

ANTI-HONORIFICABILITUDINITATIBUS: *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST* AND UNTEACHABLE WORDS

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The 'Shakespeare's Unteachable Words' session at the 2016 World Shakespeare Conference came into being, as many good things do, during a conversation I had with Lucy Munro. We wondered together if we could imagine a panel that could combine my interest in pedantry with her current research on oaths, and it became a bit of a game to find a conceptual framework that was broad enough to contain our multitudes. Since, as the article that follows here will make clear, my own writing was beginning to revolve around difficult words (such as *honorificabilitudinitatibus*) and nonsensical constructions in the early printings of *Love's Labours Lost*, the idea of language that resisted ordinary acts of teacherly explication started to rise to the surface. Could there be such a thing, we asked ourselves, as a word or a class of language that was in some sense resistant to standard pedagogical practice? Do early modern oaths have a power that we can no longer identify or reasonably transmit? Do Latinate nonsense and scholastic in-jokes have a reasonable place in our world any more? And, as Indira Ghose went on to ask as she joined us in our efforts, is there any way to properly locate for our students the language of 'honesty' and 'honour' so central to early modern England's nascent ideas about class? These questions are all subsidiary lines stemming from what became our central theme: did Shakespeare write any unteachable words?

My own approach to this problem was directed in part by a few of Jacques Rancière's ideas about

pedagogy, set out in the early pages of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. For Rancière (writing, admittedly, from a subject position defined by the French academy of the 1980s), the classroom is a scene of enforced stupidity or 'stultification', the term translator Kristen Ross uses for Rancière's '*abrutir*'. While those of us who are firmly interpellated into pedagogical scenarios by our own lifetimes of teaching and learning might see the act of teaching as a gift, or as a process of endowment, Rancière's analysis finds darker tones in the meeting of two minds:

There is stultification whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another. A person—and a child in particular—may need a master when his own will is not strong enough to set him on track and keep him there. But that subjection is purely one of will over will. It becomes stultification when it links an intelligence to another intelligence. In the act of teaching and learning there are two wills and two intelligences. We will call their coincidence *stultification*.¹

While this assessment is perhaps less directly applicable to the often conversational, dialogic classrooms of the early twenty-first century Anglophone world, the premise is worth holding up as a refractive lens for the problem of pedagogy in Shakespearean

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Palo Alto, CA, 1991; 1987), p. 13. For a useful condensed overview of that longer work, see Jacques Rancière, 'On ignorant schoolmasters,' in *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation*, ed. Charles Wright and Gert J. J. Biesta (London, 2010), pp. 1–24.

contexts. We (and by that I mean today's classroom leaders) would not consider ourselves to be enforcing stupidity upon our students. But as we teach Shakespeare's works, we are always putting on display our own 'intelligences' – that is to say, our scholarly aptitudes, our personal or digital archives, our reservoirs of fact and practice that inform our work in our classrooms. That display, according to Rancière, can be useful as a process of explanation, but explanation itself always produces the stratifying distances that bring the idea of stupidity into being.

I would imagine that some readers of this chapter will respond to this idea the way I did when I first encountered it. 'That's not how I teach', I thought to myself. My own self-reflexive, self-conscious pedagogy, I would like to think, counteracts this stultifying effect. But Rancière would argue otherwise. The ignorant schoolmaster, in his model, begins teaching from a perspective devoid of expert knowledge. Students learn by being given materials to decode but they are not told how to decode them. They learn, in the Rancièrian hypothetical, without being told anything at all.²

What follows here is in no way an endorsement of this pedagogical model, though I do find it to be provocative in useful ways. I became a teacher in part because I take comfort from the solidifying fictions I can build out of facts, and I enjoy showing others how those fictions act on us in literary contexts. But while I am and always have been more than willing to share this process openly with my students, the explanation or narrating of fact itself has played an odd, secret role in my pedagogy and in my own teacherly psychology. The moment when a student clearly cannot understand something that I myself know, the moment when I say something like 'well, what Shakespeare means here is . . .' or 'Actually, there's a joke about sixteenth-century animal husbandry here' or something along those lines, that 'teaching moment' is crucial, but it enacts over and over again the process that Rancière critiques in the *Ignorant Schoolmaster*. It is a moment that reminds everyone in the room that I know things and that they do not. Our relative intelligences are created in those moments, no matter how often I let them know that I, too, rely

on marginal glosses and past classroom lessons to guide me through semantic problems as I wend my way through *Hamlet* for the 700th time. Horrifyingly, the practical conversations I use to put my students at ease about ignorance simply reinforce the point: I know a lot about how to learn Shakespeare. Rancière's terms are rough, but necessary and clarifying. Even at my charming professorial best, I stultify.

