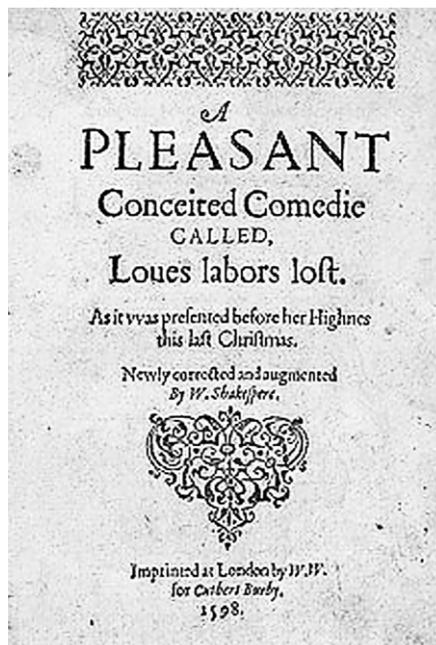


“Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee”:  
 the Divine Feminine in the “Pleasant  
 Conceited Comedie Called  
*Love’s Labor’s Lost*”

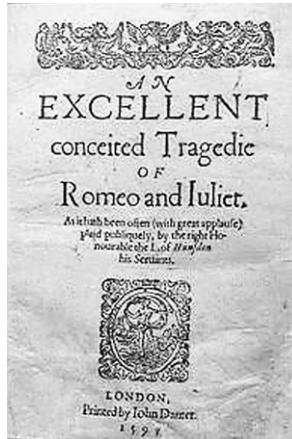
Marianne Kimura



The title page of the first quarto<sup>1</sup> (1598) of *Love’s Labor’s Lost* shows that it

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love's\\_Labour's\\_Lost](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love's_Labour's_Lost)

was first introduced as “A Pleasant Conceited Comedie”. *Romeo and Juliet* was similarly originally (first quarto of 1597<sup>2</sup>) called “An Excellent Conceited Tragedie of *Romeo and Juliet*”, so *Love’s Labor’s Lost* is not unique among Shakespeare’s plays in its use of the word “conceited” in the title<sup>3</sup>.



Wikipedia gives a good definition of “conceit” as it would have been understood by Shakespeare and his contemporaries:

a conceit originally referred to an extended metaphor with a complex logic that governs a poetic passage or entire poem. By juxtaposing, usurping and manipulating images and ideas in surprising ways, a conceit invites the reader into a more sophisticated understanding of an object of comparison. Extended conceits in English are part of the poetic idiom of Mannerism, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup>

2 [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/66/Romeo\\_and\\_Juliet\\_Q1\\_Title\\_Page.jpg/400px-Romeo\\_and\\_Juliet\\_Q1\\_Title\\_Page.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/66/Romeo_and_Juliet_Q1_Title_Page.jpg/400px-Romeo_and_Juliet_Q1_Title_Page.jpg)

3 I’ve also discovered that *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Taming of the Shrew* had the word “conceited” in their titles in their early editions.

4 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conceit>

The question is ‘what exactly is the conceit in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*?’ (With *Romeo and Juliet*, the conceit has already been found: man and our energy source, the sun, over many years are the real topic, but they are represented metaphorically by two young lovers<sup>5</sup>.)

This paper will attempt to sketch out the underlying situation—the real topic—hidden and buried in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, and in so doing, the conceit will become evident. In addition I will show that the real project of *Love’s Labor’s Lost* is to publicly though secretly affirm allegiance to “the Goddess”, a female deity that has long been effaced in a Western culture based on a monotheistic male deity.

Scholars have suspected some sort of hidden reference to Giordano Bruno in the character of Berowne: “A long line of writers, amongst them myself, have argued that the character of Berowne must be an echo of Bruno’s visit to England, but we have none of us known what to look for in the play...”, Frances Yates wrote in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964) (*GBHT*, 391). Yates also called Berowne “Giordano Bruno’s namesake” (*GBHT*, 391) because of the obvious similarities in their names.

