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1

Shakespeare's Academy

> I protest, the schoolmaster is exceedingly fantastical—too-too vain, too-too vain.
>
> —*LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST* (5.2.526–27)

THERE IS no greater temptation for scholars than to imagine that our profession makes us special, set apart from other people and the sphere of common life. The differentiation of experts from amateurs—or, if you prefer, the exclusion of amateurs from the society of professionals—has a long and complicated history. According to John Guillory, the story of literature as an academic discipline begins in the Middle Ages, when knowing how to read Latin becomes a mark of distinction at a time when reading in the vernacular is becoming more common. By 1900, "a new kind of professionalism in the domain of knowledge work" supplants literacy in classical languages as the thing that makes scholars scholarly.[1] Just as knowledge of Latin diverged from vernacular literacy earlier, this new professionalism, or "scholarly reading," diverges from "lay reading," and it defines itself against the counterpart it takes to be lacking in seriousness and rigor. For Guillory, scholarly or professional

reading "is a kind of *work*, a labor requiring large amounts of time and resources," but lay reading, by contrast, is a leisurely activity, "motivated by the experience of *pleasure*." Or again, professional reading is "a *communal* practice," in the sense that it "envisions an audience of students or scholars, in the classroom or in print," whereas lay reading is "a *solitary* practice," lacking organized "scenes of communal reading."[2]

These ways of talking about scholars and reading are not surprising. They are bound to occur in societies that relegate the study of literature to specialists with academic credentials—and not least because, in the eyes of the specialists, the legitimacy and perpetuation of their discipline depends on them. Many scholars simply cannot imagine literary criticism without the distinction between professionals and amateurs that lies at the heart of the discipline's self-understanding and conception of intellectual authority. Jonathan Kramnick, for example, who believes in "humanistic expertise as something equivalent to the expertise of the sciences," and in literary criticism as "one discipline among an array of disciplines," questions the value of recent efforts in the public humanities "to imagine that criticism might have an audience or even a home outside the university." In his view, literary criticism outside academic institutions, forums, and publications is inferior to the criticism generated by academics in those places of professional activity, because it does not participate in "the living practice of the field" or the "citational evolution of scholarly argument."[3]

The efficacy of these arguments as strategies for claiming ownership of the study of literature, or justifying the existence of English as an academic discipline, or ennobling the humble labor of its practitioners is debatable. For one thing, the withdrawal of literature professors and other humanists from public life has made it difficult for humanistic disciplines to earn the

public's esteem and trust. For another, drawing dichotomies between scholars and everybody else has the singular disadvantages not only of misrepresenting the experiences of lay readers (as only scholars would call them), but also of undervaluing what happens beyond the academy—for example, in book clubs and in public programs sponsored by universities, churches, libraries, theater companies, and other cultural institutions, where literature is also read and discussed communally. The critic Ryan Ruby writes that "[t]he readership for contemporary para-academic, journalistic, and creative criticism is vastly more sophisticated than it is given credit for."[4] Gary Taylor, a Shakespeare scholar, is less diplomatic. According to him, the discipline of English has "a vested interest in maximizing and glorifying the differences between itself and the general public," and that is why English professors have "inevitably stressed individual intellectual subtleties rather than a community of shared response." They "tend to be intellectual elitists," as opposed to Shakespeare who, "on the evidence of his plays, was not."[5]

Love's Labor's Lost is the only play by Shakespeare that takes the founding of an academic institution as its point of departure. It goes without saying that there are many differences between universities at the end of the sixteenth century and the academy now. Nothing like my discipline existed when Shakespeare wrote the comedy. Nevertheless, I believe the play is useful for thinking about the formation of scholarly character. That is because *Love's Labor's Lost* is a sustained reflection on obscure motives and intractable states of mind that lead scholars to believe they are, or must become, different from and better than everybody else—even though, as Shakespeare suggests repeatedly, this alienating belief is vain and foolish and exposes them to mockery. The comedy looks closely at the reasons elitist

thinking takes hold of the scholars in the play and how it impedes their capacity to understand themselves and other people. Through the scholars' experiences, Shakespeare also considers what it is like to be a critic, in the sense of finding fault with someone or something, and to enjoy using and abusing one's wit for that purpose. To what end? Reflecting on the play about a century ago, John Dover Wilson, an eminent Shakespeare scholar, recommended that all "teachers, professors and educationalists" read the comedy annually, on Ash Wednesday in fact, as a sort of penitential rite, "for their souls' good" and as a cure for pride.[6]

Shakespeare's grammar school education greatly enriched his art,[7] but scenes of instruction and comments about the experience of schooling in his plays are rarely positive. That is also true of *Love's Labor's Lost*, which is relatively uninterested in pedagogy and the process of teaching and learning. The comedy's portrait of scholars is not flattering because it focuses on the blind spots in their self-knowledge, but neither is it lacking in the graciousness that Shakespeare habitually extends to characters who have not earned it. Anne Barton, in a revelatory essay about *Love's Labor's Lost*, helps us to understand why both of these things are true. "At the very heart of the plan for an Academe," she writes "lies the reality of Death" and a corresponding desire "to insure [*sic*] some continuity of personal existence."[8] The comedy begins when a young king, who is ashamed of being merely mortal and fears living an ordinary life, tries to outwit death by establishing an academy to make himself and his followers famous for their austerity of life.[9] From there, the play takes shape as an increasingly elaborate joke about academic vanity at the scholars' expense, in which death eventually has the last laugh. Throughout the action, the scholars must learn humiliating lessons about their common lot

with other human beings: that like the people to whom they feel superior, they are subject to forces beyond their control, including love and death. These lessons, and the new relationships to which they lead, turn out to be more meaningful than the eminence they seek in their academy. And therefore we can say that the play not only criticizes the scholars but also humanizes them, tempering the laughter their brazen behavior warrants with the compassion their ordinary humanity deserves.

