A S IT DOES in *The Comedy of Errors*, the losing-finding antithesis forms the structure of *Love's Labor's Lost*. The formula is clearly stated in the *summa epitasis* in Act IV, when the King of Navarre and his three courtiers have fallen in love and find it impossible to keep the part of their oaths that forbids them to see women. In their quandary, they turn to Berowne, their greatest wit, for a way out of the dilemma, and he responds with a masterpiece of oratory. We shall analyze it later in detail; we need to note here only the final paradox in Berowne’s string of paradoxes, offered as excuses to giving in to the promptings of nature: “Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves, / Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths” (IV.iii.357–58). Even though Berowne’s argument is fashioned on the paradox of salvation, it is a piece of palpable sophistry. In this respect it resembles Proteus’s attempt in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to rationalize his treachery toward his friend and his beloved into an act of self-discovery:

Julia I lose, and Valentine I lose;  
If I keep them, I needs must lose myself;  
If I lose them, thus find I by their loss:  
For Valentine, myself; for Julia, Sylvia.  
(Il.vi.19–22)

Berowne’s and Proteus’s protests underline the danger of self-loss through disloyalty, but the comforting feeling that we are watching “happy comedies” reassures us that appropriate findings will take place in the end. Proteus will, after all, marry his Julia, and Valentine will get his Sylvia just as Berowne will win his Rosalind (even though it happens that in the latter case marriage will have to be delayed).
Love’s Labor’s Lost adds to the movement from losing to finding a related theme that was new for Shakespeare and proved fruitful for his later patterns of self-knowledge, the theme of the quest for the self. King Ferdinand of Navarre and his courtiers have founded an academy devoted to the pursuit of learning; but it turns out that what they are most in need of knowing is themselves, and, in a confused way, they set out to gain this knowledge. Theirs is an ill-considered quest, demonstrating mainly how not to go about it; but through their errors and through some hints at how self-discovery can take place, the play gives us, as long ago Edward Dowden noted, an insight into Shakespeare’s ideas of self-culture.¹

The idea of a learned academy provides an appropriate context for the theme of self-quest. Although academies were in vogue in the Renaissance, it is tempting to think that Shakespeare was stimulated to write a play on this subject by reading Pierre de La Primaudaye’s French Academy.² Shakespeare could have found in this book both the theme of the quest and the traditional humanistic recipes for achieving self-knowledge. La Primaudaye quoted in an early chapter the saying of Heraclitus, “I have sought myself,” and went on to point out how man could seek himself by studying his body and soul and their natures. Self-knowledge was for La Primaudaye as for Shakespeare the prerequisite for all other knowledge. But there are more differences than similarities in the behavior and goal of the four young men of Anjou and the four aristocrats of Navarre. The former begin their enterprise with a sense of its difficulty and with humility, the latter with overeagerness and overconfidence (except for Berowne, who joins the others reluctantly and against his better knowledge). La Primaudaye’s courtiers are aware of the need for moderation in learning and interrupt their intellectual pursuits for a considerable time; Shakespeare’s academicians devote themselves immoderately to learning, seclude themselves, and attempt, unsuccessfully, to live ascetically.

I believe that there was a more important source for the theme of the quest for self-knowledge in Love’s Labor’s Lost than La Primaudaye, whose influence on Shakespeare must, after all, remain doubtful. This source was the general convention of the warfare of the Christian knight. We have noted earlier the seminal book of this tradition, Erasmus’s Enchiridion Militis Christiani; and it may also be helpful to call to mind its most notable artistic product, Albrecht Dürer’s famous engraving Knight, Death, and Devil (1513). Eras-
mus's book, be it recalled, strikes a characteristic balance of religion and philosophy and brings both under the heading of nosce teipsum: self-knowledge is the first point of wisdom for the Christian knight. Equipped with the humility derived from it, the spiritual warrior may hope to reach the castle of knowledge and faith, which in Dürer's drawing towers above the dim glen haunted by death and devil. But Shakespeare needed no direct acquaintance with either Enchiridion or Dürer's engraving to know the convention. He was indoctrinated with it from his early youth, and he may have associated it, in particular, with the only academy he ever attended, the grammar school. Here he would have found it, for instance, in Palingenius's Zodiacus Vitae, the moral-didactic poem that appears in most Elizabethan curricula. In his poeticized version of the warfare of life in the sixth book, "Virgo," Palingenius specifically singled out the hardship of scholars: fasting, lack of sleep, and sexual abstinence. But even if Shakespeare should never have read Zodiacus Vitae, he was still intimately acquainted with the slogans and the strategy of the spiritual battle through Saint Paul's various exhortations, which the Book of Common Prayer had made part of church ritual. From birth to death, the Elizabethans were reminded that they needed to fight devil and flesh. At baptism, the minister received the child into "the congregation of Christ's flock" and signed him with the cross in order "manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." The Catechism in particular reminded the children of their duties as Christian soldiers. It informed them that their godfathers and godmothers had promised in their name that they would "forsake the devil and all his works and pompes, the vanities of the wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." As the Preamble explained, they must be confirmed so that "they may receive strength and defence against all temptations to sin and the assaults of the world and the devil," for they had now come "to that age that, partly by the frailty of their own flesh, partly by the assaults of the world and the devil, they begin to be in danger to fall into sundry kinds of sin." We can be assured that William Shakespeare, who at a later time took the vow of a godfather himself when his godson William Walker was baptized in 1608, was enrolled in the army of the combatants against the devil and the flesh.