Out of all Shakespeare's comedies, *Love's Labours Lost* may be the one that is most interested in the relationship between ignorance and pedagogy. From the almost immediate failure of the King's Academy to the jests that are volleyed back and forth and forth and back again between lords and ladies and foresters and pages and clowns, nearly everyone in the play gets a chance to enact the Rancièrian exchange. Even the character named 'Dull' gets in a decent zinger at one point. And in what may be the clearest sign of the play's pedagogical engagements, a long list of critics have used the play to discuss the relative intelligence of Shakespeare himself, sorting through its classical in-jokes in pursuit of the school-boy life of Stratford's natural genius.³ Of course, the focal points of all this in the play are the pedantic, pre-tentious, scholar-figures of Holofernes and Nathaniel, both of whom love nothing more than to explicate everything around them and every hard word they hear. These two characters are exemplary models for a certain kind of glossorial authority that we in our own roles as scholars, teachers, and editors often adopt as we curate or present Shakespeare's texts for readers and students. What follows here rests on the premise that we can

² Rancière's ur-Ignoramus is Joseph Jacotot, who, in the 1820s 'taught' a group of Flemish speakers French despite his inability to speak Flemish. He gave his students a bilingual translation of *Telemaque* and told them to learn what they could. Within six months, the story goes, they all understood French.

³ See, most famously, the work of Thomas Spencer Baynes, *Shakespeare Studies* (London, 1894), and T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latin and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana, 1944).

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST AND UNTEACHABLE WORDS

learn quite a bit about our own silent assumptions pertaining to related forms of editorial and scholarly authority by pursuing the parallel courses that appear between our work and those of the ludicrous scholars in the forest of Navarre. We can, I will suggest, think more clearly about our own pedagogical biases if we look to the words or phrases in Shakespeare's plays (and especially in *Love's Labour's Lost*) that resist explanation, that may be unteachable in some way, and that mock us, as we push back against them.

EMPTY WORDS

The boundaries between stupidity and intelligence in *Love Labour's Lost* are often drawn by the material diversity of language, by unusual transactions between words that do things with their semantic content and words that mean nothing but do things just by simply being there.⁴ Characters across the play's social spectrum use meaningless phrases to prove themselves in battles for the momentary currency of cleverness. In the first act, for example, Berowne ends a set of manly rhyme-wrestling within the newly forged Academy of Navarre with a phrase that no one around him understands:

KING. How well he's read, to reason against reading.
DUMAINE. Proceeded well, to stop all good proceeding.
LONGAVILLE. He weeds the corn and still lets grow the weeding.
BEROWNE. The spring is near when green geese are a-breeding.⁵ (I.I.94–7)

When questioned about his joke, Berowne agrees with Dumaine that the phrase is 'In reason nothing', but it has just enough substance 'in rhyme' to fit into place. It is formally decorous, in other words, but it lacks functional semantic content. This combination turns out to be a deeply effective one. Berowne wins the boys' game by enacting, illustrating and exaggerating its meaninglessness. The ornate, lyrical wit most loved by the Academy is powerfully punctuated by Berowne's ability to stop making sense.

As a result, his nonsense helps construct a central organizing feature of the play's social hierarchy: Berowne's privilege is marked out, in part, by his ability to deploy semantically empty (and novel) language without being stained by it.⁶

At the other end of the play's imagined spectrum lies Costard, usually named in the early texts' speech-headings as a rustic 'Clown', whose job in the play is mainly to mis-deliver letters, misunderstand elaborate diction and get caught canoodling with Jaquenetta. Costard is also, however, the speaker of the linguistic equivalent of the pedantic Holy of Holies, the longest latinized term in all of Shakespeare and, indeed, one of the sixteenth century's favorite emblems of ludicrous suffixization: *honorificabilitudinitatibus*.⁷ The literal meaning

⁴ The most influential work for my thinking here includes William Carroll, *The Great Feast of Language in Love's Labour's Lost* (Princeton, 1976); Keir Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language Games in the Comedies* (Cambridge, 1984); Malcolm Evans, *Signifying Nothing: Truth's True Contents in Shakespeare's Texts* (Athens, GA, 1986), pp. 50–67; Patricia Parker, 'Preposterous reversals: *Love's Labor's Lost*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 54.4 (1993), 435–82; and Lynne Magnusson, 'Armado and the politics of English in *Love's Labour's Lost*', in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir (Burlington, VT, 2008), pp. 53–68.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all citations from *Love's Labour's Lost* are taken from H. R. Woodhuysen, ed. *The Arden Shakespeare* (London, 1998).

⁶ Occasionally, critics will mistake the social logic of the play for the true state of things. Here is one editor on the play's novel diction: 'Armado and Holofemes between them are responsible for the majority of these new words; but Biron is the third most important contributor to the total and, while their new words smell of the inkhorn, his do not. They appear as natural growths from the native soil of plain English usage. They need no gloss and have never needed one.' G. R. Hibbard, ed. *Love's Labour's Lost* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 36–7. What does an inkhorn smell like?