Love's Labor's Lost is not well-known, so let me begin by stating some facts about it. Through a complex, episodic structure Shakespeare unfolds a main plot, involving four aristocratic couples who work toward love at cross-purposes, and two subplots that focus on a grandiloquent knight's love for a dairymaid and a schoolmaster's verbosity and self-regard. Misdirected and intercepted letters traverse the play and connect the plot lines, as the comedy guides four groups toward a shared theatrical experience in the final scene, where courtiers disguised as Russians dance with ladies who pretend to be each other and a pageant about the virtues of the ancient world takes place. The first of these groups consists of Ferdinand, the bachelor king of Navarre, who invites three other bachelors from his court—Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine—to become "fellow scholars" in a new academy (1.1.7). When aristocratic ladies arrive from France to collect a debt, these young men become their suitors. The Princess of France (who is otherwise unnamed) and her ladies—Rosaline, Katharine, and Maria—are the members of a second group, along with Boyet, their male chaperone. A third group of characters in the play includes Don Adriano de Armado, a knight; Holofernes, a schoolmaster; and

Sir Nathaniel, a curate. These men, who esteem themselves very highly for their own knowledge of books, become the targets of the scholars' criticism—which is to say, their mockery. As figures of ridicule, however, they also clarify for the play's audience the states of mind and antisocial behaviors that Shakespeare criticizes in the scholars themselves. A final group includes Costard, a peasant; Jaquenetta, a dairymaid; Anthony Dull, a constable; and Moth, a page. For the most part, this group accentuates what is laughable about the members of the third group.

As the play begins, Ferdinand calls upon his courtiers to join an academy and commit themselves to a course of study for three years, during which they must adhere to an oath to fast, refrain from sleep, and avoid the company of women. When pressed to explain what the academy and its strict requirements are for, Ferdinand says the scholars will be rewarded with "study's godlike recompense": the discovery of truths that would otherwise remain unknown (1.1.58). That statement belies the other way he defines the academy's purpose in the play's opening speech: to make scholars famous.

> Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
> Live register'd upon our brazen tombs
> And then grace us in the disgrace of death,
> When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,
> The endeavor of this present breath may buy
> That honor which shall bate his scythe's keen edge
> And make us heirs of all eternity.
> Therefore, brave conquerors,—for so you are
> That war against your own affections
> And the huge army of the world's desires—
> Our late edict shall strongly stand in force:

Navarre shall be the wonder of the world;
Our court shall be a little academe,
Still and contemplative in living art. (1.1.1–14)

This speech is not quite a song, but the style and content of its fourteen lines gesture to the sonnet form and, more specifically, to Shakespeare's sonnets—for example, to the poet's concluding boast to Time in Sonnet 123, a defiant promise to be constant, come what may: "This I do vow, and this shall ever be: / I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee" (123.13–14). On a second reading, however, the spirit of what Ferdinand says has at least as much in common with Sonnet 64, in which the poet, who has studied Time's power over the natural world and human achievement, is made anxious by the lesson he learned: "Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate, / That Time will come and take my love away. / This thought is as a death, which cannot choose / But weep to have that which it fears to lose" (64.10–14). Time, consumption, death, a scythe, fame, the enduring quality of brass, eternity: The metaphors Ferdinand uses for the inaugural convocation of his academy reveal something important about his state of mind. For one thing, this would-be scholar is painfully aware of his mortality. For another, he has the audacity to believe he could become immortal through academic efforts. Immortality is, then, another and perhaps more important sense in which the phrase "study's godlike recompense"[10] is meaningful. In this prince's estimation, the point of living a scholar's life is to become much more than human.

The academy in *Love's Labor's Lost* thus begins as the vision of a fatherless boy on the cusp of adulthood who stands beneath the shadow of a cormorant's wing. Unlike the poet in the sonnets, Ferdinand fears his own death, rather than the death of a loved one. The poet aims to immortalize the one he loves,

but Ferdinand hopes his labors as a scholar will make himself one of the "heirs of all eternity" (1.1.7). And whereas the poet in the sonnets repeatedly lauds the youth and beauty of his friend, Ferdinand seems to dwell on the possibility that in times to come there will be nothing praiseworthy or memorable about his own life. Perhaps that is why he regards death, our common lot, as a personal "disgrace." The academy offers Ferdinand a refuge from his fears by charting an unlikely path toward fame through disciplined acts of self-denial. It also exposes him to new risks. Ferdinand is old enough to know what death is, but he is still too young to understand what Prospero, the scholar-prince in *The Tempest*, learns from being overthrown and banished: namely, whatever authority Ferdinand has depends upon him playing a public role in his society, not holding himself aloof from it in private studies.

Ferdinand describes his academy as an instance of "*living* art" (my italics), but the oath his courtiers must swear to be accounted scholars rejects life's ordinary circumstances. Only by denying the needs they have in common with everybody else—for nourishment, rest, conversation, and love—will the scholars make themselves worthy of fame. Note that the "oaths" the scholars must take go hand in hand with a new "edict," "decree," and "proclamation" (1.1.19, 144, 270). However absurd and impractical the rules of the academy are, Ferdinand imposes them as laws throughout his kingdom. Indeed, before the first scene ends, Anthony Dull, the constable, hauls Costard, a peasant, before the king for "consort[ing], contrary to thy established proclaimed edict" with Jaquenetta, a dairymaid (1.1.248–49). Like the academy and its oath, the edict points to the existence of powerful fears about the human body's vulnerability, the reality of women, and more generally, the physical and psychological changes that come with the onset of sexual maturity—and to

a fantasy that the existence of these things could be abolished by mere prohibition, whether voluntary (oath) or involuntary (law). To put it another way, Ferdinand may be less invested in separating his academy from society than in creating a society where his academy and its values are all in all.

