' (4.3.302–3). It turns out, though, that the play's initial prohibition – 'not to see a woman in that term' of three years (1.1.37) – will be extended a twelvemonth and a day, in the ending's deferral. But 'not to see a woman' has been the lords' condition all along. Berowne tries to blame the ladies' beauty – it 'Hath much deformed us' – in a speech of tortured logic and awkward syntax:

> And what in us hath seemed ridiculous –
> As love is full of unbefitting strains,
> All wanton as a child, skipping and vain,
> Formed by the eye and therefore, like the eye,
> Full of strange shapes, of habits and of forms,
> Varying in subjects as the eye doth roll
> To every varied object in his glance;
> Which parti-coated presence of loose love
> Put on by us, if, in your heavenly eyes,
> Have misbecomed our oaths and gravities,
> Those heavenly eyes that look into these faults,
> Suggested us to make. (5.2.733–44)

Berowne had earlier celebrated their eyes – 'From women's eyes this doctrine I derive: / They sparkle still the right Promethean fire.' More, *they* are 'the books, the arts, the academes, / That show, contain, and nourish all the world, / Else none at all in aught proves excellent' (4.3.319–23). Yet whatever women's eyes had to teach, the lords were evidently unable to learn. After discovering how the ladies tricked the lords in the Masque of Muscovites, Berowne promises – in a formal sonnet with rhyme (see 5.2.402–15 n.) – that he will no longer 'woo in rhyme, like a blind harper's song' (5.2.405). A figure of the poet, the blind harper also echoes Cupid, the 'purblind, wayward boy' (3.1.156) whom Berowne blames, in one of his best speeches, for having fallen in love. The chain of reference, though, is circular: love, Berowne claims, is 'first learned in a lady's eyes', then 'Courses as swift as thought in every power' of the body, adding 'a precious seeing to the eye: / A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind' (4.3.296–303).

In the first scene, Berowne had decried knowledge gained merely from books as seeking 'the light of truth, while truth the while / Doth falsely blind the eyesight of

[1] See Goldstien on the play's use of Petrarchan imagery, and Breitenberg for a psychoanalytic critique of Petrarchanism: 'Petrarchan poetry becomes the textualized form of the male gaze', p. 136. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* represents the deceptions of the 'eye' at even greater length.

his look'. He asks to be taught 'how to please the eye indeed / By fixing it upon a fairer eye, / Who dazzling so, that eye shall be his heed, / And give him light that it was blinded by' (1.1.75–6, 80–3). Study may be 'like the heaven's glorious sun' (1.1.84), as Berowne claims, but whoever sees 'the heavenly Rosaline / That, like a rude and savage man of Ind / At the first opening of the gorgeous east / Bows not his vassal head and, strucken blind, / Kisses the base ground with obedient breast?' Indeed, what 'eagle-sighted eye' looks upon her 'That is not blinded by her majesty?' (4.3.212–19). Sight leads to blindness; blindness leads back to sight. Considered in the context of the ongoing themes of vision and blindness, such wit is something more than the 'gingling declamation' that Samuel Johnson condemned.[1] The conjunction of eyes, love, and blindness is conventional in one sense, but is deployed in such paradoxes and at such obsessive length here in order to sustain a critique of Petrarchan discourse for its over-idealisation of the feminine body.[2]

The lords have attempted to sublimate their desire into pedantic knowledge at the beginning, in the belief that the power of the mind will triumph over death, but Holofernes represents the consequence of that move – i.e. sterility and clotted pedantry. Navarre's prohibitions against women include not allowing a man 'to talk with a woman' (1.1.128) and the punishment that any woman coming to the court would suffer 'losing her tongue' (1.1.122–3). Speech with women – verbal exchange equals social exchange – is dangerous because it involves loss, and allows women to take a 'masculine' position. Boyet's question is thus to the point: 'Do not curst wives hold that self-sovereignty / Only for praise' sake when they strive to be / Lords o'er their lords?' (4.1.36–8). Deprived of speech, the women would be unable to define themselves and would not be 'curst' – that is, shrews – but the women in fact overwhelm the lords linguistically even as they refuse to accept the idealising, flattering rhetoric the lords offer them. Indeed, the Princess's embassy has already inserted her into the 'masculine' affairs of diplomacy, as she comes to 'speak' with Navarre on behalf of 'her decrepit, sick, and bedrid father' (1.1.136) – the dying, impotent patriarch about to give way to a powerful royal matriarch, who will hold, as Queen Elizabeth did, the supreme 'masculine' position. Navarre acknowledges this new world to some extent when, after Marcadé's news, he asks 'How fares *your majesty*?' (5.2.700; my emphasis).