⁷ For a (the?) thoroughgoing survey of the appearance of *honorificabilitudinitatibus* in medieval and Renaissance contexts, see the entry on the word on, strangely enough, Wikipedia.com. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honorificabilitudinitatibus> (accessed May 2016). Thank you, anonymous contributors. Also relevant: Noel Malcolm's discussion on 'Macaronics, word-coining, gibberish, and coining' in the introduction to *The Origins of English Nonsense* (London, 1997), where he points

of the word is something like ‘the state of being able to accept honours’, but, importantly, this definition has absolutely nothing to do with the word’s effect in the text. While there are many people in the play who speak Latin (more or less), Costard is definitively not one of them (see 3.1.132–6, where he decides that ‘Remuneration’ is ‘the Latin word for three farthings’). Costard uses *honorificabilitudinitatibus* not to indicate someone’s honorificability, but rather to tell a joke about Moth’s size:

I marvel thy Master hath not eaten thee for a word, for thou art not so long by the head as honorificabilitudinitatibus. Thou art easier swallowed than a flapdragon.

(5.1.38–41)

Costard works with *honorificabilitudinitatibus* like a modern English-speaking child works with *anti-disestablishmentarianism*: to him, it means no more and no less than ‘extremely long word’. It is a sound to be spoken with as many syllables as possible and then, figuratively, to be eaten.

There is, of course, a joke here for learned audience members or readers who might have encountered the word in other contexts, since the less-than-scholarly Costard would not be expected, from their perspective, to speak this way. Patricia Parker argues that moments like these in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* critique the values and language of elite culture by deflating or ‘deforming’ them.⁸ This is true, but a differently valenced leveling effect is also at work. Audience members and readers (both in Shakespeare’s time and in ours) need no particular education to laugh at the sound or sight of a huge word. Difficult Latin, in other words, can be funny to audiences who do not speak a word of it. It can be absolutely empty of content but still do its job.

Now – a bit of scholarly explication. If one wanted to be especially pedantic (and of course, I do), one could present a series of philological facts pertaining to this word. It appears in mainly scholastic contexts with varying degrees of irony beginning in the eighth century; it is used, most famously, by Erasmus in his *Adages* to poke fun at someone who loves long words and it had become

by the later sixteenth century a clear marker for jokes about pedantry and ludicrous Latinate terms. Fair enough. But while I am interested in all this, I am not sure it helps us understand the power of the term in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. By the time we get to Shakespeare’s day, the word’s meaning or distant historical context has little to do with its purposes. John Marston, for example, uses it in *The Dutch Courtesan* in 1605 to let Crispinella compare another character’s annoying ‘discourse’ to ‘the long word *honorificabilitudinitatibus*: ‘a great deale / Of sound and no sence’. Erasmian jokes and clerical winks are besides the point. No one seems to care what the word means at all.

The gigantic hollowed-out space of *honorificabilitudinitatibus* makes it seem a bit like a container waiting to be filled when it appears in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. As a result, it has a fairly strange position in the work of people who feel that empty spaces should not exist in Shakespeare’s plays. The term, most strikingly, became an elaborate staging ground for believers in the Baconian hypothesis. Following Isaac Hull Platt, Edward Durning-Lawrence and others saw in *honorificabilitudinitatibus* a central clue in the all-too-obvious ciphers that Sir Francis had left behind in the plays [Illustration 10].⁹ Elizabethan courtiers certainly enjoyed playing games with anagrams but, as

out the link between Latinizing word games and Rabelais (p. 105). See also Anne Prescott, *Imagining Rabelais in Renaissance England* (New Haven, 1998).

⁸ Parker’s argument in ‘Preposterous Reversals’ (cited above) is worth quoting at length: ‘If from the perspective of the higher social orders in this play, the appropriate response to Costard’s (or Armado’s) imperfect mastery of “manner and form” is mockery and ridicule, from another perspective these deformations, turnings, and varyings reflect on far more than the lower orders in the play: the “high” is brought “low” not only by the iterations of parodic mimicry but through exposures (such as the cheeky servant Moth’s) of how open to manipulation are the forms themselves (how “preposterously” led by bodily desire, rather than, more loftily, the other way around), when such turning or varying becomes a means through which the pretensions of the aristocrats are themselves deflated’ (p. 439).

⁹ Sir Edward Durning-Lawrence, Bt. *Bacon is Shake-Speare* (London, 1910), p. 102. See also Isaac Hull Platt, *Are the*

and that therefore the true solution of the meaning of the long word "Honorificabilitudinitatibus," about which so much nonsense has been written, is without possibility of doubt or question to be found by arranging the letters to form the Latin hexameter.

