

Máté Szabó:

“What Sign is It?” – De / Re-Constituting the Dramatic Sign
in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*

shallow / profound

The playtext of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is either played down or regarded problematic by most critics. The approaches¹ are concerned with the edginess of the construction: J. V. Cunningham², John Kerrigan³, Barbara Mowat,⁴ Kenneth Steele⁵ and Stanley Wells⁶ read the play as a repository for Shakespeare’s early style that can be studied through the errata. Grant L. Voth⁷ even complains about the readerly expectations disappointed, claiming that the entertainment the title promises proves to be vain.⁸ Brian Vickers goes as far as stating⁹ that in the play “the overall incongruity of Derridean methods [are] being employed,”¹⁰ carried out in a style in which “the center is not the center and coherence is constituted in contradiction.”¹¹

Vickers, along with a number of critics, agrees that the focal point of the play is its display of wordplay. His analysis makes a declared separation of the linguistic aspect from the plot, indulging in the previous as the greatest forte of the work, while downplaying the latter. Also he finds that the highlighted language games are hastily structured, offering no “meaning” in the traditional sense to the reader – what is at the disposal of the play’s critics is the metaphysical emptiness of a series of puns that cover a useless, petty plot, flattering the possibilities of a deconstructionist procedure in the text.

Stanley Wells adds, “the words turn into actions, but into actions which in various ways run counter to the intention of the speaker. They enact not what has been desired but what has been denied. In Freudian terminology, the plot of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* fully acts out the return of

¹ For an authoritative discussion see Felicia Hardison Londré, “Love’s Labour’s Lost and the Critical Legacy” in Felicia Hardison Londré (ed.) *Love’s Labour’s Lost: Critical Essays*. (Garland: 1997).

² J. V. Cunningham, *With That Facility: False Starts and Revisions in Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Ed. Gerald W. Chapman. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965).

³ John Kerrigan, “Shakespeare at work: the Katherine – Rosaline tangle in Love’s Labour’s Lost.” In: *Review of English Studies* 33 (1982) 129–136.

⁴ Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, eds. “Introduction” In: *Love’s Labour’s Lost* by William Shakespeare (New York: Washington Square Press, 1996).

⁵ Kenneth B. Steele, *Leaden Contemplation: Ambiguous Evidence of Revision in Q1 Love’s Labour’s Lost*. <<http://daphne.palomar.edu/shakespeare/playcriticism.htm#LJL>>

⁶ Stanley Wells, “The copy for the Folio text of Love’s Labour’s Lost.” In: *Review of English Studies* 33 (1982) pp.137–147.

⁷ Grant L. Voth, *Love’s Labour’s Lost – A Guide for The Shakespeare Plays*. (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1984).

⁸ Voth p. 16.

⁹ Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare – Contemporary Critical Quarrels*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993).

¹⁰ Vickers p. 210.

the repressed.”¹² Appropriating the difference between the plot’s ‘empty’ wordplay and the archetypal tensions unfolding in the unconscious of the work, this paper sees *Love’s Labour’s Lost* in a somewhat similar way as Jonathan Goldberg’s 1986 essay approached *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.¹³ Goldberg – along with the critics mentioned above – highlights a dangerous liaison between the mechanic, unmotivated comic structure and the possible cultural reading of the unconscious mechanisms. Like *Two Gents*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (published but a year later, in 1590) is another piece that belongs to the “generation of the letter.”¹⁴ Goldberg’s reading of *Two Gents* opens with the remark that the letters, the texts of the play take control of the characters, they are textually driven and determined. About Silvia, Goldberg states that her discourse is “of the Other,”¹⁵ disseminated from her character, dictated by her inherent fate encoded in her *name*. She is bound to come to terms with her fate in the *silva* around Milan, where she accepts her already written fate of becoming a saint. Like the playtext’s earlier songs and pastoral allusions determined her, she becomes an Ovidian legend, a nymph of the forest, which she accepts, seals in her last stage utterance – “O heavens.” As Goldberg writes, “she is her name and she finds herself in the written text.”¹⁶ Highlighting the work of a dominant unconscious mechanism in the playtext, Goldberg gives new value to the often critically undervalued *Two Gents*, which inspires the comparison of the plot (surface) and the unconscious of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

This paper argues that in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* the *return of the repressed* can be approached as a series of archetypal crises of early modern graphic representation – the need for a writing turn and its failure. The text is charged with the prefix *re*, since it is working along the conclusions of a set of deconstructionist classics. It proposes that these works (most importantly: Elam 1984¹⁷, Evans 1985¹⁸, 1986¹⁹, Hartman 1985²⁰, Goldberg 1900²¹) although do not state explicitly, but reach a critical point from where it is not possible or not worth to venture further.²² This may be

¹¹ Vickers p. 211.

¹² Wells p. 85.

¹³ Jonathan Goldberg, “Shakespearean Characters: the generation of Silvia” In: *Voice, Terminal, Echo – Postmodernism and Renaissance English Texts* (New York – London: Methuen, 1986) pp. 66–100.

¹⁴ Goldberg 1986 p. 85.

¹⁵ Goldberg 1986 p. 85.

¹⁶ Goldberg 1986 p. 76.

¹⁷ Keir Elam, *Shakespeare’s Universe of Discourse*. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1984)

¹⁸ Malcolm Evans, “Deconstructing Shakespeare’s Comedies” (p. 77–78.) in: John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 1985).

¹⁹ Malcolm Evans, *Signifying Nothing – Truth’s True Contents in Shakespeare’s Texts* (NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1986)

²⁰ Geoffrey Hartman, “Shakespeare’s poetical character in *Twelfth Night*” in: Patricia Parker (ed.) *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. (London: Routledge, 1985).

²¹ Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

²² Obviously, those who agree with the impossible continuation of early modern studies with deconstructionist reminiscences will not agree with claims of this text. About the chances of such a study I am currently working on a

for deconstruction’s resistance to theory and/or owing to the adjacent deconstructionist infiltration into other branches of lit. crit., yet no doubt the main current of Shakespeare research of the 80s mostly characterised by the Alternative Shakespeares²³ “generations” has grounded to a halt, left itself in the lurch or escaped to other territories. Being a bad deconstructionist, it intends (!) to claim (!) that beyond the respected classics’ refraining from further participation, the textualised dramaturgy²⁴ of deconstructionist classics display other, not yet explored potentials. It proposes that a retake on the early modern dramatic sign is possible, taking a closer look at archeologies of the “Elizabethan real”²⁵’s sign: the graphic, the character and the surface. For now, I aim to approach Shakespeare’s problematic use of the graphic in constituting his alleged poetic character.

Moreover, the second part of the paper attempts a closer look at the *dubious economy* of Shakespeare’s graphic representation as it seemingly displays a *key* that necessitates further thoughts about deconstruction’s take on Shakespeare’s alleged poetic character.

“salve”

As Evans in his 1986 reading²⁶ already claimed, the play’s economy is constituted by struggles of the letter’s resistance to representation (Mercury’s fight with Apollo) and the humanities shattered by the letter. What remains somewhat unnoticed in the economy is the counter-theatrical practices vitalised by representational power of writing that makes its claim in the creation of theatre with equal force to mimesis. With the arrival of writing as a maker, in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* a clash of opposed aesthetics begins that leaves the reader perplexed by the interpretive options of its poetic character.

In 1.1. the King of Navarre issues a very strange edict:

text titled Fathers and (possibly) Sons – de/ re-constituting Shakespeare’s Dramatic Sign. Excerpts of this text are published at my research page, <http://mateszabo.pbwiki.com>

²³ John Drakakis (ed), *Alternative Shakespeares*. (London: Routledge, 1985, 1992).

²⁴ Suffice two illustrative quoted for now. Goldberg (1986 p. 97.) does not refuse to summarise: “The argument of this essay, out simply, is this: from its earliest instances (*Titus Andronicus*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) to late examples (*Cymbeline*), the inscription of the Shakespearean character throws into question any identification of the *system* with a “sovereign ... author.” Put even more bluntly by Hartman (1985 pp. 50–51), “the spirit of this comedy [Twelfth Night] is not that of revenge, malice or ritual expulsion. All these motives may participate, yet what rouses our pity and fear is the way language enters and preordains the outcome. (...) We remain in the text even when we are out of it.”

²⁵ Drakakis 1992. p. 244.

²⁶ Evans 1986 pp. 58–65.