In Love's Labor's Lost, the spiritual warfare convention, of course, is made subservient to the purposes of comedy as is everything else.
One may well suspect that in using so many of the slogans of the convention and showing their ineffectiveness, Shakespeare may have had a satirical purpose. He may have taken his revenge for some of the overdoses of moral advice he received. But he did not poke fun at this advice as such; he did not satirize the idea of spiritual warfare, only its inopportune, immature, and ill-considered application. Berowne, unprincipled as he is in joining an enterprise he recognizes as doomed to failure, points out well his colleagues' naiveté in believing that the devil and the flesh can be easily conquered. Even the pedagogues in Shakespeare's audience could have taken some satisfaction from the fact that the play proved one of their favorite axioms, that "the study of love letteth and turneth away every other study." If they had looked on this development with a jaundiced eye, they would have missed, of course, that other, more important point of the play, that it is natural for young men to fall in love and that nature must not be suppressed by an unnatural asceticism.

In order to fully understand the thought and the humor of *Love's Labor's Lost*, one needs some acquaintance with the strategy of spiritual warfare and a familiarity with its vocabulary. It forms a major part of the religious terminology with which, as critics have noted, the play is saturated. Only if one knows what is behind this saturation—a surprising phenomenon at first sight—does he understand the irony in the courtiers' speeches at the turn of events: the disciples of philosophy merge their slogans of spiritual warfare, which sanctifies their pursuit of learning, into a pseudo-religious idiom of courtly love, which glorifies their pursuit of ladies. Shakespeare's best verbal effects come from his clever juggling of the words and ideas of the two contradictory conventions.

In the idiom of learning, the vocabulary of spiritual warfare is prominent from the beginning. It is unmistakable in the king's opening speech, more a trumpet call than an inaugural address:

    Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
    Live regist'red 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)

Ferdinand calls for battle against enemies more dangerous than a mysterious "School of Night" or a dictionary maker and translator named Florio: his foes are the two waylayers of the Knight in Dürer's engraving, Death and Devil. Ferdinand pledges himself and his three followers to do battle for honor by overcoming the "scythe's keen edge" of death and time in despite of their allies, the "affections" and the "world's desires," that is, the fleshly temptations, usually symbolized in the spiritual warfare convention by the devil. Ferdinand's speech has a general resemblance to exhortations for spiritual warfare, such as, for instance, the opening of Erasmus's Enchiridion:

The first point is: we must needs have in mind continually that the life of mortal men is nothing but a certain perpetual exercise of war, as Job witnesseth, a warrior proved to the uttermost and never overcome; and that the most part of men be overmuch deceived whose minds this world, as a juggler, holdeth occupied with delicious and flattering pleasures, which also, as though they had conquered all their enemies, make holiday out of season none otherwise verily than in a very assured peace. It is a marvelous thing to behold how without care and circumspection we live, how idly we sleep, now upon one side and now upon the other, when without ceasing we are besieged with so great a number of armed vices, sought and hunted for with so great craft.

Against these enemies, Erasmus enjoined never-ending watchfulness; he warned in the words of the heading of the first chapter, "We must watch and look about us evermore while we be in this life." He found those particularly prone to defeat who acted "as though they had conquered all their enemies"—men who have the overconfidence displayed by Ferdinand. The Erasmian model warrior prayed for victory in the awareness that his own power and strength were insufficient and that he needed the help of God; he did not claim already to have conquered.