In fact, the scholars who have suspected that Berowne is masking Bruno are not entirely wrong. In *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, Berowne is a sort of impresario figure above the other characters, more knowledgeable, wiser and more articulate. He definitely is a stand-in for Shakespeare, as we will see, but he also represents Bruno in that Shakespeare was extremely devoted to Bruno’s ideas and uses them constantly in his work (in a hidden and poetic way). As for the specific conceit in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, the plot of the play mainly masks the “nine blind philosophers” narrative from the Fourth and Fifth dialogues of Part II of Giordano Bruno’s work *Heroici Furori* (1585) (in translation, the title is usually

---

5 <https://www.slideshare.net/Fantasia47/juliet-is-the-sun-the-secret-anticoal-play-in-romeo-and-juliet>

*The Heroic Furies* or *The Heroic Enthusiasts*). In *Heroici Furori*, these nine philosophers are stricken blind by the witch Circe when she opens a jar filled with liquid and sprinkles this on them. She then takes a second jar and explains that although she is powerless to open this vessel, water from it sprinkled on them would make the men able to see again: “O curious spirits, take this other fatal vessel which my hand is powerless to open; and go far and wide on a pilgrimage through the world, seeking out all the numerous kingdoms, for destiny wishes that this vase remain closed until lofty wisdom and noble chastity and beauty together apply their hands to it; all other labors are fruitless to pour forth this water. But if it happens that those gracious hands with this water besprinkle whoever approaches them for a cure, you will be able to experience divine virtue, for your cruel torment being changed to remarkable joy, you will see the two most beautiful stars in the world.”<sup>6</sup>

The men journey far and wide and finally arrive on the shores of the River Thames, in England, where some nymphs greet them. One nymph then opens the jar: “One of the nymphs took the vase in her hand, and without essaying further, offered it to each one of the others, but none could be found who dared to open it first. But all of them by common agreement, after merely looking at it, referred and proposed it in deference and reverence to only one among them; who seized it finally, not so much from a desire to demonstrate her glory, but through pity and the desire to bring succor to these hapless men; and although uncertain, she clasped it in her hand, and almost spontaneously, opened it herself.”<sup>7</sup>

This paper will primarily focus on the way *Love’s Labor’s Lost* uses this famous episode of the nine philosophers and the nymph as its central but hidden structure. However, in *Heroici Furori*, there is one more well-known story, also used by Shakespeare in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, and this one occurs in Dialogue Two

---

6 <http://esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm#p2d1>

7 <http://esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm#p2d1>

(in Part II of *Heroici Furori*). This is the story of Actaeon and Diana; in Bruno’s version of this famous Greek myth, Actaeon is a ‘Heroic Lover’ who desires the Divine Truth of nature (this Divine truth is cast as the goddess Diana). ‘Love’ is therefore conceived of as a metaphor for pursuing true knowledge and wisdom. Just as in the original Greek myth, in *Heroici Furori*, Actaeon is turned into a stag by Diana and devoured by his hunting dogs; however, in Bruno’s retelling, this is not a tragedy, but instead it is seen as a metaphor for reaching true understanding and therefore becoming one with nature, ‘being devoured by the truth and merging with it’:

MARICONDA ..... Finally, some theologians, nurtured in the doctrines of various sects, seek the truth of nature in all its natural and specific forms; and they consider that it is through these forms that the eternal essence specifically and substantially perpetuates the everlasting generation and mutation of things called into existence by those who create and build them; and that over those who build them reigns the form of forms, the source of light, the truth of truths, the god of gods, by whom everything is filled with divinity, truth, being, and goodness. Therefore truth is sought as something inaccessible, an object beyond objectivity and beyond all comprehension. For that reason it is impossible for anyone to see the sun, the universal Apollo and absolute light as the supreme and most excellent species; but very possible to see its shadow, its Diana, the world, the universe, the nature which is in things, the light shining through the obscurity of matter, and so resplendent in the darkness. Therefore of all those who in the ways mentioned speculate much in this deserted wood, very few are those who arrive at the font of Diana. Many remain happy with chasing the wild and less illustrious beasts, and most of them find nothing to catch, for they have aimed their nets at the wind, and have remained with a handful