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. 11–14)²⁷

And thus Navarre’s train transforms into a group of fellow-scholars, who in the academe, in this “wonder of the world” (1.1.12) shall live in the self-imposed celibacy of humanist learning, sanctioning (what is more, *stigmatising*) all the other, non scholarly joys of life, by stating

That his own hand may strike his honour down,
That violates the smallest branch (...) (1. 1. 21–22)

And so they do, they *enrol(l)*. They move into the space of scrolls, codices, legends and manuscripts. They plan to copy ancient philosophers, translate and write summaries, glossaries and compile grammar-books. They perceive the world through the space of books; the world is mirrored through the pages of books; they “*pine and die (...) in living philosophy*” (1.1. 30–31); breathe and live in a textual reality, in a

Textful life, in order to
(...) pore upon a book,
to seek the light of truth. (1.1.71–72)

Navarre is convinced that a common, flesh and blood existence cannot be else but an obstacle in the search for their understanding of *truth* (a strange concept that I will discuss further later below). And this strange, never-seen truth is *barred* from common sense – from a non-textual existence –

Things hid and barr’d, you mean, from common sense? (1. 1. 57)
to know the thing I am forbid to know. (1. 1. 54)

An ordinary life, an ordinary *look* can only divert them from approaching truth, this strange revelation of truth: “*it doth falsely blind the eyesight of the look*” (1.1.78).

Following the peculiar argument of the opening, the reader is allured into a most strange conclusion (at least the possibility of which is undeniable when close-reading the text). There is something deeper than superficial input of words in Navarre’s argument, regardless of the

²⁷ All references are to the Arden edition. Ed. Richard David. (New York – London: Routledge, 1990).

inclusion or exclusion of the Harvey-Nashe or the School of Night theories (see: Charles Nicholl,²⁸ Robert Debotel,²⁹ Schrick³⁰ or Calderwood³¹) or other early modern circumstances available in the process of interpretation. What Navarre seems to state is that what *is real is what is written*. Perversely enough, Navarre’s argument implies that to beguile *truth*, one has to look *into* – what is more, literally, move *into* the book. The court of Navarre comes to a bizarre conclusion. Whether or not poking fun at his contemporaries, the playtext implies that this plot will not be concerned (inscribed) with *people*, but with *pieces of paper*. The king believes that reality is determined by texts, so he misplaces the textual (where “light” is) and non-textual (that is deprived of light) domains, and calls his train to immigrate, even *escape* into text, and to sanction (e.g. the cutting of tongues of those who converse with women, etc.) contact with the reality outside text. The edict is an invitation into the pseudo-reality of texts, an ontological project, implying that Navarre shall be saved by textuality. What lies outside this textual haven, where *light* and forbidden knowledge is to be found, is to be evaded as dangerous diversion, and needs to be punished.

It is only Biron who tries to protest (though in the same register as his adversaries): “Where light in darkness lies, / Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes” (1. 1. 79–80). Though Biron’s arguments sound true (he states that the greatest scholars have the same words for the greatest secrets like the basest of people), strangely enough he gives in to Navarre’s project for two reasons. One is loyalty, but on the other hand he is beaten by his own rhetoric – even if he opposes the project, he speaks like a humanist, as his counter-arguments echo the poetic tradition of his age, including the similarity of the majestic cycle of nature Shakespeare evokes in the Sonnets:

Why should proud summer boast,
Before the birds have any a cause to sing?
Why should I joy in an abortive birth?
At Christmas I no more desire a rose,
Than wish a snow in May’s new-fangled shows;
But like of each thing that in season grows.

²⁸ Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

²⁹ Robert Detobel, *Regarding Love’s Labour’s Lost* www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/library/barrell/21-40/092002%201%20LLL.doc -

³⁰ W. Schrick, *Shakespeare’s Early Contemporaries: The Background of the Harvey – Nashe Polemic and Love’s Labour’s Lost*. (New York, NY: AMS Press Inc., 1972).

³¹ James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama: The argument of the Play in Love’s Labour’s Lost*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

So you, to study now it is too late. (1. 1. 103–108)³²

Biron seems to give in to the Academe because he is *rhetorically chosen*, as his words already evoke the end-product, a poem. So he subscribes his name on the scroll as well.³³

The part of the play that is concerned with flesh and blood actors onstage could end at this point. From now on the reader cannot evade observing that by this change – even if he or she actually *sees* actors onstage – the plot is already in the power of pieces of parchments exchanged by various hands. Thus our perception is metamorphosed, as what we see or hear is basically a variation or extension of reading, and the characters’ acting and speaking is also marginal as compared to what they read. Somehow texts grow upon the players. The least one can say about the liaison of texts and characters is that the various parchments follow the characters, *live* as the characters do. Yet there is also the possibility of a change of roles: everything they do is first *written* down, everything they plan can only be carried out in writing. Everything they learn about things happening comes in writing. The cast receives and sends the letters, learn things from letters and send their reactions back in writing. And this apparently deprives the characters from their non-textual identities, and leave a feeling that beyond a mockery of humanist learning³⁴, the texts of the play somehow drain the characters *into* their domain.

Even the edict is not learned about, but is *read*, from a copy in Biron’s hands; to the call of which he – even regrettably, but – subscribes. Dull (literally) *reads out* Costard’s affair with Jacquenetta, to which Navarre responds based on the written edict. Costard is *caught red handed* by writing, as his deed is brought to light when the circumstances are read out from the letter. Costard denies, but he is refuted by a piece of text, unarguably:

³² R. W. David argues that “Love’s Labour’s Lost (...) echoes (...) the non-dramatic poems” and attaches the date of composition to the creative period of writing “a massive number of the sonnets.” (p. xxiv–xxv).

³³ In Malcolm Evans’ reading Biron’s reluctance is a *locus communis* of contemporary criticisms of writing. Biron’s bitterness evokes Ficino’s Neoplatonic argument, condemning the dogmatism of writing presiding over the creativeness of free speech, “which shines out to illuminate things concealed from the senses, now beguiled and atrophied by another light, the uninterrupted beam of writing which, inviting no response, brings only passivity, acquiescence and darkness.” (Evans p. 52.) Also, Biron in his argument propagates the mysterious, divine knowledge of the human soul, the knowledge of the senses, that may not be appropriated doctrinally. As Ficino writes, it is the “Natural light shines out, and it searches out the order of natural things” (Ficino 1944 p. 159.) In connection with Biron further references are made to Montaigne (Montaigne, *Essays*. Tr J. Florio, 3 vols, London: Constable, The Tudor Translations, vol. 1. 1892 I. p. 136.) and Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*: schoolmasters will “infect you, marre you, bleare your eyes” (Nashe 1904–10, III. p. 279.)

³⁴ In *The Taming of The Shrew* Tranio, Lucentio’s servant declares a similarly servile acceptance of the dominance of the humanist dream: being “devote to Aristotle’s checks” (1.1.325), he aims to “fall to” (1. 1. 332) the organising principle of “rhetoric” (1.1.338) and choses the humanities (“music and poesy”, “mathematics” and “metaphysics”

Ferdinand [reads]:

‘There did I see that low-spirited
swain, that base minnow of thy mirth,’—

Costard

Me?

Ferdinand [reads]:

‘that unlettered small-knowing soul,’—

Costard

Me?

Ferdinand [reads]:

‘that shallow vassal,’—

Costard

Still me?

Ferdinand [reads]:

‘which, as I remember, high Costard,’—

Costard

O, me! (1. 1. 242–251)

Strangely enough, what Costard confesses is not the *deed* (of any kind of liaison with Jacquenetta), but the *mark* of it “I do confess much of the hearing it, but little of the making of it” (1. 1. 281–2). And the punished Costard – who shall fast three days on bran and water – is *delivered* like a letter to his keeper, the known *scolaro*, Don Armado.

A little later Don Armado confesses that he is in love [with Jacquenetta, again], as if he signed a contract – “I will *hereinupon* confess I am in love” (italics added, 1. 2. 360). Armado compares his state of mind to a ballad lost “some three ages since” (1.2.409–10) (that is the one of the king and the beggar), which he intends to “have (...) newly writ o’er,” (1.2.413) reproducing, copying the emotional clichés of a written tradition (Hercules, Samson, etc.). And finally, of course, he decides to win Jacquenetta by/via writing; he “shall turn sonnet,” (1. 2. 480) and is “ready for whole volumes of folio” (1. 2. 481). Writing is the weapon to win his love-battle: Don Armado declares that he shall be as skilled with words as a virtuoso fencer who juggles with the sword.

