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'Dead, for my life': Stopping, Starting and Interrupting in *Love's Labour's Lost*

H.R. Woudhuysen

I

- 1 I edited *Love's Labour's Lost* for the Arden Shakespeare nearly twenty years ago.¹ The Arden series is famous for its detailed commentaries or notes on the play and I hope the ones that I wrote are occasionally helpful. Editing is a slow process and it took me several years to start work on the edition and then to produce it. The patience of the General Editors of the series was sorely tested. At the end of the process, the editor is sent a series of proofs: the first proofs that arrive are of just the text of the play; after that come the textual apparatus, the Commentary, the Introduction, and finally the appendices – eventually, when these separate sets of proofs have been turned into proper pages, the index appears and you are able to spend happy hours filling in page numbers and trying to make sure the index is useful and works. However, it is the text of the play that requires closest attention; all the minute decisions you have taken about spelling and punctuation, whether a speech is in prose or verse, what the title of the play is and what its characters should be called come back to haunt you.
- 2 I must have checked the proof text against the first surviving Quarto of 1598 some three or four or even more times. If the text of the play and its layout contain errors, this suggests that much else in the edition will be wrong. Readers expect accuracy and consistency; as the great classical scholar and poet A.E. Housman maintained, accuracy is a duty not a virtue. When you are checking a text against its original or even a typescript, in effect you read it twice while watching, as it were, a sort of game of tennis; the editor's eyes move from the copy on the left to the printed version on the right. Thus checking a text three or four times means that you read it six or eight times. How often in the course of editing the play did I read *Love's Labour's Lost*? It must

have been a good twenty or thirty times. Yet I noticed that even when reading the proofs – a mixture of mechanical tedium and deep terror – every time that I got near to the entry of Monsieur Marcadé towards the end of the last scene, I would sit up and get that prickling or trembling in the back of the head, a shiver down the spine, that signals a range of emotions between fear, pleasure, and excitement that great art – music, poetry, painting – can produce. Housman described a similar effect: 'Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act.'² I feel that way about that extraordinary moment when Marcadé appears, interrupts the games between the lovers and completely changes the play's mood and direction.

- 3 If we look at the moment in the Quarto as it appeared in print for the first time (or perhaps the second, but at least the first time we can see it), we might notice something quite striking. Marcadé says 'The King your father'; the Queen replies 'Dead for my life.' And the messenger responds 'Euen so: my tale is tolde.'³ It is a wonderfully concise and powerful exchange that draws on a well-used contemporary saying ('the tale is told'), but which also points to the play's close engagement with narrative and plot – or rather, as we might think of it as plotlessness. For, after all, the play resolves nothing; as Berowne says: 'Our wooing doth not end like an old play: Jack hath not Jill' (v.ii.862). At the close of the play, the tale of whether the King and his courtiers will pair off and marry the Princess and her Ladies is not told and the audience is left in an agony of suspension and uncertainty. Marcadé's interruption brings to a premature close the masque of the Nine Worthies, the men's wooing of the ladies, and Shakespeare's play as a whole. But there is something about the way in which Marcadé does this that I missed when editing the play. 'The King your father', he begins and then is interrupted by the Princess, 'Dead for my life.' Yet looking at the Quarto, there is no mark of punctuation after Marcadé's news about the King, just white space. The Queen interrupts him and interruption in English drama is nowadays usually marked with a dash, as it is in my edition:

MARCADÉ. I am sorry, madam, for the news I bring
Is heavy on my tongue. The King, your father –
PRINCESS. Dead, for my life!
MARCADÉ. Even so, my tale is told.
(v.ii.713-715)

But the dash as a punctuation mark signalling interruption, incompleteness, or a breaking off of thought did not exist in the drama in 1598.

- 4 Until around 1600, the usual way to mark an interruption was with commas, colons, semi-colons, unhelpful full points or, as here in *Love's Labour's Lost*, with just no punctuation at all – the dash was not part of the grammar of interruption. For example, in Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, Tarquin breaks Lucrece off while she is in full flow, pleading with him not to rape her: 'So let thy thoughts low vassals to thy state, / No more quoth he, by Heauen, I will not heare thee.'⁴ In the first quarto of 1594 her speech ends mid-sentence with a comma.
- 5 The classical rhetorical figure employed here is *aposiopesis*; it was widely recognised and relatively common in the writing of Shakespeare's period. The word comes from the Greek for 'to keep silent'; the figure was discussed by Quintilian and most fully in English by George Puttenham in *The arte of English poesie* (1589, but probably dating

from 1570). In describing *aposiopesis* or 'the figure of silence', Puttenham says that it is used:

when we begin to speake a thing, and breake of in the middle way, as if either it needed no further to be spoken of, or that we were ashamed, or afraide to speake it out. It is also sometimes done by way of threatning, and to shew a moderation of anger.⁵

None of the examples he gives of the figure, is punctuated unusually, or has distinctive typographical marks: the figure stands on its own and is not signalled by special sorts of punctuation.