The most consequential prohibition in Ferdinand's design is the last one, forbidding conversation with women. From the moment the oath is sworn, problems of communication and oath keeping become major preoccupations for the play. In adopting the oath's third article, Ferdinand's academy departs from an ancient way of understanding conversation as the defining attribute of humanity, the endowment that sets us apart from animals. In *De oratore* (*On the Orator*), a cornerstone of grammar school education in Shakespeare's era, Cicero argues that our capacity for witty conversation (*sermo facetus)* makes us human: "By this one gift we are most distinguished from brute animals, that we converse together, and can express our thoughts by speech" (1.32).[11] He returns to this theme a decade later in *De officiis* (*On Duties*), another influential school text, where he remarks that the drive moving human beings to meet with and engage each other arises from a natural impulse to procreate and care for children. While that impulse is common to all animals, in human beings, writes Cicero, "the power of reason" regulates it so that it "unites one man to another for the fellowship both of common speech and of life [*ad orationis et ad vitae societatem*]" (1.11–12).[12] Shakespeare may be alluding to *De officiis* in *Love's Labor's Lost* when, in friendly conversation, Sir Nathaniel, a curate, remarks to Holofernes, a schoolmaster, that "society (saith the text) is the happiness of life" (4.2.156–57).[13]

As Cicero takes up the topic of private conversation in *De officiis*, in contrast to public oratory, he suggests that the way people talk to each other in the intimacy of daily life makes

evident our uniquely human nature as rational, language-bearing creatures, drawn to one another out of a mutual desire for affable and life-sustaining company. "Conversation ought to be gentle without a trace of intransigence; it should also be witty," he writes, "[n]or should any one speaker exclude all others as if he were taking over the occupancy of his own estate. He should think it fair in shared conversation, just as in other things, for everyone to have a turn" (1.134). In making private conversation the activity in which we experience and practice what makes us human, Cicero places a high value on wit. Being witty, for Cicero, also means having a sense of decorum, being sensitive to the rights and feelings of other people, and being generous.

In contrast to Cicero's vision of human society, Ferdinand's vision for scholarship is explicitly antisocial. It marks a retreat from intercourse with women and seems rather barbarous. From the early sixteenth century, "conversation" meant living among other people, exchanging thoughts and words, and sexual intercourse.[14] In this context, the decree, which stipulates that no woman shall come within a mile of the scholars "on pain of losing her tongue," underscores not only a fear of social intimacy but also anxieties about adult sexuality that the all-male academy is designed to contain. It is also a ghastly instance of scholar-made law, for which Longaville gracelessly takes credit as a flourish of wit ("Marry, I did that!") (1.1.120–24).

Opposition to the principles of the new academy does not go unvoiced. Berowne is the last of Ferdinand's companions to swear the oath. He mounts a spirited resistance to the academy, and the style of his resistance gestures toward a quite different

vision for scholarship, informed by a sense of humor about the frailties of the human condition. Where Ferdinand declaims his point of view in speeches that demand assent, Berowne asks a question, the first one in the play: "What is the end of study, let me know?" (1.1.55). The question changes a coercive ceremony with scripted parts and foregone conclusions into a playful, open-ended discussion. From Ferdinand's answer that the purpose of studying is "to know which else we should not know," Berowne takes up the auxiliary verb *should not* and sends it back into play (1.1.56). "Come on then," he says, "I will swear to study so, / To know the thing I am *forbid* to know" (1.1.59–60, my italics).

In plain English, Berowne is saying this: "If you say that the point of studying is to learn what I *should not* know otherwise, then in order to keep my promise to study with you, I must do precisely those things that you would *prohibit* me from doing." Witty, surprising, and paradoxical, this line of reasoning welcomes laughter in a bid to resolve the conflict with Ferdinand. Berowne concedes that he might not have understood what he promised to do when he agreed to become a scholar, and he recommits himself to being true to his word. Ferdinand, in turn, is invited to acknowledge that his definition of scholarship is too strict and to change his meaning before the oath is ratified formally. But Ferdinand does not laugh, and the opportunity to infuse the new academy with Berowne's spirit passes.

Is Berowne's protest against Ferdinand's vision for scholarship the complaint self-indulgence makes against discipline? That is the way that Ferdinand appears to understand it. He accuses Berowne of wanting to "hinder study" and "train our intellects to vain delight" (1.1.70–77). Ferdinand thus makes a judgment about Berowne without pausing to appreciate the virtues his speeches demonstrate, chief among them irony, to which Ferdinand reacts with literal-minded opposition, as if

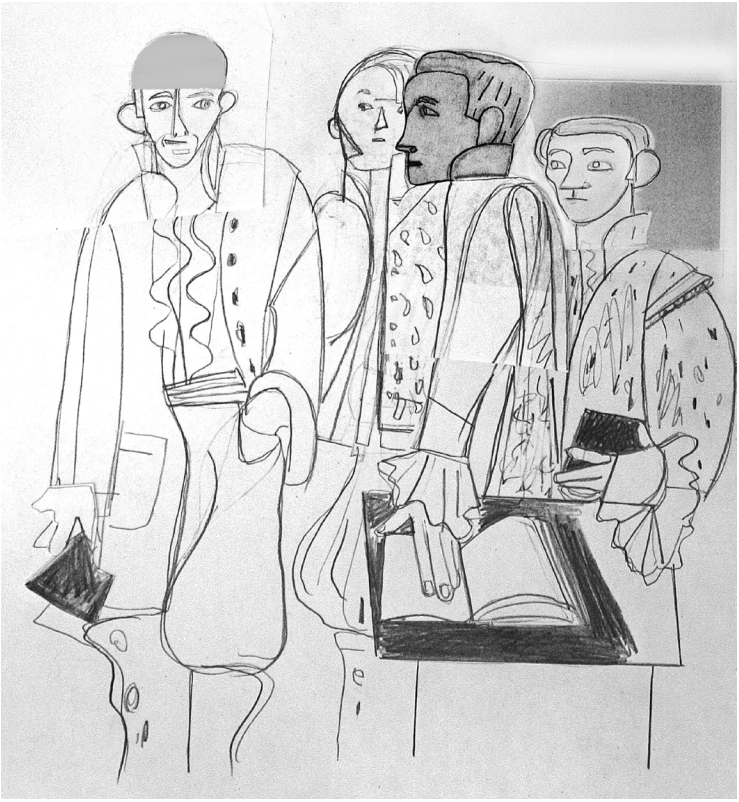

FIGURE 1. Miriam Hitchcock, *Shakespeare's Academy* (2025). Used by permission of the artist.