The French Princess *gives a paper* about the end of her embassy (the Princess and her train may also be interpreted as letters themselves, sent to the “forbidden gates of Navarre,” (2. 1. 510) aiming to seek a goal (the sum) and return, be “dispatch[-ed]” (2. 1. 515) soon. Navarre studies the paper *in loco*, than responds to it, meanly *reading out* the French king’s will and commenting on them briefly, stating that they shall wait for the writing about the sum (again, a crucial piece writing) in question. The royal meeting in the open air captures the hearts of the officials in both

(1.1.331–2) as bringers of “profit” (1.1.333) (again, the promise of a *light*) as opposed to the idle “pleasure” (1.1.333) of ignorance.

trains, leaving “abus’d Navarre’s book-men” (2. 1. 727). So says Boyet:

If my observation (which very seldom lies),
By *the heart’s still rhetoric*, disclosed with eyes,
Deceive me not now, Navarre is infected. (italics added, 2. 1. 728–30)

The witty Frenchman, the Princess’ solicitor, accounts for how he *read* the face of Navarre in love, and informs his mistress about the king’s state:

His heart, like an agate, with your print impressed,
Proud with his form, in his eye pride expressed:
(...)
His face’s own margent did cote such amazes,
That all eyes saw his eyes enchanted with gazes. (2. 1. 235–244)

Armado decides to win the love of Jacquenetta by a letter, that is meant to reach her beloved’s heart as if a bullet, and the smoke of the shot is not else but the “sweet smoke of rhetoric” (3. 1. 823). When Moth drags Costard onstage, and Armado sends him to Jacquenetta with the letter, poor *plain, broken shinned* Costard, again, *becomes* the letter sent, the “plaintain” (3.1.836). Costard’s other envoy is to carry the amorous Biron’s letter (who was once a “critic,” a person free from love) to Rosaline, which Costard promises to carry out “in print” (3.1.935).

Costard brings the supposed Biron Rosaline-letter, that turns out to be the Armado – Jacquenetta one. The ridiculed Don Armado, whose name is even read out for the audience, is recognised as the author of the letter by his *style* (“BOYET: I am much deceived but I remember the style”(4. 1. 1071)), implying that his actual presence is outshone by his textual one. Further below Boyet and Rosaline indulge in a wordplay about hunting, courtship and addressing letters, also echoing the bullet / rhetoric passado. Their puns imply that words are weapons, and the true battle is fought in words. When they *hit* their prey, they mean success in love. And as the characters intend to hit by words (“mark[s] (...) well shot” (4. 1. 1115)) encoded into letters, the correspondence of the players obviously becomes the actual battlefield and the success of the correspondence brings real success or failure.

Boyet

My lady goes to kill horns; but, if thou marry,
Hang me by the neck, if horns that year miscarry.
Finely put on!
Who is the suitor? Who is the suitor?

Rosaline

Well, then, I am the shooter.
Boyet
 And who is your deer?
 (...)
 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?
Rosaline
 Shall I come upon thee with an old saying, that was
 a man when King Pepin of France was a little boy, as
 touching the hit it?
Boyet
 So I may answer thee with one as old, that was a
 woman when Queen Guinover of Britain was a little
 wench, as touching the hit it. (4. 1. 1093–1108)

The conversation of Nathaniel is textually riven, *trapped* in graphic representation: the hunt is written about (the epitaph), their talent is based on how they deal with constructing texts (Holofernes’ poem about the letter L), or their opinion about it (a “*marvellous well for the pen*” (4. 2. 1301)). Holofernes learns that Jacquenetta brings him the wrong letter having “*overglanc[ed] the superscript*” (4. 2. 1280). The mistook letter is sent to the king (as evidence of treason), who will, again, learn news from a piece of paper. The scene ends with a brilliant wordplay where society and text are (again) easily mistook, implying that it is the text, not society that is the *happiness of life*:

Sir Nathaniel
 And thank you too; for society, saith the text, is
 The happiness of life.
Holofernes
 And, certes, the text most infallibly concludes it.
 (4. 2. 1310)

The next scene opens with a textual *coming and going*, a strangely arranged movement – almost a dance: *Enter Biron with paper; stands aside. Enter Ferdinand, with a paper; reads; drops paper; steps aside. Enter Longaville, with a paper; reads; steps aside. Enter Dumain, with a paper; reads. Longaville advancing. Ferdinand advancing. Biron advancing.* The characters display their unbeatable belief in textuality. They are fantastically “transform’d” (4.3.1406), and hold that they would be unsuccessful lovers should their texts be bad, lacking power: “I fear these stubborn lines lack power to move” (4. 3. 1376). Perhaps this is the point where one could suspect a symbolic role-

change between text and character, as the letters seem to have replaced the characters’ stage presence, and the readers are clearly dominated by what they read. What they read is what they are. The texts even take over the physical and mental dispositions of the characters: the listless players drop or tear apart papers; stand from one foot to the other with papers; misplace, lose and draft letters, give themselves away in lengthy confessions.

“perjury”

At this crucial point an unexpected turn comes about: suddenly the “light” of Navarre proves false, and the belief fades, grows threatening about the academe-project, the escape into textuality. The kinsmen state they have “*persuaded [their] hearts to (...) false perjury*” (4. 3. 1384). And later we read: “*O, some authority how to proceed; / Some tricks, some quillets, how to cheat the devil. / / Some salve for perjury*” (4. 3. 1632–33). At this point Dumain almost announces the collapse of the textual project: this cannot save them, there is *no salve in the mail*. Yet as the plot evolves, drivenness by texts is still the dominant theme of the playtext.

The second verbal duet of Nathaniel and Holofernes is still textually bound: over their table-book they ridicule Armado’s spelling, while their speech is infected by the textually encoded doctrine of humanism. With the arrival of Costard another duello of letters breaks out: Holofernes even alludes literally to fencing, questioning “What is the figure? What is the figure?” (5. 1. 1794). Their dispute is a verbal fight, where the rivals scorn each other (e. g. “thy disputest like an infant” (5. 1.1796)) and improvise along the fighting positions of a fencing book,³⁵ exchanging grammatical blows:

Moth

Peace! the peal begins.

Don Adriano De Armado [To Holofernes]

Monsieur, are you not lettered?

Moth

Yes, yes; he teaches boys the hornbook. What is a,
b, spelt backward, with the horn on his head?

Holofernes

Ba, pueritia, with a horn added.

Moth

Ba, most silly sheep with a horn. You hear his learning.

Holofernes

Quis, quis, thou consonant?

³⁵ An extensive list of early modern fencing books is at < <http://www.thehaca.com/masters.htm> >

Moth

The third of the five vowels, if you repeat them; or
the fifth, if I.

Holofernes

I will repeat them,--a, e, i,--

Moth

The sheep: the other two concludes it,--o, u.

Don Adriano De Armado

Now, by the salt wave of the Mediterranean, a sweet
touch, a quick venue of wit! snip, snap, quick and
home! it rejoiceth my intellect: true wit!

Moth

Offered by a child to an old man; which is wit-old.

Holofernes

What is the figure? what is the figure?

Moth

Horns.

Holofernes

Thou disputest like an infant: go, whip thy gig.

Moth

Lend me your horn to make one, and I will whip about
your infamy circum circa,--a gig of a cuckold's horn.

(5. 1. 1779–1798)

Another seminal example is when the Princess is more content with Ferdinand's *letter* than any other possible gifts she might have received:

Princess

Look you what I have from the loving king.

Rosaline

Madame, came nothing else along with that?

Princess

Nothing but this! Yes, as much love in rhyme
As would be cramm'd up in a sheet of paper,
Writ o'both sides the leaf, margent and all,
That he was fain to seal on Cupid's name.
(5. 2. 1884–89)

Then the ladies decide about the merit of their men based on the qualities of their writings: So says the Princess on Rosaline's suitor “*Well bandied both; a set of wit well play'd*” (5. 2. 1909–10). And so is Rosaline, observing Biron's composition: “*The numbers true*” (5. 2. 1915). Consequently, they all seem to fall in love enchanted by the charms of the letters:

I am compar'd to twenty thousand fairs.

O, he hath drawn my picture in his letter.
(5. 2. 1918–19)

So it seems that the decision to mock their response to the courtship is textually reflected: they declare the letters empty, insufficient. They refuse the letters as if they represented the men:

Rosaline

Much in the letters; Nothing in the praise.

Princess

Beauteous as ink; a good conclusion.

Katharine

Fair as a text-B of a copy-book.