of flies. I say very few are the Actaeons to whom destiny gives the power to contemplate Diana naked, and the power to become so enamored of the beautiful harmony of the body of nature, so fallen beneath the gaze of those two lights of the dual splendor of goodness and beauty, that they are transformed into deer, inasmuch as they are no longer the hunters but the hunted. For the ultimate and last end of this chase is the capture of a fugitive and wild prey, through which the hunter becomes the hunted, the pillager becomes the pillaged. Because in all the other species of the chase undertaken for particular things, it is the hunter who seeks to capture those things for himself, absorbing them through the mouth of his particular intelligence; but in that divine and universal chase he comes to apprehend that it is himself who necessarily remains captured, absorbed, and united. Therefore, from the vulgar, ordinary, civil, and ordinary man he was, he becomes as free as a deer, and an inhabitant of the wilderness; he lives like a god under the protection of the woods in the unpretentious rooms of the cavernous mountains, where he contemplates the sources of the great rivers, vigorous as a plant, intact and pure, free of ordinary lusts, and converses most freely with the divinity, to which so many men have aspired, who in their desire to taste the celestial life on earth have cried with one voice, *Ecce elongavi fugiens, et mansi in solitudine* (Ps.54.8: 'Lo, I have gone far off flying away; and I abode in the wilderness.').

The result is that the dogs, as thoughts bent upon divine things, devour this Actaeon and make him dead to the vulgar, to the multitude, free him from the snares of the perturbing senses and the fleshly prison of matter, so that he no longer sees his Diana as through a glass or a window, but having thrown down the earthly walls, he sees a complete view of the whole horizon. And now he sees everything as one, not any longer through distinctions

and numbers, according to the diversity of the senses, or as varied fissures are seen and apprehended in confusion. He sees the Amphitrite, the source of all numbers, of all species, the monad, the true essence of the being of all things; and if he does not see it in its own essence and absolute light, he sees it in its germination which is similar to it and is its image: for from the monad, the divinity, proceeds this monad, nature, the universe, the world; where it is contemplated and gazed upon as the sun is through the moon, which is illuminated by it, inasmuch as he finds himself in the hemisphere of intellectual substances. She is Diana, she who is the being and truth of intelligible nature, in which is infused the sun and the splendor of a superior nature, according as the unity is distinct in that which is generated and that which generates, or that which produces and that which is produced. Therefore you will be able to draw your own conclusions about the mode of the chase, the dignity of the hunter and the most worthy result of his effort. That is why the frenzied lover boasts of becoming the prey of Diana to whom he renders himself, of whom he is esteemed a worthy consort, and so happy a captive under his yoke, that he has no reason to envy any man. For no other man has been given so much advantage as he. Nor has he reason to envy any god. For the species of a divinity cannot be obtained by an inferior nature, and consequently must not be desired, or even become the object of our appetite.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to understand who exactly Diana is, and how she is conceived of in *Heroici Furori*. So additionally I present some lines about Diana from *Heroici Furori*:

---

8 <http://esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm>

MARICONDA. Here is a flaming yoke enfolded by a noose, and around it the inscription, *Levius aura* ('Lighter than the air'). The emblem means that divine love does not oppress or lead its servant to the shades below as a captive and a slave, but raises, uplifts, and exalts him beyond every freedom.

CESARINO. I beg you, let us read the poem quickly; then in better order, more precisely and with no delay shall we be able to examine its sense and see if we can find even another meaning in it.

MARICONDA. It says:

She who kindled my mind to the higher love, she who rendered every other goddess base and vain to me; she in whom beauty and sovereign goodness are uniquely displayed, is she whom I saw coming from the forest, huntress of me, my Diana, among the lovely nymphs upon the golden Campania, wherefore I said to Love: -- I surrender myself to this one.

And he to me: -- Oh fortunate lover! Oh spouse favored by your destiny! She who alone among so many has within her bosom life and death, and adorns the world with holy graces, her you have achieved by labor and by fortune; captive though I am in her amorous court, I am so highly blessed, that I do not envy the freedom of any man or god.

You notice how content he is under such a yoke, under such a burden, captive of the one he saw proceed from the forest, from the wilderness, and from the wood; that is to say, from those less frequented regions ignored by the multitude, alien to society and apart from the vulgar. Diana, splendor of the intelligible species, is his huntress, because having wounded him

by her beauty and grace, she has bound him and holds him under her sway more content than he could have ever been otherwise. She is said to be *among the lovely nymphs*, that is to say, among the multitude of other species, forms and ideas, and *upon the golden Campania*, an allusion to that intelligence and spirit that appears in Nola, and lies on the plain of the Campanian horizon. To her he renders himself, to her whom love praised more than he praised any other, desiring that he regard himself most fortunate because of her, who, among all that is visible and invisible to the eyes of mortals, gives the world its noblest attire and makes man glorious and beautiful. That is why he says his mind is enkindled to that highest love and that it recognizes every other goddess, that is, the care and consideration of *every other species*, as base and vain.<sup>9</sup>

