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"LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST" AS A LOVE DEBATE CONSIDERATION OF THE ENDING

You, that way; we, this way
Exeunt Omnes
(V, II, 1. 927)¹

The unconventional ending of Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* has attracted a great deal of critical attention, but one thing seems to have gone unobserved — namely, the dependence of Shakespeare's unfulfilled ending on a medieval native genre: the semi-dramatic love debate². Clearly, Shakespeare thwarts our expectations of romantic comedy by postponing the vows of matrimony and spoils the final effect of his courtly pageant by failing to crown his play with betrothal celebrations, the frequent symbols of love's triumph. The precedents of his unusual ending go beyond romantic comedy and courtly pageant and are to be found in the rhetorical structure of the medieval love debate.

The conflictus of Spring and Winter is an example of the once popular medieval debate genre³ evidenced in *Love's Labor's Lost*. The two contrasted

¹ The stage-manager's or printer's addition in the Shakespeare Folio, the line is particularly viable. Expurgated by the Arden editors (1951 edition of Richard David, based on the 1906 edition of H. C. Hart), it reappears in the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Hardin Craig and David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1973), and is in general favored in Shakespearean productions. The reasons for the viability of the line are to be looked for in the play's structure.

² In the discussion of *Love's Labor's Lost* the debate is occasionally mentioned with reference to the conflictus of Spring and Winter closing the play. The dramatic use of similar archaisms in Shakespearean drama is discussed for tragedy in Howard Felperin's *Shakespearean Representation: Mimesis and Modernity in Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton 1977), but the subject is not generalized for Shakespearean comedy. Madeleine Doran is aware of the possibilities of exploring the debate structure for the study of Elizabethan drama. She is also aware of the structural dependence of *Love's Labor's Lost* on the debate genre. Discussing the sources of Elizabethan drama (*Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama*, Madison 1964, p. 315 she mentions, in passing, *Love's Labor's Lost* as an example of the use of a debate in the court pageant in which the issue under debate (love and chastity) is settled "in a genuinely dramatic way."

³ The debate form is discussed in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ed. John Welles (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1907); *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ed. J. W. H. Atkins, Cambridge 1959, M. Doran,

personifications argue for their superiority over one another by merely suggesting, in place of more usual cataloguing, their respective advantages and disadvantages. Originally, the debate form was no more than a rhetorical exercise designed to present contrastive cases fairly and exhaustively, and the conflict was left unresolved since its resolution was felt to be a matter of personal preference or practical consideration and did not pertain to the logical display of argumentation. The more specific love debate—*dit amoureux*—was an extension of the form and combined its rhetorical and inconclusive structure with the quasi-judicial form of the court of love in which a love claim was presented. Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* provides a late example of the form: the formel's (OE for female bird) suitors state their cases and are dismissed, the judgment being postponed for a year. As in the case of a regular debate, the love debate is used as an exposition of the conflicting claims of opposed or polar values—love and chastity, love and lust, love and honor—with a pronounced generic tendency to leave the arguments stated but no solution reached. Some clear examples are provided by Andrea Capellanus' series of dialogues in his *De amore*, a sort of practical guide for a seducer. None of his specific cases resolves in consummation; the interest rests in the battle of wits within a definite set of premises. Pastourelle may be considered a later development of the genre, with a witty peasant girl thwarting a design on her by her social superior. The two sides to the question are presented, but the involved persons part unchanged after their exchange of arguments. In this case, a broadly philosophical argument based on the contradictory stances of chastity and lust is stressed above the resolution of a specific case.

The slight action of Shakespeare's play, with its limited psychological development of characters, seems to spring from the debate structure demonstrated above. The structure of *Love's Labor's Lost* is rhetorical—it oscillates between making the case for chastity and the case for love—and the play ends characteristically with an elipsis of fulfillment. As a rhetorical rather than a psychological play, *Love's Labor's Lost* is, by definition, a "no solution" play. It cannot fuse its issues of love and chastity into an easy oxymoron of "chaste love", a solution offered for example by Ben Jonson's *Love's Triumph* where at the end of the masque love is celebrated as "the right affection of the mind / the noble appetite for what is best"⁴. To end the debate of love and chastity with a march toward marriage ("chaste love"), but without psychological progression, would exalt love at the expense of chastity. The patterns of achieving higher love in Neoplatonic terms or in Erasmian charity through folly are glimpsed in the play; those

Endeavors of Art, pp. 309–322. *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Parliament of Fowls* are the classic examples. The presence of the birds in Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* is a curious coincidence. Both Chaucer and Shakespeare end their "debates" with bird songs celebrating Nature.