Rosaline

'Ware pencils, ho! Let me not die your debtor,
My red dominial, my golden letter:
O, that your face were not so full of O's!
(5.2.1921–26)

Boyet, when bringing the news about the “conspiracy” speaks in verse. As a response to these news the ladies mask themselves, misplacing themselves, as the letters were misplaced. And in the very end, when the couples are revealed, Biron begs for pardon bringing up the excuse that he was enchanted by a text to the Princess, who makes Biron confess:

O, never will I trust to speeches penn'd,
Nor to the motion of a schoolboy's tongue,
Nor never come in vizard to my friend,
Nor woo in rhyme, like a blind harper's song!
Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,
Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,
Figures pedantical; these summer-flies
Have blown me full of maggot ostentation:
I do forswear them; and I here protest,
By this white glove;—how white the hand, God knows!—
Henceforth my wooing mind shall be express'd
In russet yeas and honest kersey noes:
And, to begin, wench,—so God help me, la!—
My love to thee is sound, sans crack or flaw.
(5. 2. 2324–37)

The play of the Worthies is announced by handing over a paper, and in the end Marcade arrives like a letter himself, delivering the news of the king's death, marking the play with a full stop.

another part of the same

While the textually driven metaphor seems to be the dominant player in constructing one of the possible interpretations to the playtext, it offers a far more intricate adventure than the inverted power-relations of text and reality. The fearful thing sets in not much after when the French embassy waits for the *coppice* of Navarre to arrive, all in love. Then arrives Costard with a letter to Rosaline – that turns out to be Armado’s mocked text addressed to Jacquenetta. The dialogue of the Princess and Costard reveals more than the mocking of a style-parody:

Princess

To whom shouldst thou give it?

Costard

From my lord to my lady.

Princess

From which lord to which lady?

Costard

From my [lord Biron] to (...) Rosaline.

Princess

Thou hast mistaken this letter.

(4. 1. 1079–83)

It seems that the fate of letters (that encapsulate the fate of characters) is completely out of control. Something is being sent to someone, yet sender and recipient cannot effect the delivery. So states Rosaline:

Thou canst not hit it, hit it, hit it,
Thou canst not hit it, my good man.

Boy

And I cannot, cannot, cannot,
And I cannot, another can.

(4.0.1109–12)

By now the air is set for a constant insecurity. But then Moth, the postman, drags Costard onstage, with a nonsensical series of wordplay:

Re-enter Moth with Costard

Moth

A wonder, master! Here’s a Costard broken in a shin.

Don Adriano De Armado

Some enigma, some riddle: come – thy l’envoy: – begin.

Costard

No enigma, no riddle, no l’envoy! No salve in the mail, sir! O, sir, plaintain,
A plain plaintain! No l’envoy, no l’envoy:

No salve, sir, but a plaitain.
(3. 1. 833–6)

R. W. David³⁶ well explains the dangers the interpretation of this wordplay invite. But, at first, before turning to the critical edition, the audience is puzzled by the gibberish these lines set free onstage. As if Armado and Moth opened up, further widened an air of obscurity, a nonsensical correspondence: this is, of course, the point when the two misplace the letters, and here is the onset of the most chaotic aspect of the plot. Clearly enough, for a modern audience, this section is totally unintelligible. (It is almost impossible to attempt a good translation, e.g. into Hungarian, as the translator faces the problem of *what* to translate, since the words are at first glance totally senseless, an air of lunacy is let loose: something (that later will be mistook) is written to an addressee (Jacquenetta), whose name is misunderstood by the bearer of the letter, and a nonsensical situation emerges: something is to be handed over to someone, but what needs to be taken to whom, is all the way unclear.

Re-enter Moth with Costard, whose “broken shin”, alas has been injured, has been disappointed sexually.³⁷ Costard’s alleged promiscuity (that the expression “broken shin” implies) opens the play of associations with things more than one – partner, woman, addressee. This slight aside joke is reinforced by the denial of meaning (what is more, the giving up on the possibility of meaning) in the letter, well before it is composed – “no enigma, no riddle, no l’envoy” (3. 1. 835). Then the content and the addressee of the letter is questioned. “No enigma, no riddle, no l’envoy” – the wordplay induces the invitation of a writing that is being written, unlawful, hyper-free, a writing creating and decomposing itself, as it has no meaning (riddle, enigma), addressee (l’envoy), untouched by human hands, impossible to appropriate by faulty human speech. What the characters are saying here is clearly nonsensical, a salutation of a writing being written by itself. Then comes the ominous wordplay,

No l’envoy! No salve in the mail!
(...) no l’envoy, but a plaitain!
(3. 1. 835–7)

implying the emptiness of the self-writing text: the early modern context³⁸ of “no salve in the mail” triggers around the *salve* [*medicine*, like “salve for a sore”] and the *salvé* [*salute*], while *mail*

³⁶ Preface to the Arden edition ed. R. W. David. (New York-London, Routledge 1990.)

³⁷ R. W. David p. 48.

³⁸ R. W. David p. 49.

means *post*, but also *wallet*, *budget*. No *salve in the mail* thus implies no medicine / remedy / meaning, understanding in the post, and not least also no medicine [*salve*] in the budget / wallet [*mail*], absolutely gibberish. “It’s empty, empty!” they cry, stating (nihilistically) the arrival of a writing unintelligible, “plaintain” – approached from the state of an almost incomprehensible spoken language:

Moth

I will tell you sensibly.

Costard

Thou hast no feeling of it, Moth: I will speak that l'envoy:

I Costard, running out, that was safely within,

Fell over the threshold and broke my shin.

Don Adriano De Armado

We will talk no more of this matter.

Costard

Till there be more matter in the shin.

Don Adriano De Armado

Sirrah Costard, I will enfranchise thee.

Costard

O, marry me to one Frances: I smell some l'envoy,
some goose, in this.

Don Adriano De Armado

By my sweet soul, I mean setting thee at liberty,
enfreesing thy person; thou wert imured,
restrained, captivated, bound.

Costard

True, true; and now you will be my purgation and let me loose.

(3. 1. 875–87)

No wonder it is difficult to grasp what Armado and Costard are actually saying. The audience is obviously faced with the players onstage speaking incongruously about the lost content of a misplaced letter, invoking a great tragic moment if we are in the mood for that.

When Armado calls writing “perjury” and cries for “salve,” he is horrified by the lack of meaning, that cannot *be hit* beneath the surface of seeming decorum in the texts dominating the stage-action. Another tragic instance is when the *learned* Holofernes’ compilation about the letter *L* brings forth the horror of an emptiness:

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

from thicket;
Or pricket sore, or else sorel; the people fall a-hooting.
If sore be sore, then L to sore makes fifty sores
one sorel.
Of one sore I an hundred make by adding but one more L.
(4. 2. 1200–9)

Explaining the *epithet*, Holofernes’ comments are none the less worrying:

He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer
than the staple of his argument. I abhor such
fanatical phantasies, such insociable and
point-devise companions; such rackers of
orthography, as to speak dout, fine, when he should
say doubt; det, when he should pronounce debt,--d,
e, b, t, not d, e, t: he clepeth a calf, cauf;
half, hauf; neighbour vocatur nebor; neigh
abbreviated ne. This is abhominable,—which he
would call abbominable: it insinuateth me of
insanie: anne intelligis, domine? to make frantic, lunatic.
(5. 1. 1750–60)

The supposedly learned schoolmaster peeps into the texture of writing and is horrified to see the emptiness beneath. An emptiness that refuses to shine the light Navarre longed for in the opening scene. Letters live on their own, uncontrollable, and cannot be ordered by the table-book. No wonder the players are left with a “broken shin,” and decide to abandon the texts as a fallen project. The last letter is taken to the king as “treason,” who along with his kinsmen admits that he was taken in, conned by the lure of a textual alternative.

salve / perjury

What happens *unconsciously* in the play, rendering *Love’s Labour’s Lost* a tragedy of cultural history, is presented extensively in Goldberg’s project and requires a further study of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as a focal medium of the social energies of its time. W. R. Woudhuysen³⁹ demonstrates a possible connection between Sidney’s work and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. As Woudhuysen remarks, “by 1593 Shakespeare could have read in print all of Sidney’s works apart from *A Defence of Poetry* and *The Lady of May* (...) [yet] it is possible he saw these [latter two] in

³⁹ Preface to the 1988 Arden edition. pp. 2–16.

manuscript.”⁴⁰ Shakespeare’s Holofernes⁴¹ and Sidney’s character used in a court entertainment called *Rombus*⁴² both echo parodies of rhetoric books and the excessive and pointless use of “inkhorn terms.”⁴³ The inclusion of Sidney and the possible identifications of Holofernes⁴⁴ with John Florio or Richard Lloyd all display a massive involvedness in authoritarian representatives of a textual culture, ambassadors of graphic representation. Holofernes’ hornbook lesson (5.1.44–53) that in Woudhuysen’s reading “becomes the bleeting of a sheep,”⁴⁵ is a fearful acknowledgement of the uncontrollable sway of *signa* on paper.