Perhaps the most telling instance of the ladies' embrace of their own power and refusal to submit to the lords' discourse occurs in the Masque of Muscovites, when Moth attempts to speak his memorised greeting:

> MOTH 'A holy parcel of the fairest dames
> (*The ladies turn their backs to him*)
> That ever turned their – backs – to mortal views'.
> BEROWNE 'Their eyes', villain, 'their eyes'. (5.2.160–3)

Not only do they refuse 'their eyes' – the source of knowledge, according to Berowne – and give the lie to the specious idealising rhetoric Moth has been given to speak, but

[1] Johnson, 1.266.
[2] See Nancy J. Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981), 265–79.

in offering their '*backs*' to the men we see not only an act of subversion and a literal instance of the 'preposterous reversals' Patricia Parker documents,[1] but a figure for the men's failures throughout.[2]

At the beginning of the play, the women are said to come, like an invading army, to 'besiege his [Navarre's] court' (2.1.86); by the end, their power has only been enhanced, for women's tongues, Boyet reports, are 'as keen / As is the razor's edge invisible' (5.2.256–7). Everything about them indicates that they have taken over the masculine position in the play.[3] It is the women who 'shoot' and 'play the murderer' (4.1.10, 8) in the hunting scene, and women who tell men that they cannot 'hit it' (4.1.118–19). The lovers' separation at the end of the play thus seems inevitable. 'Not to see a woman' (1.1.37), 'to see no woman' (4.3.283): this is at once the lords' desire, their condition, and their punishment.

LANGUAGE

The detachment of the 'sign of she' from its correct referent, when the ladies are masked, finds its correlative in the lords' language – by turns lyrical, witty, narcissistic, obtuse, and eloquent – which is destabilised throughout the play. For every set of Berowne's 'Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, / Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation, / Figures pedantical' that have 'blown me full of maggot ostentation' (5.2.406–9), there is a corresponding moment of brilliance, 'as sweet and musical / As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair' (4.3.311–12). The 'songs of Apollo' are rightly elevated above the 'words of Mercury' (5.2.895) at the end, because the poet, 'his ink . . . tempered with Love's sighs', has the power to move others, as Orpheus did: 'O, then his lines would ravish savage ears / And plant in tyrants mild humility' (4.3.317–18). Such noble verse, however, is too rarely heard, and Rosaline's penance for Berowne responds to his overly clever, often immature language; thus she addresses 'the tongue / Of him that makes' shallow jests (5.2.830–1), incidentally reversing the traditional cultural association of loose tongues with women. Navarre's original edict provided that if any woman came within a mile of his court, the penalty would be 'On pain of losing her tongue' (1.1.122–3). But it turns out to be Berowne's tongue that will be chastened, as Rosaline tells him he must,

> from day to day
> Visit the speechless sick and still converse
> With groaning wretches; and your task shall be
> With all the fierce endeavour of your wit
> To enforce the pained impotent to smile. (5.2.818–22)

[1] '"Preposterous" was the early modern English term for sodomy as the sexually back to front', Parker, p. 479.

[2] As Breitenberg, p. 140, puts it, 'The women have thwarted the male gaze by inverting it: they can recognize the men without being recognized by them.'

[3] A complete switch of gender roles was featured in a 2003 production of the play, directed by Kit Thacker, for the Thirteenth Night Theater Company in New York: Armado became Armada, and it was the prince of France who beseeched the Queen of Navarre, Birona. The production deleted Holofernes and Nathaniel, and most of Armado/a's speeches (D. J. R. Bruckner, *New York Times*, 2 April 2003).

So too the other women: the Princess describes the lords' letters and favours as 'bombast and as lining to the time' (5.2.755) – that is, as 'Inflated or turgid language' (*OED sb.* 3) – and Katherine will, for the duration of the penance, 'mark no words that smooth-faced wooers say' (5.2.796).

If the lords fall foul of their own linguistic excesses and naivety, many of the characters in the subplot are tripped up by far more rudimentary verbal traps. The play offers an at times indigestible 'feast of languages' – a heap of 'scraps' pulled from the 'alms-basket of words' (5.1.32–5). Costard and Dull are malaprops, mangling 'high' words and unwittingly revealing their own predilections. At times, they speak truth through their mistakes – Costard's 'sinplicity' (see 1.1.209 n.), Dull's 'the pollution holds in the exchange' (4.2.40–1) and at times an obscenity bubbles up (Costard's 'egma'; see 3.1.61–70 n.). At other times, however, the malaprops share some of the play's excitement about the possibilities of language: Costard pronounces 'remuneration' and 'guerdon' (see 3.1.119 n.) with pleasure, the mouthful of sounds somehow representing the coins in his hand; Dull claims to have understood no word spoken by Armado and Holofernes in 5.1 – he 'hath not eat paper . . . he hath not drunk ink' (4.2.22), Nathaniel explains – but he enters into the fray, with firm conviction, in his denial of the '*haud credo*' (see 4.2.10 n.).