HI LUDI F. BACONIS NATI TUITI ORBI

These plays F. Bacon's offspring are preserved
for the world.

It is not possible to afford a clearer mechanical
proof that

THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS ARE
BACON'S OFFSPRING.

It is not possible to make a clearer and more
definite statement that

BACON IS THE AUTHOR OF THE
PLAYS.

10. Sir Edward Durning-Lawrence, Bt, *Bacon is Shake-Speare* (London, 1910), p. 102.

a tool of argumentation in this context, they are useless. Indeed, if we read the word as some kind of anagrammatic clue, we would have to consider the possibility that Shakespeare was trying to send us other messages about his identity such as 'I: A Fictitious Hindi Bobtail Urn' or 'Ti-Hi! A bobcat in a fur dilution is I' or even the rather more cryptic 'Lo! I hid a rabbinic unit! It is tofu', all of which are *also* complete anagrams of *honorificabilitudinitatibus*.¹⁰

Rabbinic ciphers aside, I do think the appearance of this word in the early printed editions of *Love's Labour's Lost* is a kind of clue – just not the sort that Durning-Lawrence and his co-religionists wanted it to be. The 1598 Quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* (Q1) does, in fact, draw attention to the non-semantic force of the word by emphasizing its material letter-forms. Nearly every bit of Latin in the play is set in italics. Costard's *honorificabilitudinitatibus* is a notable exception.¹¹ Typographically speaking, in other words, the word does not perform as ordinary Latin. And why would it need to? The

Shakespeare Plays Signed by Francis Bacon? (Philadelphia, 1897), pp. 6–7.

¹⁰ These anagrams (along with hundreds of thousands of other possibilities) can be revealed through tedious weeks and months of letter-arranging, or by visiting the Internet Anagram Server at <http://wordsmith.org/anagram/> which does the job in three seconds or so.

¹¹ A qualification: the appearance of this word in roman type may have its roots in the exigencies of typesetting, rather than being a bit of print-shop or scribal interpretation – it is the final word on a line of prose, and there is no room for it on the next one down. It's possible that setting the word in italic type would have made it too long for the text block. It is also possible that the shop was running low on italic letters when they set this Latin-heavy forme. That said, the effect of the decision, whatever its cause, is to visually set this particular bit of Latin apart for a reader. For an excellent recent discussion of typographical variation in the printing of non-English in early modern playbooks, see Marjorie Rubright, 'Dutch impressions: The narcissism of minor differences in print', in *Doppelgänger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia, 2014), pp. 110–61. Thanks also to Claire Bourne for directing me toward the typographical oddities of early printings of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

nonsensical quality of the word is just as funny as its more abstruse scholastic reference – and for today’s audiences it is certainly funnier. If we grant as much, Costard’s joke performs in type and in sound as a levelling mechanism, inviting all kinds of people, learned and not, to laugh at its thirteen syllables. Sixteenth-century jokes that are organized by Latin and pedantry, in other words, are not only aimed at people who have spent time in school. The satirical thrust of nonsensical language does not always map onto or reinforce the kinds of social stratification that people invested in educational competencies sometimes take for granted in the Shakespearean text. Lynne Magnusson’s ideas about the pleasures of linguistic multiplicity in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and Parker’s sense of the play’s preposterous effects hold true even, or perhaps especially, when words themselves do extra-semantic work.¹²

These ideas might help shed light on one of the oddest editorial cruxes in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. It is found in the conversation between Holofernes (here, ‘Peda’, for the stock figure ‘Pedant’) and Nathaniel (here, ‘Curat’) about Don Armado, whose ornate rhetorical stylings are simply too ‘peregrinat’ for their taste (square brackets indicate my insertions):

PEDA. I abhorre such phanatticall phantasims, such insociable and point devise companions, such rackers of ortagriphie, as to speake dout sine [b], when he should say doubt; det when he shold pronounce debt; d e b t, not det: he clepeth a Calfe, a Caufe: a halfe, haufe: neighbour *vocatur* nebour; neigh abreviated ne: this is abhominable, which he would call abbominable, it insinuateth me of inf [s?]jamie: *ne inteligis domine*, to make frantique lunatique?