- 6 *Aposiopesis* gave a sort of emotional realism to dialogue or conversation, making the unsaid and the unsayable a leading way of representing how people actually talk and think. Despite the danger of its over-use, there was not just classical, but also divine precedent for it. Christ's words from John 12:27 'My soul is heavy: what shall I say' were thought to be a suitable example of it.
- 7 Dashes occur in some Elizabethan prose works, and usually signal that someone is being interrupted.⁶ Yet if we examine the texts of plays written for the commercial theatre and which were printed between 1584 and 1599, we shall, as far as I know, not find a single interrupting dash in them, either in their first editions or in reprints during that period. My general sense is that they do not occur in manuscript plays copied before 1600: interestingly, there are none in *Sir Thomas More*. Then, out of the blue, in 1600 Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour* exhibits a rash of around thirty dashes in the later part of the play (all after gathering E). With one exception, they are always in the play's prose parts. This is the earliest surviving printing of any of Jonson's work.⁷ The quarto displays the typographical inventiveness and sensitivity to punctuation with which Jonson is usually associated. All of these features suggest Jonson's close involvement with the book's typographical design and that he was responsible for introducing the dashes.
- 8 Once Jonson introduced the dash to play-reading audiences in 1600 it quickly caught on. The process can be easily demonstrated by looking at the occurrence of dashes in Shakespeare quartos. They first appear in the quarto text of *King Lear* in 1608, which contains twelve or thirteen of them (one was removed in the course of printing), all set from one or more en hyphens. In *Troilus and Cressida*, printed the next year, there are sixteen, many set from solid rules. There is also a development: they are used when speakers interrupt themselves, lose the thread of what they are saying, or are simply overwhelmed with emotion. With the first quarto of *Othello* (1622), a play which makes much use of interruption, the text is rendered almost telegraphic by some 69 dashes, including eight on one page. In time, the dash became a major feature of expressive typography and was particularly associated with the drama. Some plays make what might seem to us an extraordinarily heavy use of them: Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* of 1607/8 has a huge number, while his *Trick to Catch the Old One* of 1608 has about 109 and Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1611) contains around 140 dashes, and another 40 related to stage directions.

II

- 9 Marcadé's sudden entrance and his broken-off exchange with the Princess suggest the importance of the role of interruption in the play. The word 'interrupt' itself, with its derivatives, is not a common one in Shakespeare, occurring no more than fifteen times in all of his writings and twice in our play. To go back to the news of the King's death, we might notice how the Princess greets the messenger: 'Welcome, Marcadé, / But that thou interruptest our merriment' (v.ii.711-712).
- 10 Earlier in that extraordinarily long last scene – the longest in all of Shakespeare's plays – Boyet recounts what happened when he was trying to have a snooze:

BOYET. Under the cool shade of a sycamore
I thought to close mine eyes some half an hour,
When, lo, to interrupt my purposed rest,
Toward that shade I might behold addressed
The King and his companions.
(v.ii.89-93)

- 11 Boyet prepares the way for the play's first inset show, the entrance of the King and his companions dressed as Muscovites: a sleep or a rest is interrupted by the appearance of disguised players. When, later in the scene, we get to the show of the Nine Worthies, the speeches of the performers are constantly interrupted by the facetious comments of the courtly spectators:

COSTARD. I Pompey am –
BEROWNE. You lie, you are not he.
COSTARD. I Pompey am –
BOYET. With leopard's head on knee.
BEROWNE. Well said, old mocker: I must needs be friends with thee.
COSTARD. I Pompey am, Pompey surnamed the Big.
DUMAINE. The 'Great'.
COSTARD. It is 'Great', sir: Pompey surnamed the Great.
(v.ii.543-548)