⁴ *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*, Ben Jonson's *Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel, New Haven—London 1969, p. 456. This is his later masque (1631) but similar sentiments about the "world of chaste desires" are found in his early nuptial masques, eg. *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly*, 1611.

resolutions are part of the play's rhetoric and are articulated in Berowne's Promethean speech. But these solutions are unattainable within the structure used in this play which is more concerned with the juxtaposition of the elements contrasted than a choice between them. *Love's Labor's Lost* thus works more clearly by the rule of paradox than by fusion of the juxtaposed elements. The final attempt at bringing love and chastity through the progression of action leads to the disclosure of the static nature of the play's concept. Little progress is made between the beginning and the end of the play, and thus the only proper way to finish is to suspend action. The play is left open-ended: "You, that way; we, this way" . . . (V, II, 1. 927). The issue will be declared solved in a year and a day's time.

Admittedly, Shakespeare seeks to achieve some mediation between love and chastity, or the state of affairs where "our loving [is] lawful, and our faith not torn" (IV, III 1. 282). This is the thesis assigned for dispute to his best rhetorician by the play's *spiritus movens*, King Ferdinand. The play starts with what is usually seen as its comic error: a pledge of chastity made by the young lords of Navarre. This vow is almost coincident in time with the arrival of an *escadron volant* of the spirited French ladies on a diplomatic mission. The attraction between the young people, who as a result of the oath find themselves in hostile camps, is obvious, immediate, and sincere. But the obstacle to their union is unsurmountable within the play finding love and chastity unreconcilable. Although the lords are eager to forsake their oaths, the marriagable ladies and diplomats know the value of the word and deem it proper that the oaths be kept. The princess swears by her virginity not to invade the territory forbidden to women and remains happily outside the court, camping out in the kingdom of the outdoors where she and other votaries of love in her camp are perfectly at ease. Within the double framework of oaths—the lords' oaths of chastity and the ladies' oath to respect it—the two parties wage a "civil war of wits" in which the lords are primarily "oath breakers" to be reformed and the ladies are "pact makers"⁵ insistent on not compromising their standards which (despite Samuel Johnson's prudery) are consistently high. We see the lords' clumsy efforts to withdraw from their initial position in their cycle of sonnets, followed by an attempt to woo the ladies in disguise when they are barred from plain dealing by their original offense and suspicions that their pledges of fidelity could not be taken in clear conscience. When the ladies react to what they perceive as a new falsity, the original mutual attraction goes sadly astray in "mock for mock"; the play becomes a paradigm of the failure at finding the proper linguistic medium of communicating and accepting love. The source of the difficulty here is the inverted problem of chastity. The usual sexual roles in courtship are reversed as a result of the initial oath-taking; the lords are willing enough to be seduced

⁵ The terms are borrowed from Ralph Berry's "Words of Mercury" (Shakespeare Survey, 22, 1969, p. 72) where they are used to characterize the type of discourse between these two groups of characters and are not linked to the thematic discussion of the play.

from their oaths of chastity but the girls of France would obviously prefer to be courted themselves and reject the roles of seductresses to which they are reduced by the situation. In consequence there is no way out of this impasse and the play is brought to an end. Marcade appears as a *deus ex machina* to justify the ladies' withdrawal. The lords' self-imposed initial oath of three years' retirement into studious and celibate life is reimposed by the ladies, although they reduce the time to "a twelvemonth and a day" out of mercy. The initial error of the lords is corrected. The love from which they shut themselves off is acknowledged. They have both their "love lawful" and their "oath not torn". The possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation at the close of the term is suggested. This resolution, however, hinges on still another conditional promise or oath; the outcome cannot be simply taken for granted. In a sense, the play ends exactly where it began; the action took us full circle.