At the other extreme of linguistic capacity is Moth – witty, punning, 'quick in answers' (1.2.26), as Armado ruefully acknowledges. Armado admires Moth's 'Sweet smoke of rhetoric!' (3.1.52), but for the audience, Armado, Holofernes, and Sir Nathaniel vent up a thick, almost Dickensian fog of words that chokes everyone else. In these characters' language are parodies of euphuism (associated with Lyly), Arcadianism (associated with Sidney), Petrarchanism, inkhornism, satire, and much else. Their approach to style is indicated in this exchange, after the second of Armado's letters has been read:

> BOYET I am much deceived but I remember the style.
> PRINCESS Else your memory is bad, going o'er it erewhile. (4.1.89–90)

The pun style = stile (steps for getting over a fence) indicts the language of Holofernes and Nathaniel, as well as Armado, who make it something physical to be overcome, a hurdle to be 'gone over', lest we be left behind, as Dull is. Armado's language is further complicated by his foreignness, yet Shakespeare manages to lend it, in spite of its absurdity, an almost touching romantic archaicism.

This rich linguistic texture, no doubt the bane of modern directors and actors who must find ways to make it work before contemporary audiences, is the product of the play's historical moment, when the great humanist tradition of eloquence and copiousness – of 'facility' – had, for some, been petrified in the ludicrous synoyms of Holofernes, the inflated diction of Armado, and the parasitic compliments of Sir Nathaniel. At the same time, the 1580s and 1590s also marked a kind of language explosion[1] – of linguistic fertility, the coining of new words, the abandonment of classical rhetoric and the invention of new languages of invective, praise, and triumph. If the negative side of

[1] Well-documented in the work of Jane Donawerth, *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century Study of Language*, 1984, among other places.

this energised linguistic moment was inkhornism and the pretentious employment of 'hard' words, Marlowe's 'mighty line' and Nashe's inventive satire were positive forces that sent language in new directions. Malcolm Evans offers another perspective on the clash of linguistic styles in the play, arguing that in it, 'Shakespeare recreates the conventional debate between speech and writing', deriving from Plato, with Shakespeare clearly coming down on the side of speech over writing.[1] (See Supplementary note on 5.2.895.)

The play's intoxication with language goes beyond its carefully registered parodies and satire, however, to a level of pure *play*, as a game, where, as Barber put it, the wordplay conveys 'an experience of festive liberty'.[2] As Keir Elam has documented at length in his scintillating study, the 'self-activity of the word' that characterises Shakespeare's comedies, and *Love's Labour's Lost* pre-eminently, 'amounts not so much to the autonomy of verbal form as to the identity of that form with the dramatic concerns of the plays themselves'.[3] Language taken as play or game is always in tension with language as social gesture or dialogue – utterance, in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms – and the characters who indulge themselves in language-games will be brought to judgement. Yet the entire play seems, in some ways, to revel in the possibilities of autonomous linguistic invention.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE COURT

The play represents two different courts – of Navarre, of France – and through them we may also dimly glimpse some aspects of the court of Queen Elizabeth. How these first two courts operate within the play – as opposed to whether they allegorise their historical referents – reflects the culture and values of the Elizabethan court. As light and comic as the play is, it is worth remembering that its occasion is a dispute, though not yet a conflict, over royal property, financial debt, and contractual promise – 'serious business' (2.1.31), the Princess notes. (See 2.1.126–46 for the specific details.) Boyet proposes a simple solution to the Princess: 'I'll give you Aquitaine, and all that is his, / An you give him for my sake but one loving kiss' (2.1.244–5) – and perhaps something nearly as simple occurs offstage to resolve the suit – but initially the dispute reveals a significant tension, as the Princess complains to Navarre: 'You do the King my father too much wrong, / And wrong the reputation of your name, / In so unseeming to confess receipt / Of that which hath so faithfully been paid' (2.1.151–4), but Navarre recoups his ground by promising, if proof surfaces, to submit to 'All liberal reason' (165).

Navarre's court is initially characterised, however, not by 'liberal reason' but by a grand scheme to join those other great Renaissance courts in making his 'little academe' into a 'wonder of the world'; the quest for knowledge at his court is to 'buy [a troubling word here] / That honour which shall bate his [Time's] scythe's keen edge, / And make us heirs of all eternity' (1.1.5–7). The ludicrous form this quest takes,

[1] Evans, p. 123.
[2] Barber, p. 95. For another provocative analysis of the concept of play, see Louis A. Montrose, '"Sport by sport o'erthrown": *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Politics of Play', *TSLL*, 528–52.
[3] Elam, p. 2.