This sort of banter goes on for 150 lines or so until Marcadé interrupts the whole show. It is the same kind of business that takes place in the Muscovite mask:

MOTH. All hail the richest beauties on the earth!
BOYET. Beauties no richer than rich taffeta.
MOTH. A holy parcel of the fairest dames
(The Ladies turn their backs to him.)
That ever turned their – backs – to mortal views.
BEROWNE. Their eyes, villain, their eyes.
MOTH. That ever turned their eyes to mortal views.
Out –
BOYET. True! Out indeed!
MOTH. Out of your favours, heavenly spirits, vouchsafe
Not to behold –
BEROWNE. Once to behold, rogue!
MOTH. Once to behold with your sun-beamed eyes –
With your sun-beamed eyes –
BOYET. They will not answer to that epithet.
You were best call it 'daughter-beamed eyes'.

MOTH. They do not mark me, and that brings me out.
(v.ii.158-172)

- 12 The word Moth uses here, 'out', takes us back to Boyet's report of the rehearsal for the mask: 'And ever and anon they made a doubt / Presence majestical would put him out' (v.ii.101-102). Here, 'to put someone out' means to cause someone to lose their self-possession, to disconcert or discompose themselves, to confuse or even to embarrass themselves, and, more specifically, to make them forget their lines in a play or a speech. It is the interruptions rather than the 'Presence majestical' that makes Moth lose his concentration and forget what it is that he is meant to say; the interruptions change the course and direction of the play. In the Muscovite mask and the Show of the Nine Worthies, we have, then, a model for how interruption determines the play's plot or its narrative.

III

- 13 Of course, much drama proceeds by interruption – every time a character comes on stage and speaks, that is, in a sense, an interruption; conversely, when characters leave the stage, the action takes on a new direction. (It's hard not to think here of *Waiting for Godot* and of Beckett's description of it as a play in two acts in which nothing happens twice.) But *Love's Labour's Lost* does something distinctive with this idea by associating the interruption with the breaking of vows.
- 14 The opening 120 or so lines of the play's first scene take us deep into the world of the French court, the King and his followers' strange decision to study, fast, sleep little and avoid the company of women for three years. Almost at once, as they read the articles that they are being asked to subscribe to, Berowne spots a flaw:

BEROWNE. ... Item, If any man be seen to talk with a woman within the term
of three years, he shall endure such public shame as the rest of the court can
possibly devise.
This article, my liege, yourself must break,
For well you know here comes in embassy
The French King's daughter with yourself to speak.
(i.i.128-133)

- 15 Even before they have been able to begin it, the King and the courtiers' plan is to be interrupted by the arrival of the Princess and her ladies. The vows are to be broken before the courtiers have so much as signed the articles of agreement. The language in which all this is expressed is made clear in this first scene. Here, the article is to be broken ('yourself must break'); within twenty lines, we have the same verb in use but now in company with a new one. The King says that the Princess 'must lie here on mere necessity', to which Berowne counters:

BEROWNE. Necessity will make us all forsworn
Three thousand times within this three years' space
[...]
If I break faith, this word shall speak for me:
I am forsworn 'on mere necessity'.
So to the laws at large I write my name,
And he that breaks them in the least degree

Stands in attainder of eternal shame.
(I.i.147-155)

- 16 In addition to the idea of breaking faith, we are given a new element: being forsworn or forswearing something. The word and its derivatives are relatively common in Shakespeare's writings, but they occur 22 times in *Love's Labour's Lost*; in the play with the next highest number of forms of the word, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, it is used only nine times. It seems that Shakespeare is particularly keen to draw attention to the word here. Throughout the rest of the play, people return again and again to the 'f' word, for example, when Nathaniel reads out loud Berowne's poem:

'If love make me forsworn, how shall I swear to love?
Ah, never faith could hold, if not to beauty vowed.
Though to myself forsworn, to thee I'll faithful prove.'
(IV.ii.105-107)

or when Dumaine reads his sonnet:

Do not call it sin in me,
That I am forsworn for thee.
(IV.iii.112-113)

or as a passing comment: 'It is religion to be thus forsworn' (Berowne in IV.iii.337). It can also go together with the 'b' word, as it did in Berowne's speech in I.i. that I have already quoted, or in Longaville's sonnet:

Vows for thee broke deserve not punishment.
A woman I forswore, but I will prove,
Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee
[...]
If broken then, it is no fault of mine;
If by me broke, what fool is not so wise
To lose an oath to win a paradise.
(IV.iii.60-70)