Berowne were actually arguing scholars should be gluttons and womanizers. In being ironic about himself, Berowne shows Ferdinand and the others how not to take themselves so seriously. "Why, all delights are vain," he says, in a second gesture that invites Ferdinand to recognize what they have in common, rather than setting himself apart (1.1.72).

Ferdinand and his vision for scholarship are earnest, a trifle grandiose, hermetic, and sober. Berowne is playful,

self-deprecating, outgoing, and witty, perhaps to a fault. Ferdinand invents the academy in a bid to establish his own authority and is intolerant of dissent. Berowne, by contrast, shows what would be gained by approaching academic life as conversation, in which all participants have the right to speak and propose new ways of using shared language. Ferdinand longs to be revered and will persevere in a conflict with anyone who will not subscribe to his own values. Berowne is irreverent, but his irreverence aims at resolving disagreements peacefully, through laughter.

Berowne implies that scholars might choose friendship to be the end, or purpose, of study, rather than an authority and reputation founded on self-isolation. Ferdinand remains unreceptive to this idea, perhaps because he wants followers, not friends. Therefore, as Berowne's protest against the academy enters a new phase, he responds more pointedly to Ferdinand's vision for scholarship. The freedom to judge one's friend (in Latin, *libertas*) is one of friendship's cherished offices, according to ancient and Renaissance ethics. For Francis Bacon, the difference between a friend's counsel and the counsel we give ourselves is as great as the difference between a friend and a flatterer, "[f]or there is no such flatterer as is a man's self, and there is no such remedy against the flattery of a man's self as the liberty of a friend."[15] In this spirit, Berowne compares Ferdinand's scholarship to astronomy:

> Study is like the heaven's glorious sun,
> That will not be deep-searched with saucy looks:
> Small have continual plodders ever won,
> Save base authority from other's books.
> These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights [the
> astronomers],

That give a name to every fixed star,
Have no more profit of their shining nights,
Than those that walk and wot not what they are.
Too much to know is to know nought but fame;
And every godfather can give a name. (1.1.84–93)

Berowne implies that the way Ferdinand defined the end of study earlier ("to know which else we should not know") is impertinent. Next he suggests his program of scholarship is bound to be tedious and derivative, rather than original and glorious. Then, in the passage I just quoted, he rejects the distinction Ferdinand draws between scholars and ordinary people. According to Berowne, astronomers are no better than non-astronomers for all their knowledge of the stars; like the rest of us, they go about in the dark. After that, hearkening to the first line of the play ("Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives"), Berowne asks Ferdinand to acknowledge that fame is nothing but a name. And finally, Berowne implies that the rules of Ferdinand's academy are as unseasonable as roses at Christmas or as snowfall in May (1.1.105–7). Berowne says that to study as Ferdinand would have them study would be to "[c]limb o'er the house to unlock the little gate" (1.1.108–9). He means that to practice scholarship in Ferdinand's terms would be a ridiculous effort and a waste of time—specifically, a waste of the season of life in which these young scholars find themselves. "The spring is near, when green geese are a-breeding," says Berowne, and "[I] like of each thing that in season grows" (1.1.97, 107).

When Ferdinand imagines an academy, he focuses on an infinitely distant future, in which unborn generations will remember and praise him as an ancient hero whose scholarly deeds enabled him to transcend his time. But for Berowne, who

behaves as though scholars are (or could be) friends, scholarship cannot be a means to an end, however laudable that end might be. If scholarship is friendship, it must be an end in itself: belonging to the present, its good depending on what scholars do with the ripeness of the moments they share with other people. Berowne's commitment to friendship and conversation as models for scholarly life make him vulnerable to the ultimatum that Ferdinand now issues: ratify the oath and stay with us as a scholar, or refuse and be banished as a layman (1.1.110). When Berowne repeats his promise to study, signs the articles of the oath, and stays in the academy, Ferdinand congratulates him, saying, "How well this yielding rescues thee from shame" (1.1.118). How, though, should we understand Berowne's yielding? As obedient submission to a valid authority? As proof that Ferdinand's case for fame persuades him? Or as a further demonstration of the values Berowne uniquely brings to scholarship—in this case, his belief that the common good of being together is preferable to the private good of winning the argument, of being right?

The scholars in Ferdinand's academy could aspire to contribute to the immortality of works entrusted to their care, by renewing and expanding the kinds of attention they receive. This is what academic institutions traditionally and properly do. But this academy, which has neither books nor teachers in it, has a different purpose: to secure for its scholars a form of social recognition that skirts shame by avoiding love. That is why the scholars' discourse amounts to little more than private banter and condescending remarks about other people and the way they speak. These scholars are critics. By the time Shakespeare

wrote *Love's Labor's Lost*, a clear connection had been established between the Latin adjective *criticus* and the editing and publication of ancient texts, a traditional domain for scholarship. In 1605, Francis Bacon carried this association into English when he distinguished "Critical" (which is "attained by men's proper endeavours") from "Pedantical" (meaning "delivered by teachers").[16] Shakespeare, however, associates critic and criticism with disapproval, ridicule, and satire. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Berowne's reference to himself as a "critic" of love (3.1.173) as the first usage of the word in English to mean "[a] person who expresses a considered judgement on something or someone; esp[ecially] one who expresses a harsh or unfavourable opinion; a criticizer, a fault-finder."[17]