How Bruno’s significant idea of the importance of a Goddess, what we can also now call the Divine Feminine, can be understood in *Heroici Furori* as a necessary part of any complete spiritual and religious understanding—and conception—of the world, is described in this passage by Bruno scholar Hilary Gatti:

The mythical figure who dominates Bruno’s *Heroici Furori* is that of the moon goddess Diana. In the earlier part of the work, she is seen in relation to Actaeon, who stands here for the hunter or intensely mystical Neoplatonic philosopher. His impetuous intellectual quest for truth permits him to glimpse the goddess in her nakedness, bathing in a pool in the midst of a thickly wooded forest in central Italy, where he is immediately devoured by the hounds of his own thoughts. At the end of the work, however, Bruno centers his reader’s attention on a group of nine more tried and

---

9 <http://esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm>

experienced philosophers, who, in the course of a long journey through 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, have (at the other end of the philosophical spectrum) been blinded by the natural magic of Circe—that is by their adherence to a crass materialism. They finally arrive on the banks of the River Thames, where they are liberated from their blindness by the chief nymph of the gently flowing river, who is explicitly praised as an English Diana. It is she who pours healing waters on their eyes, initiating them into a vision of the infinite universe that is no longer enervating, no longer an endless wandering through a blind labyrinth (“*lungo error in cieco labirinto,*” as Petrarch famously expressed his own plight in Sonnet 224). Rather, in Bruno, the new experience ushered in by the English Diana is seen as energizing. It opens up for the nine philosophers (who are poets, nine being the number of the muses) an entirely new world composed both of a lower sphere symbolized by Father Ocean and of a higher, celestial sphere, which is that of Jove. This composite, infinite, and infinitely vital universe is open both to poetical and musical celebration of its intimate harmonies, magically conceived, and to a more rational or scientific definition through a methodical inquiry into the laws that regulate its infinite vicissitudes...The earthly realm reflects the celestial, absorbing within itself both its infinity and its spiritual potencies.” (Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, p. 118)

Both the episode of the nine philosophers and the Actaeon-Diana episode are quests for truth within nature, and both use a supernatural female figure (a goddess and a nymph, respectively) as the ones who reveal the truth or help the men attain the truth. *Love’s Labor’s Lost* similarly tells of some men separated from women (through their own decision). (In the play, these men make the huge mistake of thinking that they do not need women to attain wisdom.) All the men, that is Actaeon, the nine philosophers, and the men of the King of Navarre’s court,

journey from a state where they are separated from women to a state where they have some closeness to the women, and through this change, they attain wisdom and happiness.

Giordano Bruno was executed for heresy in 1600 and all of his books were placed on the Codex, the list of forbidden and heretical works compiled by the Catholic Church. *Heroici Furori* is a philosophical work supporting the notion of the Feminine Divine or Goddess worship, heretical in its time in Europe in the 1500s, and *Love’s Labor’s Lost* also propounds this idea strongly in a shrouded, covered and protected way (i.e. using the conceit it mentions in the title) by presenting the main ideas, plot, and even the spirit of *Heroici Furori* intricately and completely. In sum, nature, which is to say our natural world, includes female as well as male creatures, and it seems that a religion with only a male deity was far from Bruno’s, or Shakespeare’s, ideal. Shakespeare used all of his plays to profess (using safe conceits) his pagan and environmentally-conscious vision and beliefs and *Love’s Labor’s Lost* particularly emphasizes the importance of devotion to the Goddess.

The important and key words from the English translation of *Heroici Furori*, such as “blind”, “eyes”, “goddess”, “two”, “light”, “sun”, “open”, “nine” occur in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* in metaphorically corresponding situations, so it is possible to see that the underlying structure of the play, hidden by the conceit of the men of the court of Navarre searching for wisdom, is the story of these nine philosophers and the English nymph from Bruno’s work. Equally significant is that these key words usually are given to Berowne, who, as his name indicates, is more intensely close to Bruno than the other characters.