In the context of the spiritual warfare convention the king uses in his opening speech, his sentiment on acquiring honor is incon-
gruous. Erasmus thought that the Christian warrior should seek his reward in heaven; he expressly decried the quest of earthly glory ("Against ambition or desire of honor and authority"). For Palingenius, the whole success of spiritual warfare hinged on the right attitude toward honor; he broached the subject by answering an imaginary gentleman's contention that all virtue aimed at gaining honor: "for her own self is virtue sought, and not for honor's sake." 6 Palingenius here opposed the Christian humanists' ideal of a humble and limited self to the expansive selves of the courtiers and gentlemen. But King Ferdinand's heroic expansiveness bursts through the shell of the spiritual idiom when he proclaims that the academy will make him and his friends "heirs of all eternity"—the sentiment echoes rather immodestly the hope of the baptismal service that the infants enlisted in Christ's army "be made heirs of everlasting salvation."

The more discerning in Shakespeare's audience also must have noted a basic confusion in Ferdinand's philosophic terminology when they heard him acclaim the academy as "still and contemplative in living art." "Living art" appears to be a translation of *ars vitæ* or *ars vivendi*, the Stoics' and Cicero's terms for moral philosophy. 7 But as such it could not be "still and contemplative" since it belonged to the "active" part of philosophy that was distinct from the contemplative part. La Primaudaye, like other Renaissance moralists, separated philosophy "into two parts only: into the contemplative part and into the moral, which some call active." A few sentences later, La Primaudaye described this active part as the "art and mistress of life"—a phrase similar to Ferdinand's "living art," but he also expressly associated with this art the rising above fortune "by despising glory and enduring contempt." 8 Ferdinand's confusion of basic philosophic terminology is symptomatic of his ignorance of the goals of both moral philosophy and Christian warfare. In seeking glory through establishing an academy of warriors of the spirit, Ferdinand violates these goals; his lack of self-knowledge threatens to make him lose the labor of love from the very beginning.

The oath-taking ceremony again evokes vividly the warfare convention as Ferdinand charges his courtiers: "If you are arm'd to do as sworn to do, / Subscribe to your deep oaths, and keep it too" (I.i.22–23). The very idea of taking oaths evokes the confirmation ceremony and perhaps also the vow of the Nazarites, which Erasmus held up as exemplary (sig. D8r). But most important, the rhythm
in which the courtiers reaffirm their oaths is reminiscent of the baptismal service with its threefold vows of the godparents as well as of the exhortation-and-response method of the Catechism. Somewhat like children repeating the promise their godparents had given in their steads about fighting the devil and the flesh, Ferdinand's subjects dedicate themselves to their oaths—Berowne, it is true, with some reluctance. First Longaville affirms his resolution for a three-year fast:

The mind shall banquet, though the body pine.
Fat paunches have lean pates; and dainty bits
Make rich the ribs, but bankrupt quite the wits.

(25-27)

This variation of the familiar proverb plenus venter non studet liberet fits into the warfare convention; in Erasmus's words, "The body waxeth lean, but the mind waxeth fat. The beauty of the skin vanisheth away, but the beauty of the mind appeareth bright" (sig. G4').

When Dumain adds to this renunciation a touch of humanistic contemptus vulgi by throwing "the grosser manner of these world's delights / . . . upon the gross world's baser slaves" (29-30), he agrees quite with Erasmus's demand to forsake the pleasures of the world, to change silver for gold, flint for jewels, and to please the fewer but the better (G3v). Dumain confidently declares himself "mortified": "To love, to wealth, to pomp, I pine and die, / With all these living in philosophy" (31-32). His "mortification" echoes Paul's orders to the Christian soldier to mortify the body and the affections. In dying to "love, to wealth, to pomp," Dumain seems to answer the minister's question and prayer in the baptismal service: "Dost thou forsake the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world . . . ? . . . All carnal affections may die in them [i.e., the children], and . . . all things belonging to the spirit may live and grow in them." In joining those "living in philosophy," Dumain parallels this latter sentiment and also the minister's prayer at baptism that the child, "being dead unto sin and living unto righteousness, . . . may crucify the old man." Ferdinand's courtier vies with him for the prize of all eternity.