Interestingly, the implied disillusionment of Holofernes by the “no salve” may be accounted for in one of the crucial books of Shakespeare’s time. As Goldberg argues, the modern history of English graphic representation opens with a self-acknowledged non-originary origin. Richard Mulcaster’s *Elementarie* (1582) and Ascham’s *The Scholemaster* (1570) offer simultaneously a logocentric idealisation (or “light,” “salve”) of writing as a centralising power and a failure at the start, as the venture could not come to terms with differences in spelling and even more so with the troubling element of writing. Which is even more significant when considering the Preface to the *Scholemaster*, where Ascham states it is the elementary school’s responsibility to give the necessary grounds to a future university career, by setting the basics of the logically arranged universalia of the humanities:

And one thing I would haue the Reader consider in readinge this booke, that bicause, no Scholemaster hath charge of any childe, before he enter into hys Schole, therefore I leauing all former care, of their good bringing vp, to wise and good Parentes, as à matter not belonging to the Scholemaster, I do appoynt thys my Scholemaster, than, and there to begin, where his office and charge beginneth. Which charge lasteth not long, but vntill the Scholer be made hable to go to the Vniuersitie, to procede in Logike, Rhetoricke, and other kindes of learning.⁴⁶

In *Positions* (1581), a preface to his project of education, Mulcaster aims to settle the “groundes”⁴⁷ of a utopian possibility of a finalised, regulated system of knowledge (like Navarre’s “light”), termed “healthy”, the “health of the student.” Mulcaster discusses the cultural context of his age openly witch-hunting the “odds” and “slippery grounds,” (the “perjury”) of education, as

⁴⁰ Woudhuysen p. 6.

⁴¹ A name borrowed from Rabelais’ *Gargantua* (1535). R. W. David p. 72.

⁴² Woudhuysen p. 2.

⁴³ Woudhuysen p. 2.

⁴⁴ R. W. David pp. xxxiii–xxxiv

⁴⁵ Woudhuysen p. 21.

⁴⁶ All references are to this edition: Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster*. (London: Folcroft Library Editions, 1976)

⁴⁷ All references are to this edition: Richard Mulcaster, *The Elementarie*. <<http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/p/pd-modeng/pd-modeng-idx?type=header&id=MulcaEleme>>

dangerous and uncontrollable forces that need to be regulated “by authority” so that “truth” is not “tainted” in order to “reduce our English tung to som certain rule.”

The project is an obvious failure, that Mulcaster never denies to accept. The ending of the book goes no further than the presentation of problems and the display of rhetoric arsenal propagating the advancement of learning. The conclusion of the work notes: “But I will then handle these things, when I deal with grammer, next after mine elementarie.” Further down, Mulcaster adds, “that then our tung hath no certaintie to trust to, but writeth all at randon.” Most interestingly, what comes between the preface and the afterword is a storehouse of exempla, leading no further than pinpointing those irregularities in spelling that make writing an uncontrollable, upsetting medium, incapable of being the “generall platform” of the otherness of language. Mulcaster finds no cure for bringing under control the “sounds,” his minimal linguistic units:

For great inconueniences following, and the writing it self, prouing more false then trew, while the pen set down that form, which the ear did assure, to answer such a sound, & the sound it self being to imperious, without anie either mercie or pitie, but death for disobedience, no pardon, no forgiuennesse, no misericordia, what equitie soeuer the contrarie side had: men of good wit, & great vnderstanding, who perceaued & misliked this imperiousnesse of sound, which yet was maintained, with great vncertaintie, naie rather with confusion, then anie assurance of right, assembled them selues together to common vpon so common a good, and in the end after resolut and ripe deliberation theie presented them selues before sound, vsing these, rather persuasions, then compulsions, to qualifie his humor.

Mulcaster fearfully recognises that since the arbitrary letter to sound representations of the first alphabets (when “the *sound* alone did lead the pen”) no considerable progress has been made. Though grammarians meant to apply “Reason” and “Custom” to spelling, Mulcaster finds it impossible to render “right” in “writing.” The ways to impose reason on the chaos of letters (*Generall Rule, Proportion, Composition, Deriuation, Enfranchisement, distinction, and Prerogatiue*) in the exempla lead but to generalisations. For instance, on the letter *o* Mulcaster offers the following:

O is a letter of as great vncertaintie in our tung, as e, is of direction both alone in vowell, and combined in diphthong. The cause is, for that in vowell it soundeth as much vpon the u, which is his cofin, as vpon the o, which is his naturall, as in còsen, dòsen, mòther, which o, is still naturallie short, and hòsen, fròsen, móther, which o, is naturallie long. In the diphthong it soundeth more vpon the u, then von the o, as in found, wound, cow, sow, bow, how, now, and bów, sów, wróught, óught, mów, tróugh. Notwithstanding this varietie, yet our custom is so acquainted with the vse thereof, as it wilbe more difficultie to alter a known confusion, then profitable to bring in an vnknown reformation, in such an argument, where acquaintance makes iustice, and vse doth no man wrong. And yet where difference by note shall seme to be necessarie the titles of

proportion & distinction will not omit the help. In the mean time thus much is to be noted of o: besides his time long and short, besides his tune with or without the qualifying e, sharp or flat, that when it is the last letter in the word, it soundeth sharp and loud, as agó, tó, só, nó saue in tò the preposition twò the numerall, dò the verb: his compounds as vndò, his deriuatiues as dòing. In the middle syllabs, for tune, it is sharp, as here or flat if a consonant end the syllab after o. For time the polysyllab will bewraie it self in our dailie pronouncing: considering tho children and learners be ignorant, yet he is a verie simple teacher, that knoweth not the tuning of our ordinarie words, yea, tho theie be enfranchised, as ignorant, impudent, impotent. O varieth the sound in the same proportion, naie oftymes in the same letters, as lòue, glòue, dòue, shòue, remòue and lóue, gróue shróue, nóue. This duble sound of o, in the vowell is Latinish, where o, and u, be great cosens, as in voltus, voltis, colo And vultus, voltis, occulo: in the diphthong it is Grekish, for theie sound their ou, still vpon the u, tho it be contract of oo, or os, wherein as their president is our warrant against obiection in these, so must acquaintance be the mean to discern the duble force of this letter, where we finde it, and he that will learn out tung, must learn the writing of it to, being no more strange then other tungs be euen in the writing.

The text swarms in expressions of uncertainty: “sometime consonantish, sometime vowelish;” “there be thre speciall notes to be obserued;” “why should the l, be dubbed? It is the swiftnesse of the pen sure, which can hardlie staie vpon the single ending l, that causeth this dubling;” “sometime,” “other time,” and the like, almost endlessly. Mulcaster’s project drowns into irregularities, most of which cannot be accounted for but with the display of prestige quotations and repetitions. The “sounds” of language refuse to follow reason, the head, rendering impossible the project of graphic representation. The apologetic afterword of the *Elementarie*, Mulcaster’s call for “some authority” is thus an unconscious acknowledgement of the primacy of irrationality in writing, the inherent nonrepresentability of the medium. Woudhuysen reminds us of Shakespeare’s use of the letter O as an open signifier. Rosaline’s already quoted reply to Katherine’s “Fair as a text B in a copy-book,” regretting that her friend’s face is “so full of O’s” (5. 2. 42–5) “could be almost anything.” “By its very nature an O can signify all sorts of things (...) and tends to be a signifier in search of something signified. (...) Here, then, the letter O represents an open system of thought and interpretation [that] alude[s] fixed signification.”⁴⁸

Read in sharp contrast with Caxton’s appraisal of writing, the contours of a tragedy line up along the project of graphic representation. “My pen is worn, mine hand heavy, mine eye even dimmed,”⁴⁹ he writes in the Preface to the histories of Troy, but he hails the fruit of his work as a great achievent:

⁴⁸ Woudhuysen p. 21.