At the beginning of the play, in Act I, scene i, Berowne is commenting on the King’s idea to study books; notice how the criticism of the king’s idea is accompanied by several images of blindness and eyes. Here, at the beginning of the play, the king and his fellows are being secretly compared to the nine blind philoso-

phers. A cloaking of the nine blind philosophers' real identities occurs through their being secretly signified:

Berowne: Why, all delights are vain; but that most vain,  
 Which with pain purchased doth inherit pain:  
 As, painfully to pore upon a book  
 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:  
 Small have continual plodders ever won  
 Save base authority from others' books  
 These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights  
 That give a name to every fixed star  
 Have no more profit of their shining nights  
 Than those that walk and wot not what they are.  
 Too much to know is to know nought but fame;  
 And every godfather can give a name. (I.i.93) (my emphasis)

The lines above "to seek the light of truth; while truth the while/Doth false-ly blind the eyesight of his look" echo the situation in *Heroici Furori*, where the

second blind philosopher “says he became blind through having been suddenly brought out of the darkness into a great light: accustomed to behold ordinary beauties, a celestial beauty was suddenly presented before his eyes—a sun god—in this manner his sight became dull...” (Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, 90-1). So that not only is the notion of being blind repeated in Berowne’s passage above, but also the phenomenon of being *blinded by a light* is specifically mentioned. Also Bruno’s notions of a “celestial” and “sun-god” are echoed in Berowne’s phrase “heaven’s lights”.

However, the passage in *Love Labor’s Lost* which reverberates most densely with images from *Heroici Furori* occurs in Act IV after Berowne is also revealed to be secretly courting Rosaline (as Dumain, Longaville and the King have also been just revealed to be secretly courting their own respective court ladies). It is the climax of the play, in a sense, since all the secrets have just been revealed, and it echoes the ‘revelation’ in *Heroici Furori* that occurs when the nine blind philosophers are given their sight back. Berowne replies, (to the king’s question “What, did these rent lines show some love of thine?” (IV.iii.216)):

Berowne: Did they, quoth you? Who sees the heavenly Rosaline,  
That, like a rude and savage man of Inde,  
At the first opening of the gorgeous east,  
Bows not his vassal head and strooken blind  
Kisses the base ground with obedient breast?  
What peremptory eagle-sighted eye  
Dares look upon the heaven of her brow,  
That is not blinded by her majesty? (IV.iii.217-223)

The word “opening” together with the word “heavenly Rosaline” echoes the feat of the nymph to open the vessel in *L’eroici.furori*, and the word “vassal”

sounds a bit like “vessel”. The word “blind” is countered by the words “see”, “eagle-sighted” and “look upon”, conveying the secret action occurring under the obvious one: the nymph has opened the vessel and the blind men can now see (like eagles, or very well). Berowne is using one very obvious metaphor: for him, seeing Rosalind gives him a profound and worshipful feeling that he can only compare to the way a sun-worshiper from India feels when he sees the sun, the object of his reverence. However, hidden under the open metaphor is a hidden one that the words “blind”, “opening”, “see”, “eagle-sighted” and “look upon” reveal very subtly: this is the moment that the vessel is opened in the hidden structure of the play. The presence of Rosaline here makes it clear that she is the nymph in the conceit (or allegory). (Later, in Act V, Rosaline says “he swore that he did hold me dear as precious eyesight”, when she is asked “what did the Russian whisper in your ear? (V.ii.444-446) (my emphasis)). Moreover, since the Divine Feminine includes the concept that the material earth and nature and the sun are sacred and holy, the idea of sun worship is also actually being put forward as a good thing (it is quite likely that Shakespeare practiced it personally), though it seems like only a conventional poetic metaphor on the elegant Mannerist surface.

The king then responds with the question “what zeal, what *fury*, hath inspir’d thee now?/ My love, (her mistress) is a gracious moon...” (IV.iii.224) (my emphasis) and we see the playful and mischievous aspect of Shakespeare. He has actually inserted the word “fury” (as in *Heroic Furies*) into the play to mark and celebrate the spot where the climax, the opening of the vessel, has secretly occurred. In addition the words “my love”, “mistress” and “gracious moon” recall the goddess Diana, such a central figure in Bruno’s book.

A few lines before his speech above Berowne says:

Sweet lords, sweet lovers. O let us embrace!

As true we are as flesh and blood can be.