Only Berowne has sufficient self-knowledge to realize that "the old man" cannot be so easily mortified. He understands the nature of his affections and of those of man in general, and he knows that
the academy is doomed to failure. In the face of the altitudinal pro-
testations of the others, he plays the advocate of the devil, but he
does so being very much aware of the purposes of philosophy and of
the fine print in the contracts of spiritual warfare. It is almost as if
the devil in Dürer's engraving had come to life and started citing
scripture against the confident, armed knight. First, Berowne inter-
rogates the king about the aim of the studies to which the academi-
cians are pledged and elicits the answer that it is to seek "things hid
and barr'd . . . from common sense" (57). The Elizabethans, like
their teachers the humanists, no enemies of the sensus communis,
were accustomed to judge such highly speculative endeavors in the
light of the criticism by activist philosophers like Cicero who ob-
jected to those who "devote too much industry and too deep studies
to matters that are obscure and difficult and useless as well." 10
When Berowne singles out book astronomers, the "continual plot-
ters" and "earthly godfathers of heaven's light," as examples of the
aridity of mere theory, he sides with Cicero and the humanists. Palin-
genius ridiculed those who "search the secret things" and "headlong
fall, and prove themselves a laughing-stock thereby." 11 Astronomer-
astrologists were natural examples for the foolishness of a study that
searches for things removed from common sense; we surely need
not assume that Berowne aimed a satirical arrow at Sir Walter
Raleigh's astronomer! Berowne's two references to astronomers as
godfathers, who do no more than give names to stars (89, 93), recall
again the baptismal service; and when Berowne says that "Too much
to know is to know nought but fame" (92), that is, nothing but ru-
mors, he needles the king for his glorification of fame, of honor.
Berowne realizes the astral as well as the earthly weaknesses of the
philosophic spirit.

Berowne is, of course, quite the advocate of the devil when he
recommends study of such secret matters as where one may dine or
find where "mistresses from common sense are hid" (61 ff.), but
he has a splendid answer from the pages of spiritual warfare when
the king calls these pursuits "vain delight":

Why, all delights are vain; but that most vain
Which, with pain purchas'd, doth inherit pain,
As painfully to pore upon a book. . . .
(72-74)

Even Palingenius admitted the masochism of scholarship:
The other part of virtue that doth search with studious pain,
And, for to know, the causes hid of nature doth obtain,
And truth to learn that scarce you can at any time come by:
How hard and full of pain it is, they know that it do try . . .
By which he many books can make, what good gets he thereby? 12

Obviously, both Berowne and Palingenius have glanced at Eccles. 12: 12: “there is none end in making many books, and much reading is a weariness of the flesh.” In The Praise of Folly, Erasmus had Stultitia turn this reminder of the vanity of making and reading books against the scholars as Berowne does; awareness of the ultimate vanity of one’s own scholarly effort was the kind of folly that resembled saintliness.

Berowne, however, becomes quite the sinner when he advocates supplanting useless book learning by the study of ladies’ eyes; yet the twist in which he equates the pursuit of truth with the pursuit of love is a clever application of a religious tradition that exalted heavenly love above study. As Erasmus put it, “Then prepare thyself unto the study of sciences, but no further than thou mayst think them profitable to good living. . . . It is better to have less knowledge and more of love than to have more knowledge and not to love” (sig. G6r). Berowne, of course, equates “love” with eros and not, like Erasmus, with caritas. The interchangeability of the two, to which the courtly love tradition tended, later serves the courtier as an ingenious defense for oath-breaking:

It is religion to be thus forsworn;
For charity itself fulfils the law,
And who can sever love from charity?
(IV.iii.359-61)

In castigating the vanity of book learning, Berowne acclaims the superiority of love in a humorous conceit which also is evolved from the warfare convention. It is, he says, in vain for man

To seek the light of truth; while truth the while
Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look.
Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile;
So, ere you find where light in darkness lies,
Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes.
Study me how to please the eye indeed,
By fixing it upon a fairer eye;
Who dazzling so, that eye shall be his heed
And give him light that it was blinded by.
Study is like the heaven's glorious sun,
That will not be deep-search'd with saucy looks.

(I.i.75-85)

The nucleus for this conceit is in *Zodiacus Vitae*. Palingenius said more prosaically than Berowne that, in reading, light beguiles light: "Of many, whilst so much they read, both sight and eyes decay." And like Berowne, he found the light of truth neither in the pages of books nor in the course of the stars:

> Like as the owl of night
> Can not behold the shining sun with clear and perfect sight,
> So fares the mind of man; as oft as it intends to fly
> Aloft to search the secret things, falls headlong straight from high.  

For Palingenius, however, the sunlight of truth was not reflected in ladies' eyes but in "the inner eye" that saw God with the same spiritual certainty that brightened the eye of Dürer's lonely knight in his ascent through the dark glen. Yet Berowne's ladies' eyes make a nice contrast to the stars of the astronomers, and there was some warrant in the secular Platonism of the Renaissance to search for illumination in the beauty of women. Castiglione's Bembo acknowledged the admiration of feminine beauty as the first step in the stair of love by which the soul ascends until "it seeth in herself a shining beam of that light which is the true image of the angelic beauty partened with her."  