CURAT. *Laus deo, bene intelligo.*

PEDA. *Bome boon for boon prescian*, a little scratcht, twill serve.¹³ (1598, F4r)

There are many typographical and syntactical mysteries in this passage (including the most ironic weird spelling in the Shakespeare canon – ‘ortagriphie’), but it is the final bits of Latinesque nonsense that interest me here. ‘*Bome boon for boon prescian*, a little scratcht twill serve’ is a showpiece of a textual tangle, and most editors view it as having

been unravelled. Theobald, in his edition of 1733, decided that Holofernes was responding to and correcting an error in Nathaniel’s speech. He emends the line to ‘*Bone? Bone for bene; Priscian*, a little scratcht; ’twill serve’ (where ‘Priscian’ refers to the author of a well-known Latin grammar text).¹⁴ Of course, all this assumes that Nathaniel has actually made the mistake of *saying* ‘bone’ for ‘bene’ one line earlier, which is not the case in Q or F. In order for Theobald to make sense of Holofernes’s line, he had to un-edit Nathaniel’s line and insert a grammatical error of his own into it. Bad Latin abounds, even when things look to have been set aright.

But I am more interested in the text’s obvious problems than in their solutions. Where did this jumble come from? Was it the product of someone’s mistake? If so, what is the nature of the error that led to it? These are not easy questions to answer with any certainty. The chain of transmission for the playtext is, as always, a bit of a mystery. There is general agreement that Q1 was based on the kind of manuscript we have come to call authorial ‘foul papers’, but even if this was definitively proven to be the case, we would have no idea how many people were involved in the series of events that led to the Bome-ing and the boon-ing.¹⁵ Did someone in William White’s print shop misread the manuscript copy? Did someone mis-transcribe a playhouse or authorial manuscript

¹² See Parker, ‘Preposterous’ and Magnusson, ‘Politics of English’.

¹³ I’ve amended ‘u’ to ‘v’ but otherwise kept the spellings in Q1.

¹⁴ On the pre-twentieth-century editorial history of this passage, see Horace Howard Furness, ed., *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Love’s Labour’s Lost* (Philadelphia, 1904), pp. 210–13.

¹⁵ On the difficulties inherent to the designation ‘foul papers’ along with other terms used to describe lost print-shop manuscripts, see John Jowett’s brief discussion in ‘Editing Shakespeare in the twentieth century’, in *Shakespeare Survey* 59 (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 1–19; pp. 9–13; and Paul Werstine’s more thorough critique of those terms as they were set out by W. W. Greg, *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts*, esp. p. 50.

when he made a copy for the publisher? Was Shakespeare himself the source of the mess? Or was some other reviser, editor, actor or transcriber part of the chain of transmission? Exactly whose stupidity are we dealing with here?

Since we will never positively know the answer to this question, it might be worth lingering on the fairly solid premise that whoever set the type for the 1598 and Folio versions of *Love's Labour's Lost* likely did not see erroneous stupidity here. The extant copies of Q1 *Love's Labour's Lost*, as Paul Werstine has demonstrated, show evidence of stop-press corrections and, while it is unclear whether or not the forme that contains 'Bome boon for boon prescian' was ever corrected (no variant states have been found), Werstine suspects that whoever dealt with the typesetting for *Love's Labour's Lost* had some knowledge of Latin.¹⁶ With that in mind, he suggests the play's many extant errors in Latin case, number and spelling might have been left uncorrected on otherwise corrected formes because they were assumed to be part of the conventional, stage-pedant satire aimed at Holofernes and Nathaniel.¹⁷ And while other kinds of errors in Q1 *Love's Labour's Lost* were changed when the Folio text was set (possibly, though not certainly, from a corrected or supplemented version of Q1), the strange passage was reprinted as is – and it was retained in F2 (1632), in which other errors in foreign languages that were retained in F1 were amended.¹⁸ For at least a few early readers of *Love's Labour's Lost*, then, 'Bome boon for boon prescian' seemed like a perfectly reasonable thing for Holofernes to say. That inexplicable line at that moment seemed to them to be as intelligible or, at the very least, as intelligible as anything else in the text they were creating. Scholars, apparently, sometimes say absolutely meaningless things.

POETIC NONSENSE

The kinds of questions Stephen Orgel pursues in his foundational brief essay 'The Poetics of Incomprehensibility' are clearly relevant here, though in a slightly different key. What if our

impulse to make sense out of nonsense hides an important facet of a Shakespearean text? What if our 'commonsense' decision to perform our/Shakespeare's learnedness by clarifying obscurity and emending the impossible interferes with other kinds of meaning that shaped the reception of Shakespeare's plays in print and performance? For Orgel, these questions are inspired by cruxes caused by unclear diction or obscure constructions, not outright nonsense (e.g. Hermione's odd phrase 'strength of limit' in *The Winter's Tale*).¹⁹ As a result, even in the midst of his brilliant critique of modern editors' Burkhartian assumptions that the English Renaissance existed as 'an integrated culture that still spoke a universal language', Orgel has a tendency to preserve, if only partially, an underlying authority in the person of an intelligent Shakespeare: in every bit of textual obscurity, he suggests, 'the playwright must ... have meant something'.²⁰ As we have seen, however, in the case of *Love's Labour's Lost*, it is in no way clear that the earliest readers of the play would have felt this way. 'Bome boon for boon prescian' is not obscure,

¹⁶ Paul Werstine, 'Variants in the First Quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost*', *Shakespeare Survey* 12 (Cambridge, 1979), 35–47. Werstine's supposition is based on the skill showed by White's shop with printing Latin text in other books, in addition to his observation that Latin goes uncorrected on formes which show evidence of careful proofreading elsewhere. This was, in his assessment, a case of educated non-correction.