The sea will ebb and heaven show his face;

Young blood doth not obey an old decree. (IV.iii.210-213)

The lines are the reaction by Berowne when he is discovered to also be a secret lover. Although it seems that he is merely talking about how young men (“young blood”) can’t follow a celibate lifestyle, the third line, “The sea will ebb and heaven show his face” echoes the last section of *Heroici Furori*, entitled *The Song of the Illuminati*, where Father Ocean (symbol of the earth, the material, the Feminine Divine, “the sea”) and Jove (symbol of the heaven, the sky god, Jove, the Masculine Divine, “heaven”) finally find peace and harmony together too:

"I no longer envy, O Jove, your firmament", says Father Ocean with raised brow, "for I have so much joy in what my empire offers".

"How haughty you are!" Jove replies. "What else do you have beside your wealth? Oh lord of the senseless waters, why do you so inflate yourself with such foolish boldness?"

"You have", said the god of the waters, "in your power the blazing heavens, where the fiery zone is, in which you can see the eminent chorus of your stars, "and through them the whole world gazes upon the sun. But, I say, even the sun shines with less brightness than She who makes me the most glorious god of the great creation of worlds.

"And I hold in my vast bosom, among all the others that nation where the happy Thames is seen, which has the pleasing chorus of the most beautiful nymphs.

"Among these I possess one who is unique among all beautiful ones, who will make you a lover of the sea more than of the sky, oh loud thundering Jove, for your sun shines with less splendor among the stars."

And Jove replies: "O, god of the tossing seas, that anyone be found more blessed than I is not permitted by fate, but my treasures and yours run their course together.

"The sun prevails among your nymphs through this one, and by the force of eternal laws and of the alternate abodes, she is valued as the sun among my stars."<sup>10</sup>

The lines in *Love's Labor's Lost* which explain the logic whereby worship of nature and the Goddess is not heresy are given to Longaville as he explains why he need not after all observe his vow to separate himself from women. After all, the falseness was the first vow, not to see her, and the truthful path is to be together with her. (His logic is repeated and expanded later by Berowne in his long speech at the end of this scene.) Again there is a comparison of the goddess to the sun, the man to the earth needing her light; it's very much a vision of a nature religion:

Longaville: This same shall go.

*[Reads]*

Did not the heavenly rhetoric of thine eye,  
 'Gainst whom the world cannot hold argument,  
 Persuade my heart to this false perjury?  
 Vows for thee broke deserve not punishment.  
 A woman I forswore; but I will prove,  
Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee:  
 My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love;  
 Thy grace being gain'd cures all disgrace in me.

---

10 <http://esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm>

Vows are but breath, and breath a vapour is:

Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth dost shine,

Exhalest this vapour-vow; in thee it is:

If broken then, it is no fault of mine:

If by me broke, what fool is not so wise

To lose an oath to win a paradise?

Berowne [*aside*]: This is the liver-vein, which makes flesh a deity, A green  
goose a goddess; pure, pure idolatry. God amend us, God amend! We are  
much out a’ way. (IV.iii.57-74) (my emphasis)

These lines are followed by some rhetorically brilliant lines which belong to Berowne (Shakespeare in disguise): he seems to be criticizing Longaville’s change of heart yet underneath his sneering, sarcastic and muttering critique, he (or rather Shakespeare) is actually laying out Shakespeare’s honest, sincere and profound goddess worshipping faith: “makes flesh a deity” (i.e. nature and the material earth would be sacred). And it is indeed “pure, pure idolatry” in the Christian way of thinking. Shakespeare knows and affirms it “pure, pure”, and thinks it is just fine (“pure” as a good thing). “God amend us, God amend!” of course means that Shakespeare wants personally to see people “amend” themselves and turn to Goddess worship. Such ideas would have been extremely radical back in 1597, and it is no wonder that he had to hide them, though it must have been thrilling for him to watch the public performances of these lines and know what was really being said under the surface.

Berowne’s lines here, spoken in an aside “All hid, all hid, an old infant play. Like a demi-god here I sit in the sky,/ And wretched fools’ secrets heedfully o’er-eye” (IV.iii.75-78) describe his position (in a tree, watching the other three men as they confess their loves), but it also describes Shakespeare’s own position: he

knew the secrets hidden in his play, that is, how the hidden conceit was to be understood in this “pleasant and conceited comedie”, and therefore was in a comparably knowing position as Berowne.