Berowne's conceit proves so much more ingenious when seen against this background than if it were aimed at an alleged "School of Night," as it has been held to be.

The sensible Berowne knows that his lord's ascetic rules cannot and will not work; the need to accommodate the French ladies that have come on embassy already points up the necessities that will vitiate the courtiers' oaths. As he puts it, slightly twisting a phrase in Nowell's *Catechism*, "Necessity will make us all forsworn / Three thousand times within this three years' space" (147-148). And he backs up this prophecy by what is, I believe, one of the most fundamental tenets of self-knowledge held by Shakespeare: "For every man with his affects is born, / Not by might mast'red, but by special grace" (149-50).

Berowne here espouses the orthodox anti-Stoic position of the
humanists and theologians when he insists that emotions cannot be completely suppressed. In *Enchiridion*, Erasmus sided in this question with Aristotle and the Peripatetics, who taught that the emotions were given to man by nature and could not be destroyed, but merely controlled. Such conventional arguments against the Stoics offer close parallels to Berowne's argument on necessity; Beroaldus, for instance, defended the Peripatetics against Cicero's attack in *Tusculan Disputations* (IV.xix.42), asserting with Horace that "nobody is born without faults" and agreeing with the Peripatetics that the emotions are implanted in man by providence and necessity. By attributing the final control of the emotions to "special grace," Berowne echoes the Catechism as well as the literature of self-knowledge and spiritual warfare.

Thus, clearly, if assurance is needed, Berowne's insight into human nature does not actually derive from women's eyes—"How well he's read, to reason against reading!" the king comments appropriately (94). Berowne can claim that he has said more for barbarism than the others can say for that "angel knowledge" (113), the reason being that some of his best arguments use angelic vocabulary. It is therefore natural for the king and the courtiers to turn to him for an ideological defense when, defeated by the temptations of the flesh, they have broken their oaths: "O, some authority how to proceed;/ Some tricks, some quillets, how to cheat the devil!" (IV.iii.283–84).

We are now in a position to see how Shakespeare structured *Love's Labor's Lost* on the losing-finding formula and the spiritual warfare convention, letting the language of the former gradually slide into the idiom of courtly love. It is on this plan that Shakespeare related the subplot to the main plot by making it into a scherzo variation of the dominant themes. The fantastic Spaniard, Armado, on whom the subplot centers, has come to provide "recreation" for the academicians by relating "in high-born words, the worth of many a knight / From tawny Spain lost in the world's debate" (I.i.170–71). But his first contribution to the academy is a literary masterpiece about a lost soul of a lower kind: his imitable letter about the amorous transgressions of the clown Costard, caught with "a child of our grandmother Eve, a female" in the park (250). Even the clown, however, knows his enemy in the warfare of life; says Costard: "Such is the simplicity of man to hearken after the flesh" (212). Amusingly we learn promptly that Costard's accuser, Armado, too has lost himself in the world's debates: he also has fallen
in love with that female, Jaquenetta. In the manner of a *miles gloriosus*, he tries to cover up this lamentable defeat by boasting his prowess: "If drawing my sword against the humour of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take Desire prisoner, and ransom him to any French courtier for a new-devis'd curtsy" (1.11.58 ff.). But Armado at least knows that he has succumbed to a mighty enemy: "Love is a familiar; Love is a devil. There is no evil angel but Love." Unlike King Ferdinand, he does not underestimate the strength of the foe; and he rehearses, together with that "tender juvenal," the satirical page Moth, the fates of Hercules, Samson, and Solomon, famous conquerors conquered by Love, whose "disgrace is to be called boy, but his glory is to subdue men" (176 ff.).

Armado’s resistance is from the beginning merely verbal. Shakespeare may well have intended the name “Armado” to highlight the bearer’s lack of military prowess and of philosophical resilience. Ironically, Armado is the least “armed” of the inhabitants of Navarre. His martial accomplishment is a legend, and he wears, quite literally, an inadequate armor: when Costard challenges him to a wrestling match in shirts, he has to admit that he wears none (V.11.697)—surely because of poverty rather than for penitence! And how ingloriously Armado has succumbed to the enemy in his own chest is demonstrated graphically by Jaquenetta’s condition at the end of the play. If the name Armado evoked the idea of the Spanish Armada in Shakespeare’s audience, as has been suggested, it must have been by way of seeing him as a comic symbol of this fleet’s disaster.

Thus the first act has introduced the argument in both main and subplots: the gentlemen of Navarre have foolishly founded an academy and dedicated themselves to it on the basis of ill-understood principles. The astute criticism of Berowne has exposed the weaknesses of the plan, and the defeats of Costard and Armado by Cupid foreshadow its inevitable failure; the academy has begun to crumble at the edges.