¹⁷ Werstine, 'Variants in the First Quarto', pp. 42–5.

¹⁸ On F *Love's Labour's Lost*, see Stanley Wells, 'The copy for the Folio text of *Love's Labour's Lost*', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 33, 130 (1982), 137–47 along with the critique of Wells's conclusions by Sonia Massai in *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 144–9. It is worth noting, too, that the title page of the 1598 edition advertises that the play has been 'Newly corrected and amended', suggesting that there may be a lost earlier edition of the play (Q0). If so, then this odd passage in the 1598 edition might have already survived one round of edits – though since we have no idea what the text of Q0 looks/looked like, it is impossible to say for sure.

¹⁹ Stephen Orgel, 'The Poetics of Incomprehensibility', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991), 432–7.

²⁰ Orgel, 'The poetics of incomprehensibility', pp. 437 and 436.

exactly. It does not prove an emotional state or confuse for the purpose of plot development. It is more like a bearer of non-signification, unlearned and not smart, yet passed over or accepted in edition after edition, meaning be damned.

There may, in fact, be a potentially learned reason for this nonsensical phrase to have seemed properly, even artfully, placed in the lines of Holofernes. There was a healthy tradition of poetic nonsense in the period, a tradition that sat adjacent to the satirical portraits of pedants and needless Latinate complexity in early modern England. Here, for example, is a commendatory poem written by Thomas Randolph for the 1630 edition of James Shirley's play *The Grateful Servant*. The voice Randolph adopts borrows more than a bit from the figure of the stage-pedant:

I cannot fulminate or tonitruate words;
To puzz'le intellects my ninth lasse affords
No sychophronian buskins, nor can straine
Gargantuan lines to Gigantize thy veine,
Nor make a iusiurand, that thy great playes
Are terra del fo'gos or incognitae.
Thy Pegasus in his admird carreere
Curvets on Capreolls of nonsense here.²¹

Randolph's jokey fustian pedantism is an offshoot of the rich vein of seventeenth-century nonsense poetry documented at some length by Noel Malcolm in his anthology *The Origins of English Nonsense*.²² Much of this poetry dances along the borderline of referential intelligence, though it is always, in the end, meaningless. Take this snippet from a John Taylor poem printed in his pamphlet *Sir Gregory Nonsense: His Newes from no place*:

Then did the Turnetripes on the Coast of France
Catch fifteen hundred thousand Grashoppers,
With fourteene Spanish Needles bumbasted,
Poach'd with the Egges of fourescore Flanders Mares,
Mounted upon the foote of Caucasus,
They whorld the footeball of conspiring fate²³

Given this ludicrous mess, it might not be surprising to learn that Taylor's epistolary preface in *Sir Gregory Nonsense* begins with a familiar salutation to the pamphlet's entirely imaginary

dedicatee, Master Trim Tram Senceles: 'Most *Honorificabilitudinitatibus*' (A3r). Nearly ten years earlier, Taylor had experimented with pedantic nonsense verse in a text that explicitly named the 'no place' from which Sir Gregory hailed: *Odcomb's Complaint: Or CORIATS funeral Epicedium . . .*, which was printed in London, despite the mock colophon at the foot of the title page, 'Printed for merrie recreation, and are to be sold at the salvation in *Utopia*. 1613.' This pamphlet opens with a verse apology that makes Taylor sound at times like Berowne expounding upon the formal decorousness of his meaningless 'green geese' crack: 'I know my Dactils, and my Spondees well; / My true proportion, & my equal measure' (A3r). The point is more or less proven by the pamphlet's collection of nonsense poems written, ostensibly, to mourn the death of Thomas Coryate, author of the infamous travel text *Coryats Crudities* (1611). That book, in turn, is a veritable mother lode of nonsense verse that sounds quite like the impossible Latin of Holofernes. Among its many prefatory poems, *Coryats Crudities* contains several written in authentically structured nonsensical foreign languages. The most famous of the bunch is titled 'In the Utopian tongue', by Henry Peacham, and it begins with this truly mystifying couplet: 'Ny thalomin ythsi Coryate lachmah babowns / O Asiam Europans Americ-werowans.'²⁴ Not to be outdone, Taylor included an 'Epitaph in

²¹ James Shirley, *The Gratefull Servant* (London, 1630), A3r. The text gives 'sychophronian'; pedants of my stripe will like to know that this is a misreading for 'lychophronian'.