- 17 What happens in the play is that men forswear ladies and sleep; instead, they swear to study and to fast; but in no time at all, they break their oaths and forswear their vows. The men try to argue their way out of what they have done, using all the power of rhetoric and logic that they can deploy. So, here, for example, the King tries to reason his way out of the position he is in: 'Rebuke me not for that which you provoke. / The virtue of your eye must break my oath' (V.ii.347-348). In other words, it is her fault if he goes back over his promise not to fall in love with women. But just as they acknowledge their lack of good faith and try to make up for it, the King and the Lords show that they have learnt nothing from what they have done:

BEROWNE. 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.
[...]
My love to thee is sound, sans crack or flaw.
ROSALINE. Sans 'sans', I pray you.
(V.ii.406-416)

Even as they forswear things, the men break their oaths and vows.

- 18 These are not the only things that get broken in the play. Midway through the play, the Princess intercepts a letter that Costard tells her is from Berowne to Rosaline – it turns out, of course, to be from Armado to Jaquenetta:

PRINCESS. O, thy letter, thy letter! He's a good friend of mine.

(She takes the letter.)

Stand aside, good bearer. Boyet, you can carve:

Break up this capon.

BOYET. I am bound to serve.

(He examines the letter.)

This letter is mistook; it importeth none here.

It is writ to Jaquenetta.

PRINCESS. We will read it, I swear.

Break the neck of the wax, and everyone give ear.

(IV.i.55-60)

- 19 To break up a capon is literally to carve a chicken, but a capon is also a love-letter and that can only be opened by breaking the capon's neck, that is, the wax seal that closes the letter. The seal on a letter is a mark of ownership as well as a way of securing privacy; it acts as a guarantee of both and as a sign of intimacy and trust between the person sending the letter and the person receiving it. For someone other than the intended recipient to break the seal, then, is to forswear a contractual relationship – in effect to break an oath. The Princess's hope that the letter will expose Rosaline's relationship with Berowne is not fulfilled and her party and the audience are left feeling that this strand of the play's plot is incomplete – that is: has been interrupted.
- 20 A different sort of breaking – a rather different one – is signalled when Costard (for it is he) enters in III.i. The page Moth exclaims 'A wonder, master! Here's a costard broken in a shin' (III.i.67). Besides being the name of an apple, 'costard' was slang for a head; so Moth is saying that it is astonishing that a head has a wounded shin. But a further meaning is suggested by the rhyme that Costard speaks later in the same scene: 'I, Costard, running out, that was safely within, / Fell over the threshold, and broke my shin' (III.i.113-114). There is a strong suggestion that Costard has been discovered and interrupted having sex: he was 'safely within', but stumbled over the threshold – he was nearly there, but something stopped him doing what he had in mind.
- 21 Without building too much on this characteristically obscure but suggestive set of remarks, one might take the idea of being interrupted while having sex or just of sexual frustration as characteristic of the play. The King and his courtiers vow to cut themselves off from women; beautiful women of the right kind then turn up; it all looks as though the comedy will end, as it naturally should, in marriage, until Marcadé arrives with his news of death and the play's resolution is deferred just as the men and women's marriages and promised gratification are postponed. The readers and the audience thought they were going to see a play in which the natural expectation is that men and women will pair off to marry and to produce babies, but they do not – the clue that this will not happen is, of course, in the play's title.