Language in the play turns sharply toward criticism, and the folly of scholarship comes clearly into view, only moments after Berowne gives up his resistance and signs the oath, bringing the academy into being. The scholarly endeavor that aims to conquer death immediately claims three casualties. The first is constancy. No sooner has the oath to avoid conversation with women been sworn than it must be forsworn, because the Princess of France arrives as an ambassador from her father to discuss the payment of a debt, with her three ladies in waiting and a male chaperone. Ferdinand says that he "must of force dispense with [his] decree," but to save face, he orders that the Princess and her ladies must take up residence on the lawn outside his palace. That makes hospitality scholarship's second casualty. The third is charity. Berowne asks whether there is any planned recreation for the scholars. Ferdinand says that a Spanish solider, Don Adriano de Armado, is visiting the court, "One who the music of his own vain tongue / Doth ravish like enchanting harmony" (1.1.163–64). He proposes that for "interim to our studies," they prompt Don Armado to tell them stories

about Spanish knights and mock him when he exaggerates his own achievements. "I protest," says Ferdinand, "I love to hear him lie, /And I will use him for my minstrelsy" (1.1.172–73). Longaville, not to be outdone in tactlessness, suggests that they also make "sport" of Costard, an illiterate shepherd (1.1.176). According to Roger Scruton, "laughter expresses an ability to accept our all-too-human inadequacies," but because those inadequacies are precisely what the scholars cannot accept—indeed, have sworn not to accept—they turn their laughter outward, as mockery.[18] The academy has scarcely begun when the scholars' posture of self-denial reveals itself to be inseparable from their self-indulgence and their urge to hold themselves superior to other people. They may aspire to become famous for their virtue, but what they have done is to change an anxiety about the vanity of human existence into the vanity of pride.[19]

Shakespeare uses "wit" in *Love's Labor's Lost* as we do, to mean "quickness of intellect or liveliness of fancy, with capacity for apt expression; talent for saying brilliant or sparkling things, esp[ecially] in an amusing way," but from this moment forward, he will also use it to mean criticism.[20] The tactful invitations to laugh at oneself that Berowne makes earlier give way to contemptuous mocking. Alongside criticism, pedantry is born, its fraternal twin; and like its sibling, pedantry is both derogatory and ridiculous. In act 4, scene 2, for example, Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel exult in their own wit while criticizing Dull for his lack of education, unaware that the way they speak is affected, demeaning, and absurd. Dull mishears Holofernes's Latin remark, "haud credo" ("I do not believe so") as "old gray doe," and an argument about the kind of deer that the Princess shot in the previous scene ensues (4.2.11–12). This is an opportunity for all three men to enjoy the inadvertent conjunction of English and Latin sounds, to acknowledge that the languages of learning

and daily life have something in common, and to laugh together, but Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel seize upon the occasion to laugh at Dull. "He hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book; / He hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink: his intellect is not replenished," says Sir Nathaniel, "he is only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts: /And such barren plants are set before us that we thankful should be, / Which we of taste and feeling are, for those parts that do fructify in us more than he" (4.2.24–29). In their eagerness to impress each other, and to prove how much sharper they are than Dull, these "bookmen" fail to recognize the riddle that Dull poses, to which the answer is the moon,[21] as a chance to make amends for their dehumanizing criticism and engage in affable conversation. Holofernes, who answers "Dictynna," an obscure name for Diana who is the goddess of the moon, is keener to show off his learning than he is to appreciate Dull's cleverness and share the joke (4.2.34–36).

Commentators often regard Shakespeare's own wit with ambivalence. His most ardent admirers have had reservations about the witty language of *Love's Labor's Lost*. "We shall hardly venture to 'set a mark of reprobation on it,'" writes William Hazlitt (1817), but "we have some objections to the style, which we think savors more of the pedantic spirit of Shakespear's time than of his own genius."[22] Before Hazlitt, Samuel Johnson (1765) both praised and blamed the comedy. There is no play "that has more evident marks of the hand of Shakespeare," writes Johnson, but "many passages [are] mean, childish, and vulgar."[23] Shakespeare's wit troubles Johnson and Hazlitt because, in their opinion, it violates or, more simply, lacks the decorum that neoclassical theory requires of works of art. Ben Jonson's appraisal of Shakespeare's wit in the seventeenth century is a starting point for that line of thought, but notably

the issue for Jonson is not Shakespeare's taste. Instead, it is his lack of control over gifts that ought to demonstrate his mastery as a writer. Shakespeare "was (indeed) honest, and of a gentle and open and free nature, had an excellent phantasy, brave notions and gentle expressions," writes Jonson, "wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary that he should be stopped. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too."[24]

As the play explores the effects of scholarship on the exercise of wit, and Berowne moves to the center of attention as the exemplar of the scholar's experience, he might be described in the way that Jonson describes Shakespeare: a good person who loses control of a prodigious gift. "I have a trick / Of the old rage," says Berowne, after it dawns on him that he involuntarily and extemporaneously composed a sonnet while stating he had renounced artful speech: "Bear with me, I am sick" (5.2.403–18). Rosaline describes Berowne's wit as an exercise of power, or perhaps as a power that uses him to exercise itself. At first, remembering Berowne from the time before the play began, Rosaline says she never met "a merrier man, / Within the limit of becoming mirth." She refers to his "fair tongue" as "conceit's expositor," reporting that "aged ears play truant at his tales, / And younger ears are quite ravished, / So sweet and voluble is his discourse." Here, the pronoun "his" may refer to Berowne or to his tongue, as an organ set apart from its owner and endowed with agency, like "[h]is eye" and "his wit" (2.1.66–76). Later, however, Rosaline describes Berowne and the past differently. Following "The Pageant of the Nine Worthies"—a masque that Holofernes and Don Armado organize for the nobles in act 5—Rosaline tells Berowne that she knew he had a bad reputation before she ever laid eyes on him: "The world's large tongue / Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks, / Full of comparisons, and wounding

flouts, / Which you on all estates will execute / That lie within the mercy of your wit" (5.2.826–30).