²² Malcolm, *Origins of English Nonsense*; for more on Taylor's nonsense projects, see Rebecca Fall, 'Popular nonsense, according to John Taylor and Ben Jonson', *Studies in English Literature* 57.1 (2017), 87–110; Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Philadelphia, PA, 2009), esp. pp. 1–93; and, in a different vein, Stephen Booth, *Precious Nonsense: The Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonson's Epitaphs on His Children, and Twelfth Night* (Berkeley, 1998).

²³ John Taylor, *Sir Gregory Nonsense: His Newes from no place* (London, 1622), sig. B6r.

²⁴ Thomas Coryate, *Coryats Crudities* (London, 1611), sig. 11r.

the Utopian tongue' in *Odcomb's Complaint*, which begins 'Nortumblum callimūquash omystoliton quashte burashte, / Scribuke woshtay solusbay perambulatushte' (B3r).²⁵ That poem sits alongside an 'Epitaph in the Barmooda tongue, which must be pronounced with the accent of the grunting of the hogge' (a brief sample: 'Animogh trogh deradrogh maramogh hogh Flondrogh calpsogh' (B2v)).²⁶

These experiments in quasi-exotic, placelessly foreign nonsense poetry tempt the scholar in all of us by being almost language. Like *Bome boon for boon prescian*, the Utopian or 'Barmoodan' lines of Taylor and Peacham arrange phonemes in believable sequences, luring readers (and editors) into trying to solve the puzzle of translation. The few times I have presented these poems on slides in public lectures, I have poked fun at my audience members, knowing that many of them were doing their best to parse them out or solve their seeming mysteries (I asked – they were). But as far as I can tell, the pieces of these puzzles add up to no more and no less than a particularly effective kind of scholar bait, an emptiness that acts on us, that jibes at us, that tests us with its nothing. If words can have agency, these are just begging to be glossed.

On at least one occasion, they were. One nonsense poem in *Coryats Crudities* presents its own helpful scholar in its margins, like Spenser's 'collaborator' E. K. in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. But whereas E. K. generally makes sense, the glossing voice in John Hoskins's 'Cabalisticall verses' intervenes in an entirely meaningless context, defining in some detail the word 'Gymnosophist,' but leaving unexplained the remainder of the poem, including, for example, its reference to 'your equinoctial pasticrust / Proiecting out a purple chariot wheele'.²⁷ Hoskins's marginal gloss on 'Gymnosophist' holds the gesture of annotation up to the satirical gaze, manipulating and exposing scholarly credit by ironizing it.²⁸ The joke here not only pokes fun at pedants who take their classical vocabularies a bit too seriously, but it also brings its wide range of readers into a knowing community that might

now recognize, whatever their level of education, that there are different styles or dispositions in the social field defined by what Carsten Madsen has called the 'hermeneutic gesture' of the gloss.²⁹ There is, again, a joke for more learned readers built into the accessible premise – the first 'Utopian' poem, which appeared in the earliest editions of Thomas More's *Utopia*, contains the word 'Gymnosophoan' in the midst of its own nonsense language. But as is the case with Costard's 'honorificabilitudinitatibus', one does not really need to be formally educated to learn from this glossing joke. A marginal definition of nothing can function quite well as a joke on its own terms. We do not need to be experts on no-place for it to do its work.

SENSIBLE IN THE DULLER PARTS

Modern editors and teachers tend to not engage with this kind of contextual nonsense when they decide how to handle obscure, meaningless passages in Shakespeare. Generally speaking, we share Theobald's assumption that something as disorganized as '*Bome boon for boon prescian*' could not be

²⁵ The tilde in 'callimūquash' stands in for the printer's mark indicating that the word has been shortened to save space on the line (usually an N or M has been omitted). But in this case, it is hard to know exactly what is missing here. What is the longer version of this imaginary, non-existent word? Ask John Taylor.

²⁶ For recent work on Coryate and the prefatory poems that appeared in (and out of) his *Crudities*, see Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 102–52; Anthony Parr, *Renaissance Mad Voyages: Experiments in Early Modern English Travel* (Burlington, VT, 2015), pp. 165–76; and Katharine Craik, 'Reading *Coryats Crudities* (1611)', *SEL* 44 (2007), 43–69.

²⁷ Coryate, sig. e6r. Sir Andrew Aguecheek uses similar language as he recalls Feste joking around about 'the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus' (2.3.23).

²⁸ On the ways in which authors and readers sort through and create meaning in glosses, see Jane Griffith, *Diverting Authority: Experimental Glossing Practice in Manuscript and Print* (Oxford, 2015).