⁴⁹ Caxton, *The Prologues and Epilogues*, ed W. J. B. crotch, Early E Txt Society, 176, London, 1928

...because I have promised [this book] to divers gentlemen ... therefore I have practiced and learned ... to ordain this ... book in print ... it is not written in pen and ink as other books are.⁵⁰

Caxton’s project, the “rule of print”⁵¹ is the propagation of a medium that is finally not “perisshing, vayne and forgetful,”⁵² a medium that is capable of securing “cultural and religious truths.”⁵³ The doctrinal appraisal of secured truths coincides with Ascham’s promised eden of a culture based on writing learned from following (*imitare*) the classics : “Their whole knowledge, by learning without the booke, was tied onely to their tong & lips, and neuer ascended vp to the braine & head, and therfore was sone spitte out of the mouth againe: They were, as men, always goyng, but euer out of the way”⁵⁴ of a culture of literacy, that was destined to be defined by graphic fixities. As Parker argues, “order in writing and discourse (...) is initially linked to the production and reproduction of social order and precedence; literary and grammar forms [were part of] the civilizing process.”⁵⁵ Like in Mulcaster, the *Scholemaster*’s grasp goes no further than a demonstration of an enormous set of classic exempla construing a system of prestige quotes to be memorised, almost endlessly. The education of children starts with Cicero:

After the three Concordances learned, as I touched before, let the master read vnto hym the Epistles of Cicero, gathered together and chosen out by Sturmius, for the capacite of children. (...)When the childe bringeth it, turned into latin, the master must compare it with Tullies booke, and laie them both together: and where the childe doth well, either in chosing, or true placing of Tullies wordes, let the master praise him, and saie here ye do well.

And the “learned Reader, and (...) right considerer” is to study Salust, who Ascham had the cance to listen from John Cheeke himself. From upstart apprentice to master, the “salve” of letters is a sea of quotes, ranked for their difficulty and content.

The impossibility of these two cultural motifs end up reversed in the final scene of *Love Labour’s Lost*. In Evans’s reading the suppressed attempts literally give in to a speech superior over writing, putting an end to the game of signification: “the penances that conclude the play an introduction into the order of speech. (...) After a year, their boyish pursuit of book-learning and word games over, the four young men may be reconsidered as potential husbands.”⁵⁶ Still along

⁵⁰ Caxton p. 21.

⁵¹ Patricia Parker, *Preposterous Estates, Preposterous Events: From Late to Early Shakespeare*. In: *Shakespeare from the Margins*.

⁵² Caxton p. 51.

⁵³ For a more detailed discussion of the cultural context of debates about graphic representation see Evans pp. 41–50.

⁵⁴ Ascham p. 11.

⁵⁵ Parker p. 24. For a more detailed discussion of the cultural context see Parker pp. 22–26.

⁵⁶ Evans 1985. p. 62.

Evans, the return from the graphic adventure, whatever complex it may be, remains an exemplar containing writing’s resistance to rhetorical humanism,⁵⁷ where the fallen academic project at the news of death gives in to the restoration of a humanity driven by the dialectics of the voice. The play ends with the punishment and reformation of writing reinstating it to its alleged peripheral position. This finality leaves no chance to writing, as the word is re-suited to be the maker of action (Hamlet 3. 2. 1896), “oratio” is re-adjoined to “ratio.”⁵⁸

Regardless of the dismaying news of *death* transported by Marcade, the closure *does* display a dash of hope, a “joyful (...) reformation” (5. 2. 2812) parading the supremacy of the Academe. Also it is made clear (should it not have been clear already) that the Academe was perjured with the charge of writing, its “*sins are rack’d*” and “*must be purged*” from “*faults and perjury*” (5. 2. 2760–61). All right would this be should the final lines not be bothered by the unease of the shadow of violence hanging over the evolving writing-dictated action’s sudden suppression by the violence. As Biron states, “*Mirth cannot move a soul in agony*” (5. 2. 2800). And he is right, because the *mirth* released at the liberation is too often mingled with the long of a parting, rendering untrue the victorious return from the writing-refuge. A key statement of this is the famous “*The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of / Apollo*” (5. 2. 2876–77), an utterance riven by the lament of being post-scriptum, the harshness of the after, a great deal dimming the light of victory. The actual ending of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is even more intriguing: “*You that way: we this way*” (5. 2. 2877). These words of farewell are clearly not products of a successful release. The farewell is loaded with the backwater of a mourned writing, turning a restorational rhetoric into words of colonialism, where the promise of speech can only be justified by the ideology of a speech imposed over a defeated writing. Importantly, the *this way / that way* not only marks a rupture and a resistance but the necessity to suppress writing.

Consequently the celebratory attempts of the final rite resist the expected release, and in markedly the announcing of the victory of the voice is charged with a double loss: as if both the projects of the voice and writing represented an incompleteness that in their impossible but necessary ‘union’ articulated the play’s dramatic sign. Marcade’s arrival and the performance of the Song infinitely prolong the closure or victory of any of the motifs, infinitely deferring the “*naked truth*” (5. 2. 701). In other words, the “*naked truth*” is that Armado “*have no shirt*” (5. 2. 701), as the ending infinitely blends the perspectives of writing and speech as both being salvation

⁵⁷ Evans presents the commonplace hierarchy of *sense* and *decorum* (the former is best represented in speech while *decorum* is appropriated through the media of sense and vox, the systems more perfect than writing) through examples from *De Officiis*, Della Casa’s *Galateo*, *The Courtier*, Cinthio and of course, Puttenham.

⁵⁸ Sidney, *Defence of Poesie*. <http://www.uoregon.edu/~rbear/defence.html>

/ poison. Marcade (the mail)’s message brings no “salve” but suppresses the game of representation, sending the suitors to study and the enchantresses to mourn, preparing a delayed return and a future parting.⁵⁹ Along with the preposterous reversal⁶⁰ of the comic form, the well documented diversion from Sidney,⁶¹ the conclusion is not a purgation or an ending, but a delayed possibility. The messenger puts the ending into the future tense, into a *will come*, leaving the opposed ends as inseparables, undecided, a “salve/perjury.”

“made our sport a comedy”

The play’s dramatic sign is constituted by the inter-assuredness of this writing-game. Evans and Goldberg in their readings do not exclude this possibility, yet they do not seem to venture further than the problematisation of the drama’s textual enclosure and the text’s resistance to superimposed signification. Besides these, the reading presented above also acknowledges that the graphic sign is somewhat stronger than the voice / speech-organised plot (soul) or the character, to which the Aristotelian *ethos* is attributed. All in all, it has to be noted that the economy of the play do not conjecture any further theorisation to this medley. Nevertheless, the writing-oriented tendencies of the finale give way to the feeling that the dramaturgy of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* obviously tends towards a significant potentialising of the graphic sign.

The delicate interplay and mutual alienation of speech and writing fails to be brought into a clear-cut conclusion, making it neither the victory of speech nor the defeat of writing. Still, the line with the “harsh words” and the mechanic separation of “that way (...) this way” rightfully overvalue the role of writing in the balance, that may be regarded as the dramaturgical project’s opening towards the poetical practice of a writing turn. As long as writing is the “salve,” *Love’s Labour’s Lost* gives in to an inexplicable potential. Its dramaturgy is severed from *intentio* and resists to *represent*, the voice and the unities it involves is superseded by the graphic sign. This change of power activates a non-Aristotelian model, as it refuses the *mimesis* of consistent

⁵⁹ Parker argues that the play becomes “a sustained meditation on *teloi* or ends, on the orthodox structures of sequence and following and their preposterous reverse.” In Parker’s reading the play imposes upon itself “the purgation of catharsis of its letter end, an open ended sequel that breaches both comic convention and the enclosure or formal integrity of the well-made play.” (Parker p. 32.)

⁶⁰ Parker p. 36.

⁶¹ As Woudhuysen accounts for, most critics agree that Shakespeare’s reversal of comic and tragic qualities in some of his characters may be deliberated as a pun on Sidney’s “indictment of playwrights who make ‘sinful’ things ridiculous and ‘miserable’ ones scorned” (Woudhuysen p. 4). Many readings identify Costard and Holofernes as Shakespeare’s “replies” (Woudhuysen p. 6.) to Sidney’s reprimand of the stage representation of “wretched beggar[s]

characters. As Derrida writes, mimesis, “this process of truth”⁶² is a matter of agreement, where value and content attributed to representant and represented is necessary to call to life the mimetic machine: “First, there is what is, ‘reality,’ the thing itself, in flesh and blood as the phenomenologists say; then there is, imitating there, the painting, the portrait, the zoographeme, the inscription or transcription of the thing itself. Discernibility, at least numerical discernability, between the imitator and the imitated is what constitutes order.”⁶³

Allegedly, the mimetic expectation and an order constituted by *mimesis* is the play’s chief worry, since the promised “light” it wishes to see is to be reached by the sanctioning of an outside reality. (Even if *studia humanitatis* ought to represent the consistent light of nature represented; this presumed it is quite odd that in the ever present truth/book interplay light is officially represented in the sanctioned outside while it is aimed to see in the clandestine inside / mock-real).