The wit that Rosaline admired earlier for its easy flow, she now describes as "replete" and "full," in the sense of being too much. Berowne, who fed all sorts of ears with sweetness, now seems to her to feed on "all estates" (that is, all kinds of people) in order to satisfy his appetite for ridicule. The cause of her shift in perspective must be the experience of watching Berowne subject the actors who perform in the pageant to merciless derision. "This is not generous, not gentle, not humble," says Holofernes, after Berowne mocks him from the stage, to peals of laughter from the other scholars and Boyet (5.2.622). Rosaline's new appraisal of Berowne is a judgment about the "gibing spirit" (that is to say, his wit) under whose "influence" he has fallen. It is also a protest against the ethos of Ferdinand's academy and scholars who make a game of criticizing other people (5.2.842–43).

It is not surprising that once Berowne becomes a scholar, his courteous, sweet, and pleasure-giving wit should curdle into something conceited, despotic, and humiliating. "Like a demigod here I sit in the sky, / And wretched fools' secrets heedfully o'ereye," he says, while spying on the other scholars and rejoicing in the shame they feel because they broke their promises not to communicate with women—the very promise that, unbeknownst to them, Berowne broke first (4.3.74–75). But why should that be the case? Because *Love's Labor's Lost* imagines scholarship as a war on affections, as desire for authority and fame, as inhospitable retreats from conversation with women, as malicious criticism about the vanities and follies of other people, and very clearly as a lack of a sense of humor about oneself. "Good wits be jangling," says the Princess to her companions as they jest with each other, "but, gentles, agree. / This civil war of wits were much better used / On Navarre and his

bookmen, for here 'tis abused"—as if it were obvious that witty conversation involving scholars is a battle against adversaries rather than play among friends (2.1.224–26).

The arrival of the Princess and her ladies presents the scholars with a new raison d'être: not love of fame (competition among men) but love of beauty (courtship with women). As Berowne noted in the play's opening scene, there is more than one way to grow into manhood, and henceforth, Ferdinand and his companions not only strive to act like scholars. They also aspire to be suitors and husbands, albeit secretly. Such a calling to love and beauty involves experiences different from the ones the scholars have had as members of Ferdinand's academy. It also prompts them to do different kinds of work. In the academy, the scholars derive their authority to criticize everybody else from the ascetic life they pledge to live in pursuit of immortal fame, and their criticism takes the form of speech rather than writing. By contrast, as lovers, or what we might call *amateurs*, they submit to beauty's authority and write verses in praise of their female visitors. Membership in the academy is meant to protect scholars from feelings of shame, but the opposite is true of their vocation to love beauty. Love of beauty leads to the scandal of broken oaths, generates a surplus of love lyrics that reveal the scholars' human frailty, and exposes them to the criticism they lavish on other people. "None are so surely caught, when they are catched, / As wit turned fool," says the Princess of the transformation that the scholars undergo after meeting them: "Folly, in wisdom hatched, / Hath wisdom's warrant and the help of school / And wit's own grace to grace a learned fool" (5.2.69–72).

Berowne's experience shows what it is like to be caught between the contradictory imperatives of a profession, in the early sense of a "declaration of belief in and obedience to religion" or "of conformity to the faith and principles of any religious community,"[25] and a vocation, or "a feeling of *being called*."[26] Shakespeare draws a comparison between him and Don Armado that brings the predicament clearly into view. Don Armado's soliloquy about falling in love (1.2.160–77) sets a pattern for Berowne's soliloquy about that topic (3.1.170–202). The love letter Don Armado writes to Jaquenetta, which Boyet intercepts and mocks (4.1.62–88), is a foil for Berowne's sonnet about Rosaline, which falls into Holofernes's hands and becomes the subject of a scene of literary criticism (4.2.104–17). Although Don Armado speaks prose and Berowne verse, their soliloquies are similar. Both men confess that they are in love and acknowledge that in loving women, they have "forsworn" (1.2.162) their promises to other men and "perjured" themselves (3.1.191). Both describe the experience of being in love as humiliation. But unlike Don Armado, Berowne understands what has happened to him. Having prided himself on being "love's whip, / A very beadle to a humorous sigh, / A critic, nay, a night-watch constable, / A domineering pedant over the boy" (3.1.171–74), he describes loving Rosaline as a loss of the authority he associates with the critic, schoolmaster, and law.

Don Armado and Berowne both speak derogatorily about the women they love, attributing to those women the lack of self-control to which they themselves are subject: a projection of self-criticism onto another person. Thus, Jaquenetta is "base" and Rosaline "will do the deed, / Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard" (1.2.160–62; 3.1.195–96). Ferdinand's academy, in ruling out conversation with women, aims to

protect the scholars from the experience of confusion and self-doubt that comes with falling in love. Yet it is only by heeding beauty's call that the men in the play find voices that are distinctively their own. "Devise, wit! write, pen! for I am for whole volumes in folio," says Don Armado, embracing the change that love has wrought in him (1.2.176–77). Later, more resigned than enthusiastic, Berowne echoes these lines: "Well, I will love, write, sigh, pray, sue, groan: / Some men must love my lady, and some Joan" (3.1.201–2).

The soliloquies occur right after Berowne and Don Armado hear beauty's call, but the letter to Jaquenetta and the sonnet for Rosaline reveal what happens next, when love of beauty and the desire for authority and fame compete for control of thinking, speech, and writing. Scholarship in Navarre is self-protective non-communication; the Princess calls the academy a "silent court" with "forbidden gates" (1.2.24, 26). By contrast, Don Armado's letter and Berowne's sonnet are gestures toward another person that put at risk the self-images of the men who write them. They are also proof of just how difficult it is to make oneself vulnerable, in the hope of establishing the security of a new relationship.