IV

- 22 The breaking or forswearing of both physical and abstract things signifies interruption and incompleteness. There is one more sort of breaking to which I should like to draw attention. As the disguised lords and the masked ladies converse apart in v.i, Rosaline suddenly brings the encounters to an abrupt end: 'Not one word more, my maids; break off, break off' (v.ii.262). Under 'to break off', the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this very passage from the play and gives the definition here of 'To leave off or stop abruptly'. The *Dictionary*'s first citation is a medieval one; its second is, appropriately enough, the passage describing *aposiopesis* from Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* that I have already quoted: 'when we begin to speake a thing, and breake of in the middle way, as if either it needed no further to be spoken of, or that we were ashamed, or afraide to speake it out.' The sudden ending of this part of the courtship is a sort of *aposiopesis*, an abrupt ending where a successful conclusion is not allowed. I should have thought more about those four words 'break off, break off'. They are the only time in all of Shakespeare's works that he uses 'break off' in this repeated form. No other contemporary of his does so and, in fact, as far as I or the LION database can tell, the next time they come together in this way is at the moment in Milton's masque when Comus hurriedly brings the dance of his unruly followers to an end before the Lady enters: 'Break off, break off, I feel the different pace / Of some chaste footing neer about this ground.'⁸ Milton did not need to have read *Love's Labour's Lost* (though he may well have done) to borrow these words from it. But the echo highlights the way in which the closure of this part of the scene in Shakespeare's play is marked. Rosaline tells her maids to 'break off, break off' and the King and his party leave the stage.
- 23 The instruction is a deliberately abrupt way of stopping things – a command followed by an exit. We can see the same thing happening elsewhere in the play. Shakespeare does not repeat the formula but uses another one that occurs fairly regularly elsewhere in his work. 'Come, Jaquenetta, away', Dull tells her just before they leave in the play's second scene (i.ii.139); under ten lines later Moth addresses Costard, 'Come, you transgressing slave, away!' (i.ii.148), and in due course they depart. The word 'away' is a good means for getting people off the stage and also for ending scenes, as when Holofernes invites Dull to dinner and says 'Away, the gentles are at their game and we will to our recreation' (iv.ii.162), or when Holofernes prepares Dull (him again) for the masque of the Nine Worthies, saying 'Most Dull, honest Dull! To our sport, away!' (v.i.147). A more striking version of this comes nearly at the end of IV.iii., when the King and his lords have agreed to pursue the women:

KING. Away, away! No time shall be omitted
That will betime and may by us be fitted.
BEROWNE. Allons, allons!
(iv.iii.355)

'Away, away ... Allons, allons' have something of the same force and use the same repeated form as 'Break off, break off'.

- 24 At the end of the play, it is to the same word that Berowne and the Princess both return:

BEROWNE. Worthies, away! The scene begins to cloud
[...]

KING. How fares your majesty?
 PRINCESS. Boyet, prepare. I will away tonight.
 (v.ii.716-721)

The scene begins to cloud and the play breaks off with the Princess and her ladies' departure before we can know what will happen at the end of it all. The play does not come to a conclusion; rather, as with so many scenes, it simply stops.

- 25 We are prepared for this by the play's title (which I shall come back to), but also something that is, I think, worth pausing over. We are familiar with the idea that watching a play or a film is quite different from reading a novel, say, in that unless the spectator has been checking a watch, we have no idea when a film or a play will end, whereas we can see the end of a novel approaching as the pages on the right-hand side of the book diminish. However, the monstrously long second scene of Act 5, the longest scene Shakespeare ever wrote, signals that we are approaching the end, not just because of its length, but by its repetition of the word 'end'. The best-known instance of this device elsewhere in Shakespeare is probably in the last scene of *King Lear* when Kent asks: 'Is this the promised end?' The word 'end' or 'ends' occurs in *Love's Labour's Lost* nine times in v.ii, and another four times in v.i, more than in the last scenes of any other play by Shakespeare – 'end' and 'ended' occur eight times in the last two scenes of *Cymbeline*, the play with the largest number of comparable occurrences in the canon. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, this is partly a function of the length of the last act as a whole. However, what is striking is not the sheer number of uses of the word that Shakespeare puts before us, but their significance. When the King implores the Princess 'Now, at the latest minute of the hour, / Grant us your loves', she replies: 'A time, methinks, too short / To make a world-without-end bargain in' (v.ii.781-783). A 'world-without-end bargain' is a contract that goes on for ever and ever, one that is never interrupted, never broken. There is something slightly specious about this; the Princess is thinking of marriage, of course, which does come to an end – death makes certain of that. A few lines later, Maria seems to raise Longaville's hopes by telling him that 'At the twelvemonth's end / I'll change my black gown for a faithful friend' (v.ii.821-822). A little later the point is made in this exchange:

BEROWNE. Our wooing doth not end like an old play:
 Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy
 Might well have made our sport a comedy.
 KING. Come, sir, it wants a twelvemonth and a day,
 And then 'twill end.
 (v.ii.862-866)

- 26 Armado likewise promises that the conclusion is on its way: 'will you hear the dialogue that the two learned men have compiled in praise of the owl and the cuckoo? It should have followed in the end of our show' (v.ii.873-876). The pair of poems that conclude the play replace narrative action with lyrical stasis; plot is overthrown by contemplative meditation on the seasons. But the poems also do something else. For all of the play's brilliant wit and jokes, its ingenious playing with language and clever rhetoric, for all of what Berowne earlier called 'Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, / Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation, / Figures pedantical' (v.ii.406-408), we are left with animal noises, the sound of the cuckoo, "'Cuckoo, / Cuckoo, cuckoo!'" O, word of fear, / Unpleasing to a married ear', and of the staring owl, "'Tu-whit, Tu-whoo!'" / A merry note' (v.ii. 877-878, 897-898, 906-907, 915-916).