When the nine philosophers in *Heroici Furori* regain their vision “two stars” or “twin suns” appear. (Giordano Bruno was the first natural scientist to assert (and he was later proven correct) that our sun was a star, which was another religious heresy, so for him stars and suns were the same thing.) The relevant passages from *Heroici Furori* are quoted below:

But if it happens that those gracious hands with this water besprinkle whoever approaches them for a cure, you will be able to experience divine virtue, for your cruel torment being changed to remarkable joy, you will see the two most beautiful stars in the world.....

....Do you imagine I can express the excessive joy of the nine blind men, who, having heard that the vase was opened, felt themselves sprinkled with the longed for water, opened their eyes, saw the twin suns and were overwhelmed by a two-fold felicity, that of having recovered the light formerly lost and that of having newly discovered the other light which alone could show them the image of the supreme good on earth?<sup>11</sup>

(In *Heroici Furori*, these two suns most likely symbolize the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine which shine together here, two gods.)

In *Love's Labor's Lost*, this concept of “two” and “lights” appears linked (occurring within one sentence) in an interesting, apparently rambling and tossed-off (though really quite Mannerist and carefully worded) speech of

---

11 <http://esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm>

Berowne’s, where the word “eye” (a reference to the nine philosophers regaining their vision) also occurs within this same sentence:

The king he is hunting the deer; I am coursing  
myself: they have pitched a toil; I am toiling in  
a pitch, pitch that defiles: defile! a foul  
word. Well, set thee down, sorrow! for so they say  
the fool said, and so say I, and I the fool: well  
proved, wit! By the Lord, this love is as mad as  
Ajax: it kills sheep; it kills me, I a sheep:  
well proved again o' my side! I will not love: if  
I do, hang me; i' faith, I will not. O, but her  
eye, — by this light but for her eye, I would not  
love her; yes, for her two eyes. Well, I do nothing  
in the world but lie, and lie in my throat. By  
heaven, I do love: and it hath taught me to rhyme  
and to be mallicholy; and here is part of my rhyme,  
and here my mallicholy ....(IV.iii.1-14)

“Love” can be understood as the same love of the Divine truth (the pursuit of a truthful philosophy) that motivated Actaeon to pursue Diana in the forest. “Lie and lie in my throat”, “(love) hath taught me to rhyme and to be mallicholy” are not just Berowne’s conventional lovers’ sentiments, these are also lines that explain in a disguised way that the pursuit of the Goddess motivates and inspires Shakespeare to write fiction (i.e. “I do nothing in the word but lie” (or tell fictional tales), and “it hath taught me to rhyme (produce poetry)). Expressing philosophical truth can be done through writing fiction.

There are likewise so many instances of lines linking “sun” with “eyes” in

the play that it is difficult to list them all, but here is a vivid and repetitive one:

Moth: Once to behold with your sun-beamed eyes,  
— with your sun-beamed eyes — (V.ii.168-9)

And the idea which Berwone introduced in Act IV, to compare Rosaline to a sun and worship her, is repeated by him in Act V:

We number nothing that we spend for you:  
Our duty is so rich, so infinite,  
That we may do it still without accompt.  
Vouchsafe to show the sunshine of your face,  
That we, like savages, may worship it. (V.ii.198-202) (my emphasis)

In *Heroici Furori*, the god Jove appears in the last dialogue. (Jove is also a major character in Bruno's book *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*). The characters in *Love's Labor's Lost* also invoke the god Jove (four times), although the setting of the play is Navarre, France in the courtly (that is to say, Christian) era. Amusingly, the curate, Sir Nathaniel, picks up a love letter addressed to Rosaline, written by Berowne, and reads it aloud: though Sir Nathaniel holds a religious job in the Christian church, he obligingly reads aloud the word "Jove", the king of the gods from a pagan (nature) religion. This must exemplify Shakespeare's trickster spirit, using literary wiles to get devout Christians to utter hidden heresies in public. Below is the love letter. It has quite a few words recognizable from Christian theology ("faith", "soul", "heaven", "celestial", "earthly"); however, they are employed towards Shakespeare's purpose of conveying (in disguise) *Heroici Furori* and its heretical position on goddess worship:

Sir Nathaniel: *[Reads]*  
If love make me forsworn, how shall I swear to love?