The onstage representation of the power-change of writing, when the letters become the masters of the characters, clearly displays that signification does not happen through the voice, but counter to Aristotle, where drama should be made a whole by “speech (...), [that is a] compound, significant sound (...) [and] it signifies something or it is a unity through the joining together of many speeches. For example, the *Iliad* is a unity by the process of joining together many speeches, and the definition of man by signifying one thing.”⁶⁴ Clearly, in the scenes above described one can hardly arrest signification made by the voice or rendering authorial signification (man, unity, process, joining) under the *voice*.

This is actually acknowledged by Tranio in *Taming*, where in the bastard fore-play he says, now using “abjure” in lieu of “perjury,” “*good master, while we do admire / This virtue and this moral discipline, / Let’s be no Stoics nor no stocks, I pray, / Or so devote to Aristotle’s checks / As Ovid be an outcast quite abjur’d*” (1. 1. 325–8). Moreover, Tranio adds that the disciplines in the “checks” (!) of Aristotle (the “*every godfather*” (LLL 1. 1. 95) is “*balk logic*” (1. 1. 330), and half-seriously calls to diverge from which “*no prophit grows*” (1. 1. 333). According to Tranio the truth-oriented signification, the sign ridden by speech is topsy-turvy, operational perhaps for the sake of a salve / perjury: “*Fall to (...) [it] as you find your stomach serves you*” (1. 1. 332).

and beggarly clown[s],” (Sidney 116) as Shakespeare is actually showing how funny these theoretically impossible creatures may be onstage.

⁶² Jacques Derrida, “The First Session” in: *Acts of Literature* (London & New York: 1978) p. X. (Transl. By Alan Bass) p. 144.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 143.

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *The Poetics*. (London: Penguin, 1996).

And still, the insisted look / book controversy is recovered into the light of humanism a *broken* light; none of the contestant ideologies brought success, as the writing turn failed to produce the “forbidden thing,” (1. 1. 62) because how frightening it was when writing ordained its control over the characters. On the other hand, the words *reformed* turning out “harsh” (5. 2. 2876) resist the ideological solace. Voice-directed signification is not free from the rebellion of writing, and though its exclusive dominance cannot be justified (meaning Hartman’s claim that the play is “preordained” by the complexity of language that “enters” and “preordains” it, needs to be called to regard this complexity the in-and “outcome” of voice and the graphic).

The (dramatic) language of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* in this respect is a construction of adjacent non-dominances, inevitably claiming the recognition of the logocentric deconstruction of voice / truth at work. The “nature” of this dramatic sign is best appropriated in its division, that debilitates the speech-ridden sign but will not substitute it by its graphic alternative. Obviously a troubled semiosis (salve/perjury) evolves, already taken account for by Evans in the mishy-mashy mimesis: “And in all this concern with acting, representation and indentity, so characteristic of the Comedies, the mirror that reflects deconstruction is always itself divided and already in more than one place – at the site of the mimetic *sign* or action, but also broken in the *signifier* released in the enactment of acting, the representation of the stage of the process of *mimesis* itself which may, as Holofernes maintains, be no more or less than ‘nothing.’”⁶⁵

Evans’ claim that *imitare* is for animals (right said by Aristotle’s soldier, Holofernes), “*Imitari is nothing; so doth the hound his master, the ape his keeper, the tired horse his rider*” (4. 2. 120–122) is a necessary symptom of the bastard blend of the voice and the graphic. The mirror of mimesis is broken in consequence of the representation *machine*, resulting in a signified “nothing.” Also due to the constant escape, motion of representation (from the picture) disrupts an established, defineable logocentric structure where an *ethos* could hold. In Evans’ argument it is important that the representant and the represented is “never finally effaced,”⁶⁶ the division between character and its conditional reality is never marked. The mimetic process is oscillatory, saving the characters from being able to stand for one thing or forming their consistency. Who else could be brought up again, but Holofernes, who is unable to settle who he represents, “I an hundred make, by adding but one more I” (4. 2. 60).

This delicate balance of the dramatic sign cannot be appropriated without the inclusion of the graphic, and not by chance it is due to those views that explain the value-crisis of Shakespearean semiotics highlighting the episteme-boundaries of its production. The widespread

⁶⁵ Evans 1986, p. 68.

view that Shakespeare’s dramatic sign is constituted on the brim of *everything*, resulting in some sort of congruous mess: a texture of humanist, magical, in part poststructuralist / deconstructionist theoretical half-threads.

Of course, these assertions are hard to challenge. Though, early modern pre-aesthetics (that one day may be regarded on its own, not as a *pre* or *post*-thing) has not much been problematised regarding its other / worst half, the theatralising function of the graphic sign. (A bit more ambitiously, the early modern dramatic sign seems to be at work by the binary use of two opponent forces, the medialised materiality of the graphic sign coming to a phenomenal reality on stage and the humanist concept of mimetic representation). Obviously, the *result* (“broken shin”) of theatre-making, the salve/perjury is weakened *and* supported by writing, awarding the graphic sign not only the hostile status to traditional representation⁶⁷ but as its necessary supplement, at times possible alternative.

The necessary deconstructionist parallels⁶⁸ coming handy at this point answer but one side of the problem. As already seen, the “classical” deconstructionist take on the comedies with the letter’s resistance to metaphysics and identity regained from *différance* in the end⁶⁹ undeniably lights up unprecedented tracts of the the utopy of *Elizabethan real*, yet obviously there is more at stake than a representation framed in logocentrism and intrigued by the *différance* of the letter. The upper sketched deconstruction of ideologies spreading with the rise of writing gives way to an ambition not only of the “the destruction of the entire notion and logic of the sign”⁷⁰ but appears as a new *actor*, which claims attention as part of the deconstructing operation but also as a creative presence.

Poststructuralist Shakespeareans are ready to agree that no Shakespearean playtext may be accounted for exclusively as the performative objectivising of the Derridean “breakthrough.”⁷¹ A more relevant link may be set up at the intertwining of the voice-truth and the *différance*-“based” graphic sign, that supposes a trapdoor or *hyle*,⁷² an alternative poetics escaping from early modern

⁶⁶ Evans 1986. p. 68.

⁶⁷ “So that heerein appears the second abuse, in that these men [*pen-men*], being not able to yeeld a reason of that they professe: doe neuerthelesse (Parrat-like) boast of their skill, an in their papers giue our vinting speeches, as if so be they were the onely fellows that would (as we say) beare away the Bell: whereas if a man take a view of any of their works or writings, he shall find therein no appearance either of Truth, Reason, or Art: but on the contrary, such weake stuffe as he would rather imagine it to be a scratching of a Hen, then the worke of a profest Pen-man.” Billingsley, Martin, b. 1591. The pen’s excellencie, or, The secretaries delight **Date:** 1618 This reel position: STC / 1476:03 **Copy from:** Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery

⁶⁸ As Evans acknowledges in terms of the comedies, “Had deconstruction not at this moment existed, someone would have had to invent it.” (Evans 1986. p. 85).

⁶⁹ Evans 1986. p. 79.

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.) p. 23.

⁷¹ *Of Grammatology* p. 27.

⁷² First Session p. 153.

humanity. This *between* of literature (drama) and truth indeed corresponds to the necessary idealism of a liberated mimesis removed from the Platonic – Aristotelian context, “which implies that somewhere the being of something that *is*, is being imitated.”⁷³

Shakespeare’s aesthetical *salve/perjury* rightly puts on stage the Derridean crisis of representation: “one can retain the fact that the process of truth is *on the one hand* the unveiling of what lies concealed in oblivion (*aletheia*), the veil lifted or raised [*relevé*] from the thing itself, from that which *is* insofar as it is, presents itself, produces itself, and can even exist in the form of a determinable hole in Being; *on the other hand* (but this other process *is* prescribed in the first, in the ambiguity or duplicity of the presence of the present, of its *appearance* – that which appears *and* its appearing – in the fold of the present participle, truth is agreement (*homoiosis* or *adequatio*), a relation of resemblance or equality between a re-presentation and a thing (unveiled present), even in the expression of a judgement.”⁷⁴ The crisis opens when the dramatic sign proves to be a somewhat conscious interplay of the clash of Aristotle’s checks and Navarre’s train entering the *membrane*.