For example, while Don Armado's soliloquy clarifies that he wants to yield to Jaquenetta, his letter is also bent on asserting authority over her, in the form of a lesson that demonstrates the pervasiveness of the academy's values in the play-world:

> The magnanimous and most illustrate King Cophetua set eye upon the pernicious and indubitate beggar Zenelophon, and he it was that might rightly say, *veni*, *vidi*, *vici*; which to annothanize in the vulgar (O base and obscure vulgar!) videlicet, He came, see, and overcame: he came, one; see two; overcame, three. Who came? The king. Why did he

> come? To see. Why did he see? To overcome. To whom came he? To the beggar. What saw he? The beggar. Who overcame he? The beggar. The conclusion is victory. On whose side? The king's. The captive is enriched. On whose side? The beggar's. The catastrophe is a nuptial. On whose side? The king's. No—on both in one, or one in both. I am the king (for so stands the comparison), thou the beggar (for so witnesseth thy lowliness). (4.1.62–80)

Don Armado's letter brilliantly combines candid self-disclosure with a total lack of self-awareness, and for a moment, Don Armado becomes the focus of the play's skeptical thinking about scholarship.

The letter is, among other things, a parody of textual analysis in the Renaissance grammar school. First Don Armado analyzes a story about an African king who loves a beggar woman, then he applies it to his own circumstances. Ironically, the letter is incurious about Jaquenetta herself and does not consider how she might react to or understand this lesson or its scholar. That is a joke about Elizabethan pedagogy and a reminder that scholarship in this play can be an obstacle to the formation of new relationships. Don Armado vaingloriously compares himself to Julius Caesar and King Cophetua. It follows that Jaquenetta is conquered Gaul, a beggar, and the vulgar tongue. Together, these comparisons draw attention to the warlike posture, fear of change, and aggression toward women that lie at the foundation of Ferdinand's academy, and they invite us to laugh.

"Shall I command thy love? I may. Shall I enforce thy love? I could. Shall I entreat thy love? I will," writes Don Armado in lines that nicely capture the conflict between the scholar's will to dominate and the will to love that originates with beauty's call (4.1.81–82). The sonnet that Berowne writes for Rosaline is

more graceful than Don Armado's letter, but like the letter, it is a place where the scholar's impulse toward authority and the amateur's impulse toward relationship confront each other:

> If love make me forsworn, how shall I swear to love?
> Ah, never faith could hold, if not to beauty vow'd!
> Though to myself forsworn, to thee I'll faithful prove:
> Those thoughts to me were oaks, to thee like osiers bow'd.
> Study his bias leaves and makes his book thine eyes,
> Where all those pleasures live that art would comprehend:
> If knowledge be the mark, to know thee shall suffice;
> Well learned is that tongue that well can thee commend,
> All ignorant that soul that sees thee without wonder;
> Which is to me some praise that I thy parts admire:
> Thy eye Jove's lightning bears, thy voice his dreadful thunder,
> Which not to anger bent, is music and sweet fire.
> Celestial as thou art, O, pardon, love, this wrong,
> That sings heaven's praise with such an earthly tongue.
> (4.2.104–117)

The poem's opening line acknowledges that Berowne has wondered how Rosaline might interpret his text and motives. Why should she believe him when he swears that he loves her, given the fact that by loving her, he has forsworn the solemn oath he took to the academy? As Don Armado says earlier, to be forsworn "is a great argument of falsehood" (1.2.162–63). The capacity to think this thought about Rosaline distinguishes Berowne from Don Armado. Having thought it, however, he retreats from its implications about himself and lays the groundwork for reestablishing the authority he believes he lost when he fell in love.

Berowne responds to the sonnet's opening question by reasoning either that he was powerless to keep his oath or that he could not have broken it, because it is not possible for him to keep faith with anything but beauty.

Therefore, if Berowne is forsworn, it could not be to Rosaline, because she is beautiful. By the same token, Berowne cannot be forsworn to the academy, because "[s]tudy . . . makes his book thine eyes" and "[i]f knowledge be the mark" scholarship aims to hit, "to know thee shall suffice" ("thine" and "thee" refer to Rosaline). He appears to want to say that love changed everything but also that he himself remains entirely unaltered and has been in the right all along. Berowne combines sophistical thinking, flattery, and the sonnet's mellifluent form in a bid for mastery that the poem, drawing from Petrarch's play book, disguises as a posture of submission. The poem's final lines tempt Rosaline to yield to Berowne by turning her into Jove and giving her both the power to compel Berowne to break his academic oath and the authority to pardon his transgression. In this performance of humility, Berowne appears to have no power nor any virtues, apart from his capacity to recognize that Rosaline is praiseworthy.

The texts Berowne and Don Armado write as amateurs are centerpieces for two of three scenes that focus on the activity of reading and interpretation and represent it as criticism. In these scenes, Shakespeare examines the academy and its values skeptically, without ever losing sight of the fact that love is no less prone to folly. In the first scene of reading (4.1), Boyet intercepts Don Armado's letter to Jaquenetta, reads it aloud, and mocks its style for the amusement of the ladies. In the next

scene (4.2), Holofernes harshly judges the style of Berowne's sonnet about Rosaline when it is delivered to him, despite his own demonstrated inability to compose verses fluently (4.2.54–62). In the third of these scenes (5.2), the scholars join Boyet in criticizing "The Pageant of the Nine Worthies."

At each of these points, Shakespeare invites the members of his audience either to stand with a reader who criticizes or with a writer (or performer) who is criticized. In so doing, they can take the measure of themselves and the comedy as a whole. When the play reaches its culmination in the pageant, where the mission of Ferdinand's academy, which is to produce famous men, becomes the object of the scholars' criticism and our laughter, a question arises about Shakespeare's artform. Is the theater an extension of the academy, where one protects oneself from shame by criticizing other people, or an alternative to it, a place where one learns to criticize oneself through exposure to criticism by others? Whether we laugh, and where we direct our laughter if we do, are indications of how we understand the nature and purposes of comedy and of reading.