- 27 Language may go in one direction towards the most sophisticated expression of thought and emotion, but 'that way' may be instantly subverted by the inarticulate, incomprehensible sounds of the natural world – 'this way'.
- 28 There is a difference between giving a play or a story an ending and stopping it; *Love's Labour's Lost* does not have an ending, it ends.

V

- 29 It has, however, got a distinctive and unusual beginning. It starts in a very definite way:

KING. Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
 Live registered upon our brazen tombs,
 And then grace us in the disgrace of death;
 When, spite of cormorant devouring time,
 Th'endeavour of this present breath may buy
 That honour 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.
 (i.i.1-14)

- 30 Hearing or reading all this for the first time, it is pretty hard to make much sense of it: there is an awful lot to take in and, like so much else in the play, while the language is striking and beautiful, its meaning is not easily grasped. However, the opening lines form a distinct unit of thought; immediately after them, the King abandons this train of thought, turning to and naming his companions ('You, three Berowne, Dumaine and Longaville'), giving us something solid to hold on to. Yet in spite of all their wilful obscurity, the King's opening lines have a clear structure. He starts with the imperative 'Let'; no other play by Shakespeare starts in this way and in the whole of the canon of nearly 800 scenes, only seven begin with the word. On the other hand, 'The Phoenix and Turtle' opens with the injunction 'Let the bird of loudest lay' and four of the Sonnets begin with the verb, most famously, of course, in number 116, 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments'. The relationship between the fourteen lines of the opening part of the King's speech and the Sonnets is worth pausing over. The structure of his speech can be seen more clearly by reducing it to two words: 'Let ... therefore'.
- 31 The play begins with a sort of syllogism, since *a* is so, therefore we shall do *b*. We are introduced in the first speech to a world of logic in which agreed facts have certain definite consequences. The structure of the King's speech is like that of Sonnet 105:

Let not my love be called idolatry,
 Nor my beloved as an idol show,
 Since all alike my songs and praises be
 To one, of one, still such, and ever so.
 Kind is my love today, tomorrow kind,
 Still constant in a wondrous excellence.

Therefore my verse, to constancy confined,
 One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
 'Fair, kind, and true' is all my argument,
 'Fair, kind, and true' varying to other words,
 And in this change is my invention spent,
 Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords.
 Fair, kind, and true have often lived alone,
 Which three till now never kept seat in one.

- 32 The speech and the poem are not identical – the Sonnet's change of direction really comes in line 9 which begins the sestet; the 'Therefore' in the Sonnet comes in line 7 and in line 8 in the speech – but they share an appearance of logical, ordered thought and it is not hard to pair the speech's last line 'Still and contemplative in living art' with the Sonnet's 'Still constant in a wondrous excellence'.
- 33 The way the play opens is important because, like the Sonnet, it sets up a structure that is meant to suggest that the world works through logic and necessity – that it represents a clockwork system in which certain conditions produce certain results: 'Let ... therefore'. Of course, the truth is that the King's well-regulated court is nothing of the kind. Not only are the King and his companions unable to keep their oaths, but they cannot enforce their system of discipline, their sense of how the world should be ordered on the other characters, notably Armado, Costard and Jaquenetta. Courtly idealism is subverted by the realities of life: 'necessity' really does make them all forsworn.
- 34 The King has a mechanical view of life and of the world as if it should work by clockwork and if it does not, then it must be made to do so. But human nature and life are not like this. One image of this is provided by Berowne who is wonderfully sceptical about such idealism:

BEROWNE. What? I love, I sue, I seek a wife?
 A woman, that is like a German clock,
 Still a-repairing, ever out of frame
 And never going aright, being a watch,
 But being watched that it may still go right!
 (III.i.184-188)

Of course, the passage is offensive about women, but it also tells a truth about clocks (and not just German ones): they do not work; they are unreliable and do not tell you the time. It is partly because their mechanical workings are inadequate to the task, but also because time itself – 'cormorant devouring time' – cannot be measured in this way. Rather, Spring's song shows us how this should be done: 'When shepherds pipe on oaten straws, / And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks...' (v.ii.891-892). But even the poems at the end of the play are infected by a consequentialist structure of 'When ... Then ...', setting up an apparently logical sequence.