The space of *between* is the attempt of a theatre where in lieu of the “spirited word”⁷⁵ the “limits of representation”⁷⁶ are overcome by a writing which does not imitate but is one with “life,” the “nonrepresentable origin of representation.”⁷⁷ In Derrida’s critique of Artaud, the established Western representation is cast away from “laying bare the flesh”⁷⁸ of the world, the thing itself, before it was corrupted with the representation-machine of the West: the attribution of concept to sound, signified to signifier, the pneumatical to the grammatical, translation to tradition, movement to interpretation, the soul to the body, master to slave.⁷⁹ The erasure of the word would necessarily eliminate ideology and the mimetic constraint from the stage, representing “an other language,”⁸⁰ that is no more “dominated by speech, (...) by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance.”⁸¹ Without the “master speech”⁸² inscription is expected to happen beyond the limits of representation, in the *between* of truth and its representational attributes, being the thing itself,

⁷³ Ibid. p. 153.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 153.

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, “La parole soufflée” in: *Writing and Difference* (London & New York: University of Chicago Press, 1978). pp. 220–225.

⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida, “The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation” in: *Writing and Difference* (London & New York: University of Chicago Press, 1978). p. 294.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 294.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 302.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 303.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 301.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 296.

⁸² Ibid. p. 301.

altogether signifier (author) and signified (play).

Holofernes’ already quoted composition, for instance, well displays these characteristics, “*If sore be sore, then L to sore makes fifty sores one sorel. / Of one sore I an hundred make by adding but one more L.*” (4. 2. 1208–9). The horror of the schoolmaster is induced by the alienation of the composition from its author and the poem’s inevitable announcement of the contamination of its master. The letter L is itself and everything else, refusing to represent a meaningful segment, whence it is not exposed to signification, questioning the necessity or plan of its master (Holofernes). Yet the shock is not only owing to the resistance to representation; the writing-written text (also every text circumscribing speech in the Academe-project until the cry for “salve”) displays a potential to make theatre independent of the mimetic, contributing the second potential of the play’s dramatic sign.

When Holofernes faces the horrible real of the letter (even if he is effaced from it) he is fronted with a happening reality of writing, where signification is mysteriously being and happening in the unity of the sign and thing, neither an imitative language, nor the creation of names.⁸³ The graphic sign signifies directly, and is intimately associated with the unreserved change of the real. Holofernes is both stupefied and ridiculed by this contact, since it was he who called to life the arche-writing by his humanist means and failing to give in to its superiority he casts it away. Put bluntly, Holofernes (and people of the Academe) are experiencing (and being subject to) the interplay of two opponent ways to make theatre.

Obviously, in *LLL* Shakespeare is doing a poetical double book-keeping in operating the dramatic sign, charged both with the spirited word and the writing-written, rendering incomplete the phone-oriented traditional sign. The Derridean *membrane* is the dangerous element of writing in the representational machinery, yet it would be misleading to stress the exclusiveness of this recognised *between*, as the dramatic sign seems to be but partially charged with the frightful freedom of graphic inscription, however attracting and horrifying it is to the characters. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost* the dramatic sign is apparently constituted according to this between: the powers of *mimesis* and grapheme are unified and mysteriously extinguished by the two opposite forces. Where the drama *happens* is the derridean “yet unwritten page”⁸⁴ of a “confusion,” a “present and a nonpresent,”⁸⁵ as neither of the opposed forces of *mimesis* and grapheme, speech and inscription can break free from the other.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 302.

⁸⁴ First Session p. 153.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 153.

The solution-failure of the *salve/perjury* is the evidence to the important participation of the graphic (the writing-written signification of the *last* and *first* theatre that “enters the membrane”⁸⁶ as the first spectacle of a “crossed out being”⁸⁷) in theatre-making, giving way to the hypothesis that Shakespeare consciously incorporated the dramatic potential of writing into his poetic practice. This antagonism arrests a Shakespeare somehow aware (?) or at least somewhat conscious of the drama when the pen reaches the paper. Even if the writing masters held that inscription is a conscious, intentional act of intellect and body, the mind leading the hand mastering the pen, the obvious double-charging of the dramatic sign of *LLL* easily depicts a Shakespeare feeling it is enough to reach the paper to invoke drama, and wonder about what difference it makes to suit his writing into words and action when the same forces are mobilised just scratching with his pen.

Even more puzzling is the conjecture that the onstage metaphors of this double-force has been *made* consistent stage metaphors: From acknowledging the rules of the Academe until Armado’s cry for “salve” *LLL* is *not* the mimesis of a mneme governed by truth but the power-space of the activation of the graphic sign. At the start mimesis “acknowledges” the graphic supremacy. When the Academe subscribes to separation, the sanctioning of logocentrism and the moment when at the arrival of the first letter writing *contains* and *surrounds*⁸⁸ the voice.

Whence writing *is* the performance, it animates dramaturgy from the inside, not being a deductive representation (copying the truth / voice / nature) but an inductive activation of a difference-originated graphia as a being and happening. The energy this happening activates is making, where the maker is writing and not the nature-copying mimesis: writing needs to be attributed a force to make theatre.

At this point, again, what Shakespeare might have been *doing* comes very close to deconstruction. Freud’s deliberations revisited by Derrida acknowledge in writing similar energies to that of the human organism. The psychic structure’s correspondence to stratified sheets and the marking on the sheets to the places of displacements are transposed to the economy of the act of artistic writing. As the psyche and the body (since the meaningful units / segments of the body: the genes are writing and being written) work out the economy of a writing-being-written fuelled by the psychic energies that spatialises and temporalises, and fuelled by its textual unconscious, makes and operates. Derrida acknowledges, “the border between the non-phonetic space of writing (even “phonetic” writing) and the space of the stage (scene) of dreams is

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 294.

⁸⁷ *Of Grammatology* p. 40.

⁸⁸ *Of Grammatology* p. 27

uncertain.”⁸⁹ The spatialisation and temporalisation of the psychic structure or unconscious of graphia becomes performative on the stage, staging of writing⁹⁰ since the “pictures” copies, writings and erasures are being spatialised. Like the Mystic Writing Pad, the stage is also a writing-space, “a space which writing has always claimed for itself,”⁹¹ that maintains and creates a structure, a body, a theatre.

The stratification and economy of psychic structure deliberates the operation of Freudian mechanisms in the play-text. As references have already been made to the play’s unconscious, it is not evident that the characters find facing it so unbearable that they need a *salve*. The liberation from writing is made dubious exactly by the lingering memory of this face to face, the “harsh” and the “this” / “that way.” Yet beyond the psychical and genetical economy, graphic graphic performance of LLL markedly operates as a poetic power-space. The graphic signification generated by the alleged textual unconscious renders necessary along the psyche’s spatialisation and temporalisation the temporalisation and spatialisation of poetics as well, a built-in counter-representation confronting the phone-mimesis.

These deliberations are akin to the Foucauldian studies of the body (text-body, the actor’s body, the body-psyche)⁹² highlighting the central importance of early modern notions of “economy of the body”⁹³ necessitating the unified semiotic study of textual corpuses and the actor’s alleged corpora.⁹⁴ In the light of these deliberations Holofernes’ stupor seems even more problematic. It seems now that the schoolmaster may have cried for a salve for he found unbearable the double-orientation of the dramatic sign (or he simply could not make up his mind which end to look for it). In terms of the cocktail of LLL no other salve could be offered but a mechanic solution or the necessarily added resolution, perhaps the mingling of opposed ends. (In brackets, with the remark that the importance of the materiality of writing highlighted by Yale deconstructionists was a decisive pre-aesthetical player way before its well-documented Romantic manifestations. Shakespeare apparently nearly talked himself into establishing a whole theatre on graphia: “Our wooing doth not end like an old play” (5. 2. 2817)).

⁸⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing” in: *Writing and Difference* (London & New York: University of Chicago Press, 1978). p. 273.

⁹⁰ Ibid. P. 275.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 280.

⁹² Mostly in *The Order of Things, Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*

⁹³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Random House, 1977). p. 172.

⁹⁴ This text, though needs to mention these associations, does not aim to follow these paths. We do not wish to read the phenomenal appearance of the mediated semiotics of the actor’s body, the drama-body and the text-body. See: Keir Elam, “In What Chapter of His Bosom?: reading Shakespeare’s bodies” in: *Alternative Shakespeares* 2 pp. 140–163.

Based simply on the texts included in this study it is well probable that the opposed ‘systems’ (“Jack” and “Jill” (5. 2. 2818.) may have posed a serious dilemma to Shakespeare, and LLL is organised along between them, in the sequence of the places of resistance, lead to a necessarily political ending of “doth not know” (5. 2. 2818.), where nothing is decided, so “comedy” remains: “sport.” (5. 2. 2817).