The second act confronts the knights with their temptations, the French maidens, and thus begins the action proper. The girls immediately show themselves as formidable adversaries by their intellects as well as their charm. They have much more self-knowledge than the men: the princess’ first words in dispraise of beauty contrast favorably with the king’s initial glorification of fame. Since the nowoman rule forbids their entrance into court, they must pitch their
tents outside. The scene becomes thus quasi-emblematic, contrasting the army of the world's desires with the beleaguered souls of the courtiers. But these do not quite hold to their resolved course like Dürer's constant knight; the end of the act shows that their resolution is breaking down when the ladies' counselor, Boyet, notices in Navarre's eyes the gleam not of philosophy but of love.

The suspiration of Armado, with which the third act opens, is the overture to the utter defeat and confusion of the philosophic army. Berowne, never a wholehearted combatant, is the first to defect, confessing his overthrow by "Dan Cupid," the boy over whom he was erstwhile a "domineering pedant." The former soldier of philosophy has become a "corporal" in Cupid's army; he has signed up in service of "a whitely wanton with a velvet brow, / With two pitch balls stuck in her face for eyes" (III.1.186-87). Since Berowne's love letter gets crossed with Armado's, these two defectors are uncovered in the following act.

The fourth act increases the perturbations by the lamentable rout of the philosophers and the revelation of the sad state of their auxiliary forces. The act opens with a report of the king's spurring his horse against the rising hill—an attempt, it appears, to sublimate his rising affections. The maidens in turn practice archery, an appropriate occupation for an army ordained by Cupid to battle philosophers. The girls' half-serious, half-bantering conversation on salvation by merit or mercy, a subject important for spiritual warfare, shows them better equipped than the courtiers. Unlike shrewish wives, whose desire to win glory over their husbands the maidens deride, and thus also unlike the courtiers, these amazons fight not for fame.

Armado is appropriately the first whose defection is revealed as the ladies receive his miscarried letter to Jaquenetta. His quixotic genius compares his attraction to her with King Cophetua's to the beggar maid; but not even his Caesarian boast of "veni, vidi, vici" nor his poetic roaring in the vein of the Nemean lion can make this defeat into the victory he claims it is. The parallel disaster of the philosophers is delayed by a scene devoted to the intellectual extravaganzas of the pedant, Holofernes, and the curate, Sir Nathaniel, literary and spiritual advisers of the academy. Although their professions should have conditioned them to know themselves, they are in their own ways subject to the weakness of the flesh that debilitates the spirit. Holofernes, in magisterial presumption, poses as a judge of good Latin and poetic taste; but in misquoting the beginning of an
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eclogue by the familiar grammar-school author "good old Mantuan," he shows his Achilles' heel.\(^{19}\) And Sir Nathaniel falls prey to arrogance when he dissects the ignorance of Dull and claims for himself and Holofernes superior sense and feeling (IV.ii.22). Exhorting the spiritual warrior to know himself, Erasmus warned against such "swelling of the mind" and recommended that he use the reverse procedure by comparing himself with those who excel him and make him look like a complete ignoramus (sig. S2r). If Nathaniel and Holofernes have no talent for humility, neither do they for fasting: both are strongly attracted to the pleasures of dining, a most notable weakness of the flesh that the academicians would like to eliminate.

Before any actual combat between the courtiers and the ladies takes place, the former defect from philosophy's army. In the climactic scene of the play (IV.iii), the king, Longaville, and Dumain enter successively, declaim their love sonnets, accuse each other of betrayal, and are promptly exposed to ridicule by the discovery of their own treason. They are now truly lost. Confused as they are, they seek to endow their passion with the sublimity of their former aspiration. Longaville's syncretism is in this respect the most ludicrous when he argues that his earlier oath against women really did not apply to the lady of his present affection, who is a goddess: "My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love; / Thy grace being gain'd cures all disgrace in me" (IV.iii.62–63). The argument sounds like a travesty of Erasmus's injunction to compare "the two Venuses and two Cupids of Plato, that is to say, honest love and filthy love, holy pleasure and unclean pastime; compare together the unlike matter of either" (sig. Kr). Berowne comments appropriately that Longaville's sonnet is in "the liver-vein, which makes flesh a deity, / A green goose a goddess—pure, pure idolatry" (70–71). However, Longaville, who is blind to his own aberration, clearly sees his friend's: "Dumain, thy love is far from charity" (123).