Of little psychological interest, the play remains "an intellectual fancy"⁶ or an "idea" play stressing the presentation of the arguments for chastity and love in the rhetorical and dramatic manner and closing with an unavoidable though admittedly unsatisfying outcome in the postponement of the final vows. The underlying debat structure would allow no fusion of the two elements into a higher form of love. The initial premises remaining unchangeable, the play concentrates on the rhetorical display of scintillating wit. Shakespeare continues the debate form devised, it may be emphasized, to air the issues and leave the arguments suspended. The main interest is in stating the case and not in reaching solutions of individual cases.

"STRACONE ZACHODY MIŁOSNE" JAKO DEBATA O MIŁOŚCI

STRESZCZENIE

Badając szekspirowski teatr w teatrze, krytyka interesuje się skamienielinami starszych form w utworach Szekspira, świadomą i celową archaizację u autora, który wykorzystuje formy teatralne będące jeszcze w obiegu, ale odczuwane już jako przestarzałe, dla wydobycia kontrastu kulturowego, zmagania się starego z nowym w bynajmniej niejednolitej kulturze Renesansu. *Stracone zachody miłosne* są sztuką eksperymentalną, nawiązującą w swojej strukturze do archaizowanej formy średniowiecznej *debaty*, czyli *rozprawy*. Dokładniej mówiąc, ta wczesna sztuka "szkolna" Szekspira kontynuuje szczególną gałąź rozprawy, *dit amoureux*, reprezentowaną, biorąc przykładowo, w *Parliament of Fowles* Chaucera w scenie z prezentacją pretensji miłosnych w odroczonej rozprawie, rozwiniętą dalej w serii *dialogów* — ćwiczeń retorycznych w *De Amore* Andre Capellanusa czy ich sielankowej kontynuacji w *pastourelli*. Dialog *Wiosny i Zimy*, prawdziwa debata w *Straconych zachodach*... jest archaicznym wtrętem w sztukę, przyswajającej swojej strukturze formę rozprawy.

⁶ G. Bullough, *The Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, New York 1957, p. 427. Also H. Granville-Baker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Princeton 1947, 1st series, Vol. 4, p. 10: "Instead of dancing we have a dance of dialogue;" "the play's spontaneous flow is regulated by the play of ideas."

W odróżnieniu od szekspirowskiej *komedii romantycznej* czy wcześniejszej dworskiej *apot ozy* (*pageants*), gdzie zaloty kończą się ślubem między młodymi oraz celebracją związku czyli apot ozą miłości, *Stracone zachody*,... mają otwartą konstrukcję, z zawieszeniem rozwiązania. Przy mizernej akcji i słabo rozwiniętym rysunku psychologicznym postaci, sztuka posiada konstrukcję retorycznej debaty na temat przewagi bądź czystości, bądź miłości. Miłosne utarczki — przy wzajemnej oczywistej atrakcji obu stron — odbywają się w ramach podwójnej serii przysięg: ślubów czystości kawalerów z Navarry i przysięgi szanowania tych ślubów, złożonej przez królową i jej dworki, które jako panny na wydaniu i dyplomatki, negocjujące układ międzypaństwowy, znają wagę raz danego słowa. Pogodzenie sprzeczności, tj. uprawomocnienie miłości ("our loving lawful and faith untorn", IV, III, 282) uniemożliwia struktura sztuki. Panowie wprawdzie chętnie daliby się odwieść od swoich ślubów, ale odwrócenie roli płci w tych zalotach na opak nie odpowiada pannom. Marcade zjawia się jako *deus ex machina* zawieszając akcję i odkładając decyzję do rozstrzygnięcia „za rok i jeden dzień” — formuła znana ze średniowiecznej debaty, gdzie nie chodzi o rozstrzygnięcie specyficznego problemu, lecz o możliwie wyczerpujące przedstawienie argumentacji za i przeciw. „My w tę stronę, a wy w tę stronę” — pary rozchodzą się przeciwnymi wyjściami. *Stracone zachody miłosne* są zatem — zgodnie z tradycyjną analizą — „sztuką idei”, „fantazją intelektualną”. Wyjściowe warunki, nie ulegając zmianie, stanowią przesłanki błyskotliwej gry dowcipu, kontynuującej gatunek *debaty*, a więc średniowiecznego ćwiczenia retorycznego.