²⁹ Carsten Madsen, 'The Rhetoric of Commentary', *Glossator* 3 (2010), 19–30.

a purposeful or, at the very least, a meaningful element in a Shakespearean text. There are, I have suggested, good reasons for our resistance to nonsense of this sort. But as we pursue attempts to undo textual tangles, we should do so for reasons other than the less-than-clear idea that they (and their entanglers) interfere with our access to the performance of Shakespeare's learnedness. If we use the Shakespearean text as a screen onto which we project our most knowledgeable selves, if we ignore the cultural place of obscurity or nonsense, we run the risk of reproducing Holofernes's and Nathaniel's own pedantic errors in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Those imaginary scholars are infuriated by nonsensical constructions which disrupt their fantasy of an ideal, cogent style. Nathaniel's assessment of Dull's capabilities sets out the broader social logic at play here. Listen for the echoes of Rancière's stultified brute:

Sir, he hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book. He hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink. His intellect is not replenished. He is only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts. And such barren plants are set before us that we thankful should be – which we of taste and feeling are – for those parts that do fructify in us more than he. (4.2.24–9)

Shakespeare here simultaneously enacts and mocks the familiar pattern in which one person's presumably poor performance is used to set off the skills possessed by 'we of taste and feeling'. Nathaniel does it to Dull. We all do it to Nathaniel, when we laugh at his pretensions. But as we critique the figure of the pedant, and as we seek to identify or clarify the errors of Holofernes or Nathaniel or Shakespeare or a compositor both in text and in sociable performance, we should be clear that a larger set of relationships is at stake. The satirical figure of the pedant always offers more than just a satire of pedantry. The gloss always offers more than a helpful explanation. Both help create our understanding of the practice of teaching and learning in which different styles and textual markers structure a larger field. Our classifications or ranked judgements of teachers, students, texts, and modes of education can mask (if we adapt

a Bourdieuvian frame) a wider network of economic or political relationships that subtend or structure the limits of stylistic possibility built into the educational field.³⁰ When we read the pedant in *Love's Labour's Lost*, when we teach the outlines of the early modern educational field, when we separate out the stupid labour of a print-house compositor from a hypothetically intelligent Shakespearean copytext, and when we explain the true meaning of a meaningless phrase, we are likewise contributing to the history of our own emplacement within educational institutions and their corollary networks. This process should be named as such.

As I hope I have begun to suggest here, our own performances of knowledge in these contexts are deeply pressured by the incomprehensible hybrid Latinglish in the early printings of *Love's Labour's Lost*. When we work to erase it, to render the words of our pedants sensible, we draw lines that do not simply reveal the differences between the stupid and the smart, or the knowing and the unknowing, but rather bring those categories into being.³¹ It is all too easy to use these categories to fill the empty spaces of St Paul's churchyard with shadowy compositors and scribes, all standing between us and Shakespeare's educated genius. It is easy, too, to fill our classrooms with imagined students who cannot understand what our own fine brains have to offer. But rather than honoring ourselves, what if we attempt to find a bearing marked by being *antihonorificabilitudinitatibus* in these scenarios? Complex knowledge and explication is never the only route to textual, semantic or comic clarity. We do not have to be masters of figure and trope and Latin to understand the joke of the pedant figure; we do not have to be well-versed in *sententiae* culled from Horace or Cicero or simple school-room dialogues to enjoy *Love's Labour's Lost*; we do not have to have been taught by

³⁰ See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Lauretta Clough (Palo Alto, CA, 1996).

³¹ Cf. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, p. 6.

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST AND UNTEACHABLE WORDS

a ponderously self-obsessive language-twister or a terrible punster to get the mockery that is aimed at Holofernes. The point of all these difficult terms, especially in performance as words float into being, is not just to wink at audience members who have been in school. Satirical pedantry, like other forms of art or text that depict differences based on cultural competencies, can incorporate new knowledge communities in audiences and readers, regardless of their previous experience with school-room pedantry itself. If early modern drama really was able to inflect the political life or affiliations of its participants, if drama could re-form social communities into new arrangements without explicitly setting out to do so, stage pedants might be seen as exemplary figures in that process. I hope that lesson can still be learned by us, as we think about our own places in contemporary

life as teachers of a subject and, more particularly, of an author who is on the one hand a standard-bearer of privileged culture but is also on the other hand a metonymic figure for a caricatured pedantry within the academy.

In the classroom, we might perform Shakespeare's unteachable words in ways that permit them to be just that. We might hold up their incomprehensibility not as something that always needs to be squashed out of existence in an edition or explicated into sense but use them rather as the tools they are, use them to animate comic scenarios in which teachers and students share in the pleasure of befuddlement. In our time of deep confusion, we might find ways to let a comic fog do its job, even as we clarify for ourselves and our communities the political stakes of knowledge and our struggle to put it to good ends.