The fusion and confusion of love and charity provides for scintillating wit as the renegade soldiers of philosophy repeat with only slight variations their earlier vows of service. But, alas, they carry now the frivolous banner of Cupid! In more serious times, they decried the darkness of ignorance and sought the light of truth. Now they quarrel merely on whether dark- or light-complexioned ladies are preferable. It is in this context that the king utters his much-commented-upon denigration of Berowne's Rosaline: "O paradox! Black is the badge of hell, / The hue of dungeons, and the school of
night" (250–51). Berowne, forced to defend his love, reminds the king of temptation—not, as formerly, by the flesh and the devil but—by light-complexioned ladies like the princess: “Devils soonest tempt, resembling spirits of light” (253). The allusion is to 2 Cor. 11:14, which Erasmus also used as a warning.

The quandary of the courtiers is that the demands of their natures prevent them from keeping their oaths. “As true we are,” says Berowne, “as flesh and blood can be” (211), recalling Eph. 6:12, one of the passages of spiritual warfare (“for we wrestle not against flesh and blood . . .”). And, evoking the humor of blood, whose heating-up in the liver was thought to engender appetite, Berowne continues: “Young blood doth not obey an old decree. / We cannot cross the cause why we were born” (213–14). Erasmus might even have agreed to this statement since he warned in Enchiridion against striving “with God and things more mighty than thou,” and recommended to every man “that thou oughtst to abstain from such studies as nature abhorreth, and that thou shouldst set thy mind unto these things—if they be honest—whereunto thou art most apt naturally” (sig. H6v–H7r).

It is at this point that the others demand from Berowne “some authority how to proceed,” and he comes forward with his ingenious “tricks and quillets” to cheat the devil. Berowne understands how to adapt the articles of self-knowledge to the new situation. As in his earlier objections to the rules of the academy, he draws on the spiritual warfare convention, applying it to that very different one of the war of the sexes. He begins with a line that reminds one of the king’s initial battle address to his spiritual warriors: “Have at you, then, affection’s men-at-arms.” (IV.iii.286). He goes on to repeat his earlier criticism of the rules of the academy—to fast, to study, and to see no women: such rules are treason against the “kingly state of youth,” and they make true learning impossible.

For when would you, my lord, or you, or you, Have found the ground of study’s excellence Without the beauty of a woman’s face? From women’s eyes this doctrine I derive: They are the ground, the books, the academes, From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire. (295–300)
Love's Labor's Lost: Seeking Oneself

Love, says Berowne, contrasting it with the slow labors of book learning,

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Lives not alone immured in the brain,
But with the motion of all elements
Courses as swift as thought in every power,
And gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices.

Berowne's opposition between "leaden contemplation" and the invigorating speed of love resembles Erasmus's contrast in the fourteenth chapter of *Enchiridion* between the absorption in the visible—that is, rules and empty rituals including merely mechanical obedience to monastic rules, such as fasting—and the devotion to the invisible, to love. Erasmus admonished man not to be bound to the earth by unnecessary and aggravating labors, but to lift himself up, "always sustained with those wings which Plato believeth to spring ever fresh through the heat of love in the mind of men." He who does ascend "from the body to the spirit, from the visible world unto the invisible, from the letter to the mystery, from things sensible to things intelligible, from things gross and compound unto things single and pure" (sigs. L4'-L5'). Erasmus borrowed this image from the winged flight of the soul in Plato's *Phaedrus*, an image that served both theologians and idealizers of love. Berowne's particular application of this idea to love, racing "with the motion of all elements," traces back to ancient theories on the nature of the soul as being fire and air, carried by their lightness to higher regions.²² Berowne illustrates this power of love by a metaphor that may have been stimulated by Erasmus: "It [i.e., love] adds a precious seeing to the eye: / A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind" (229–30). Erasmus attributes to love, that is, to holy love, the same vision: "If it were so that thou hadst eyes much sharper of sight than hath a beast called lynx or much clearer than hath the eagle, yet with these eyes, in the most clearest light that could be, couldst thou not behold more surely that thing which a man doth before thee than all the privy and secret parts of the mind be open unto the sight of God and his angels" (sig. R').

Yet in spite of Berowne's ingenuity, the courtiers have not won a battle but lost one, and they have not really found themselves but incurred new self-loss—one undoubtedly less perilous than their
immature asceticism, but a self-loss nevertheless, romantic love. Even more seriously, they have broken oaths. Shakespeare therefore saw to it that their self-loss is not remedied by the easy means in which it usually is in the comedies, that is, by quick marriage. First, the men of Navarre are subjected to indignities; they who ingloriously left Holy Philosophy for Saint Cupid prove to be no more successful under their new banner than they were under the old. At the beginning of the last act they are routed by the ladies, who easily outdo them in wit encounters. The ladies now refuse to take the love vows any more seriously than they took the philosophic oaths. The subplot mirrors the courtiers' disaster when the pageant of the Nine Worthies turns into a lamentable spectacle of great men conquered.