In the second scene of reading, in which Holofernes criticizes Berowne's sonnet, Shakespeare directs our laughter at Holofernes's self-regarding pedantry. The schoolmaster, who is as vainglorious as Don Armado, is another foil for Berowne and a focus of Shakespeare's reflection on scholarship. Holofernes's first appearance on stage coincides with the disclosure of Berowne's sonnet and the play's first scene of literary criticism. He says that Berowne's sonnet is mechanical ("Here are only numbers ratified" [4.2.119–20]) and derivative ("*Imitari* is nothing. So doth the hound his master, the ape his keeper, the tired horse his rider" [4.2.124–25]). Holofernes's failure to appreciate the sonnet's urbanity and polish is risible. Because he is a schoolmaster, this is a joke about vanity at scholarship's

expense. However, the joke is not only on Holofernes. Perhaps it should give us pause that like Berowne, Holofernes is able to compose verses spontaneously, if not well (4.2.56–61). Any comparison of Berowne's limpid sonnet about Rosaline and Holofernes's turgid, alliterative verses about a deer hunt will underscore the difference between them. Yet, by comparing Berowne with Holofernes and Don Armado, the play also suggests that every scholar in Ferdinand's academy, even the wittiest one, is likely to become a supercilious pedant or a braggart soldier.

Berowne is the first scholar in Ferdinand's academy to write anything, and his text sets a pattern for the ones that follow. First, he acknowledges that beauty threatens scholarship. Next, he expresses shame about yielding to beauty. Finally, he devises a way of regaining control over beauty and containing his shame. As a gesture toward communication with the woman to whom it is addressed, the sonnet can go no further, because the scholar who wrote it is actually speaking to other scholars about a crisis of academic masculinity.

As it travels through the play, Berowne's sonnet exposes him to a second round of criticism, in act 4, scene 3, where Ferdinand, Longaville, and Dumaine read their love lyrics aloud, unaware that Berowne is listening. Costard, sent by Holofernes to Ferdinand, arrives on stage with the poem only moments after Berowne disingenuously seizes the moral high ground from the other scholars and glorifies himself for not breaking his academic oath (4.3.173–77). His sonnet's appearance at this point is an acute embarrassment. Humiliation changes Berowne from the demigod who spies upon his friends and enjoys their suffering, into a merely mortal man, a fool just like all the other scholars: "Ah, [Costard], you were born to do me shame. Guilty, my lord, guilty. I confess, I confess . . . [t]hat you three

fools lacked me fool to make up the mess" (4.3.200–203). But the discovery that the scholars all forswore their oaths, and are therefore equal to each other in disgrace, does not give rise to humility or mutual understanding, much less to a reappraisal of their vision for the academy. On the contrary, Berowne immediately tries to regain a version of the specious authority over his companions that he just lost by asserting that Rosaline is more beautiful than the other women, while his companions react to his claims with increasingly lewd and derogatory remarks about Rosaline's dark complexion (4.3.217–77). This conversation does not end in agreement about beauty, but with an appeal to Berowne from Ferdinand to do what now seems impossible: to "prove / Our loving lawful and our faith not torn" (4.3.281–82). For Longaville that means finding "some authority how to proceed, / Some tricks, some quillets, how to cheat the devil," meaning a wise saying or something witty to solve the problem of their disgrace (4.3.283–84).

Berowne responds with a brilliant speech, displaying the full power of his wit. In a clear departure from Ferdinand's perspective at the start of the play, he addresses the scholars as "affection's men-at-arms" and makes the case that scholarship, understood properly, is a labor of love (4.3.286). When his perjury was discovered earlier, Berowne defended himself by saying that "[y]oung blood doth not obey an old decree": a signal, perhaps, that his rebellion against the academy and its founder was about to enter a new phase (4.3.213). Now he gracefully aligns Ferdinand, a young monarch, with his youthful courtiers, rather than his own edict, arguing that "[t]o fast, to study, and to see no woman" would be "[f]lat treason 'gainst the kingly state of youth" (4.3.288–89). Having provided this remedy for the breach of trust between the scholars, Berowne circles back to his sonnet's self-exculpatory thinking and expands it to include

the others. He argues that "women's eyes" are "the books, the arts, the academes, / That show, contain, and nourish all the world, / Else none at all in aught proves excellent." It follows that it would be nonsensical for any bookman not to break an oath that forbids him to have intercourse with these bookwomen, because "keeping what is sworn, you will prove fools" (4.3.326–30). Just when the scholars cannot deny that they are in the wrong, they turn out to be right.

Berowne's speech is wit's high point in the play. It is also a turning point for the scholars. Inspired by it, they abandon their vows and resolve to woo the Princess and her ladies, openly and together. Fundamentally, however, the academy and its values remain intact until "The Pageant of the Nine Worthies" takes place. Once internalized, the scholars' homosocial bonds are more difficult to renounce than the oaths that bring the academy into existence. "Learning is but an adjunct to ourself," says Berowne in a variant of the speech that appears in both quarto and folio versions of the play, "And where we are our learning likewise is" (4.3.291.19–20). Because Berowne aims to help the scholars save face with each other, he reasserts the academy's core values: desire for authority, fear of change, and aggression toward women. Perhaps he himself shares these values, now that he knows what it is like to be in love with Rosaline. Longaville's appeal for "some authority how to proceed" shows that even in disgrace, the scholars are beholden to their original desires, which come to look very dubious indeed as they confront irrefutable evidence of their inconstancy. In this exchange, "authority" means "[a] book, passage, etc., accepted as a source of reliable information or evidence" that would show the scholars what to do. But if a "quillet" will do the job just as well, what does authority mean to these scholars, and why do they want to have it? A quillet is

(continued...)

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