- 35 Yet the play insists and shows us that the world does not work like this. Besides logic, grammar is consequently undermined; Latin grammar should provide us with a clockwork way of organising the world and our understanding of it. By conjugating verbs and declining nouns, we bring order to chaos. But the play shows that grammar and rhetoric, which should do the same sort of thing, bring more confusion and result in nonsense. Human nature and life are utterly unpredictable, subject to 'such eruptions and sudden breaking-out of mirth' as Armado describes to Holofernes (v.i.

105-108) or to the unprepared-for appearance of death in the figure of Marcadé. The play itself is an object lesson in how our expectation of a clockwork plot can be defied and overthrown.

VI

- 36 At the end of the play, the audience may be left with the hope that, in a year, or a year and a day, the lovers will get together again, but really there can be no guarantee or assurance that this will happen. The tasks the ladies set the men – the King to a hermitage, Dumaine and Longaville to uncertainty, Berowne to a hospital – may hint at a future happy resolution but do not promise it. Much can happen in the allotted time and the men who have shown themselves incapable of keeping an oath or a vow must be judged unlikely to do what they are obliged to do by the women. However, the play's title, *Love's Labour's Lost*, suggests that things are worse than that – the labour (or labours) of love and of the lovers are not just left unrewarded; they are entirely lost.
- 37 I still think that this rather dark interpretation of the play's ending is right. It is as if all that we have seen or read could be thrown away or, more appropriately perhaps, kissed away. The play shows us that vows are made of words and that words are just breath or vapour. This painful truth extends to the play itself, which is made up of words that are just as empty and ephemeral, just as meaningless, as the words the characters in it utter. We watch a play which comes to a conclusion in which nothing is concluded; it ends but has no ending, other than by being interrupted. The dominant moment in the play, Marcadé's arrival, still sends a shiver down the spine; it is a perfect example of an *aposiopesis* – but so is the play as a whole.

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. H.R. Woudhuysen, The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series, London, Thomson Learning, 1998; all quotations are from this edition.
2. A.E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, Cambridge, CUP, 1933, p. 46-47.
3. William Shakespeare, *A pleasant conceited comedie called, Loues labors lost*, London, by W.W. for Cuthbert Burby, 1598, sig. I3v.
4. William Shakespeare, *Lvcrece*, London, Richard Field for Iohn Harrison, 1594, sig. F1r (lines 666-7).
5. George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie*, London, Richard Field, 1589, sig. T4r.
6. See, for example, Gabriel Harvey, *Pierces supererogation*, London, John Wolfe, 1593, sig. Z4v.
7. Ben Jonson, *The comicall satyre of euery man out of his humor*, London, William Holme, 1600.
8. John Milton, *A maske presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, London, Humphrey Robinson, 1637, sig. A3v (lines 145-6).

ABSTRACTS

Taking as a starting point an editor's experience of making choices for punctuating Marcadé's aposiopesis in V.ii, this paper extends the reflection to interruption or break (of syntax, of vows, of time, etc.) as an underlying principle in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Running against the mechanical 'Let / therefore' logic of the King's opening lines, the entire play proves an object lesson in how our expectation of a clockwork plot can be defied and overthrown.

Partant de l'expérience de l'éditeur confronté à des choix de ponctuation pour l'aposiopèse de Marcadé en V.ii, cet article étend la réflexion à l'interruption ou à la rupture (de syntaxe, de vœux, du temps, etc.) comme principe constitutif de *Peines d'amour perdues*. À l'encontre de la logique mécanique (« Que / donc ») des premiers vers du Roi, la pièce toute entière s'avère un cas d'école pour défier et démonter notre attente d'une intrigue réglée comme une montre.

INDEX

Mots-clés: édition, aposiopèse, rhétorique, ponctuation, Puttenham George, rupture, fin

Keywords: dash, editing, rhetoric, punctuation, Love's Labour's Lost, Marcadé, interruption, Puttenham George

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