But considering the seriousness of the courtiers' offense, Shakespeare evidently thought even these debacles not enough of a lesson. He introduced what I think is a brilliant ending, regardless of whether it was his original plan or, as is possible, an afterthought. The ending once more evokes the "scythe's keen edge" of death, against which Ferdinand had sought to erect his academy, forgetting that self-knowledge included a realization that there is no such stronghold. The news of the death of the princess' father makes all merrymaking impossible. Yet, ironically, this very change of conditions also brings about the solution to the courtiers' dilemma and, for that matter, to that posed by the action of the play. The period of mourning is ingeniously used to furnish the period of expiation for the courtiers. The ladies, who have proved conquerors in the battle against the stormy affections of their suitors, wisely decide that self-knowledge decrees they too must obey the law of necessity: they will marry the knights after a year if these are still inclined to matrimony. But appropriately, the knights must do penance by obeying the laws of the spirit they have violated, although the penitential period of one year is more reasonable than the three-year term they had pledged themselves to live ascetically. The knights, who have lost themselves, have, after all, a chance to reach the castle that towers above the dark glen of Dürer's knight. As Erasmus said, "The only way therefore to felicity is first that thou know thyself." But the path is not easy: "Nothing is more hard than that a man should overcome himself; but then is there no greater reward than is felicity" (sig. D7v).

For Berowne, whom we have come to like so well, the path may seem to us unduly arduous. But his imposed task of entertaining the sick in a hospital is in keeping with his trespass. Although Shake-
Shakespeare used Berowne partly to comment on the difficulty of trying to master the "affects" with which every man is born, he made him also an example of the need to do so; the merry-madcap courtier, who took the oath against his better knowledge and became the equally lighthearted apologist of love madness, must swear off the taffeta phrases and spruce affectation in which he so delighted. He will have to cheer the sick rather than confound the healthy by paradoxes. There is poetic justice in the special penitence imposed on the king, head of the bankrupt academy, who must live in a hermitage to cure his mind through his soul. And equally appropriate is Armado's voluntary penitence in which he gives up his pseudosophistication in favor of holding the plow to sustain Jaquenetta and her expected offspring. All who have lost themselves are given a chance to find themselves properly.

Thus we can see that even in one of his gayest comedies Shakespeare was concerned with the problem of self-culture. The central theme of Love's Labor's Lost is the quest for the self, a quest in which man, with the best of intentions, can go astray. Every man is born with his passions and must in some way control them or risk being lost forever. One cannot simply rule them out; nature will take its revenge. Yet dangerous as they are, they are part of the glory of being human. We delight in the courtiers' losing themselves in love; it springs naturally from their hearts and justly wins out over the merely brain-conceived devotion to study. The ideal of conduct, however, does not lie in permanent abandonment to this most delightful of self-losses, but in a balanced, antipedantic, and humanistic way of life. It is a path that Berowne sees clearly even if the warm blood of his youth makes it difficult for him to walk it steadily. But Love's Labor's Lost is not a problem play or a tragedy. We never really fear that the knights of Navarre will lose themselves so thoroughly as to make recovery questionable or impossible. Their asceticism, ostentatious as it is, is a temporary aberration and not the unnatural and deeply ingrained suppression of human desires of an Angelo in Measure for Measure, and their self-abandonment in love is only a brief interlude and not the all-embracing and destructive passion of an Othello.

Although Love's Labor's Lost is not a disturbing play, it does show that the man who wishes to know himself has difficult choices to make and threatening dangers to face. The more formidable man's temptation, the harder his struggle through the valley of life; and the
less grace available to him, the more likely is his failure. The action of *Love's Labor's Lost* at least implies that a man may lose himself so thoroughly as to make full recovery impossible. And this is the fate of Richard II, about whom Shakespeare wrote a tragedy not too long after his gay comedy. Shakespeare's tragic heroes, different as their individual features are from those of the courtiers of Navarre, have yet a recognizable kinship with them; these heroes too are possessed of a human nature that is tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. They fall, of course, more deeply; and their suffering is excruciating, their defeat irredeemable. Their self-search is not granted success; they cannot escape the scythe's keen edge of death. The predicament of the heroes of Shakespeare's later tragedies is the more painful because not only are they in a darker valley—this is true for Richard—but the region above it also is shrouded in mist or darkness.