Ah, never faith could hold, if not to beauty vow'd!  
Though to myself forsworn, to thee I'll faithful prove:  
Those thoughts to me were oaks, to thee like osiers bow'd.  
Study his bias leaves and makes his book thine eyes,  
Where all those pleasures live that art would comprehend:  
If knowledge be the mark, to know thee shall suffice;  
Well learned is that tongue that well can thee commend,  
All ignorant that soul that sees thee without wonder;  
Which is to me some praise that I thy parts admire:  
Thy eye Jove's lightning bears, thy voice his dreadful thunder,  
Which not to anger bent, is music and sweet fire.  
Celestial as thou art, O, pardon, love, this wrong,  
That sings heaven's praise with such an earthly tongue. (IV.ii.104-119) (my emphasis)

“Eye”, “Jove” and “lightning” appear together, and since “eye” and “light” are so important in both *Love’s Labor’s Lost* and in *Heroici Furori*, it is significant that “Jove” appears together with these words. The word “Jove” usually occurs in conjunction with the four courtly men’s (remember they stand for the nine philosophers in *Heroici Furori*) efforts to attain love. They are perpetually using the word “forsworn” (to break a vow), because heresy was involved, and “forsworn” also appears together with “Jove” in Dumain’s letter:

Dumain: That I am forsworn for thee;  
Thou for whom Jove would swear  
Juno but an Ethiope were;  
And deny himself for Jove,  
Turning mortal for thy love. (IV.iii.114-118)

And again soon afterwards, we see “Jove”, this time together with “infringe an oath”:

King: And Jove, for your love, would infringe an oath.  
What will Biron say when that he shall hear  
Faith so infringed, which such zeal did swear? (IV.iii.142-144)

The last time “Jove” occurs it appears together with an important number: the number nine. (This number is obviously important because of the “nine blind philosophers” in Bruno’s book.) There is an intense and short burst of “nine’s”. Performed, it would have been hard for audiences to miss the word.

Costard: O Lord, sir, they would know  
Whether the three Worthies shall come in or no.  
Berowne: What, are there but three?  
Costard: No sir, but it is vara fine,  
For every one pursents three.  
Berowne: And three times thrice is nine.  
Costard: Not so, sir, under correction, sir, I hope it is not so.  
You cannot beg us, sir, I can assure you, sir, we know what we know.  
I hope, sir, three times thrice, sir—  
Berowne: Is not nine.  
Costard: Under correction, sir, we know whereuntil it doth amount  
Berowne: By Jove, I always took three threes for nine. (V.ii.485-495) (my emphasis)

Although it is mainly the episode of the nine blind philosophers in *Heroici Furori* that is recreated and performed (undercover, so disguised a bit) by the

characters in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, the Actaeon-Diana story is also referred to. Shakespeare used words like “eyes” (appears 23 times in the play), “sun” (8 times), “blind” (5 times), “sight” (6 times) and so forth to refer to the nine blind philosophers, and he uses a similar tactic, word repetition of key words such as “deer” and “hunt” to refer to the Actaeon-Diana episode.

In particular, the Princess of France hunts a deer, making her comparable to Diana (the Greek Goddess of the Hunt) who, in *Heroici Furori*, turned Actaeon into a stag, which led to his being united with the Divine Truth (after being devoured by his dogs, he becomes one with nature, according to Bruno). In Act III, the Princess of France talks about hunting a deer:

See see, my beauty will be saved by merit!  
O heresy in fair, fit for these days!  
A giving hand, though foul, shall have fair praise.  
But come, the bow: now mercy goes to kill,  
And shooting well is then accounted ill.  
Thus will I save my credit in the shoot:  
Not wounding, pity would not let me do't;  
If wounding, then it was to show my skill,  
That more for praise than purpose meant to kill.  
And out of question so it is sometimes,  
Glory grows guilty of detested crimes,  
When, for fame's sake, for praise, an outward part,  
We bend to that the working of the heart;  
As I for praise alone now seek to spill  
The poor deer's blood, that my heart means no ill. (III.i.21-35)

Her line “O heresy in fair, fit for these days!” is clearly a comment and a

lament on the then-ongoing imprisonment of Bruno for heresy. (Bruno was imprisoned from 1591 until his execution in 1600). “The poor deer’s blood” definitely alludes to Bruno, whom Shakespeare perhaps saw as a *real-life Actaeon*, a philosopher who had enthusiastically, *heroically*, *furiously*, pursued the beautiful truth of the universe and for this pursuit, had been arrested and tortured and who was to be sentenced to death two years after this play was written. In effect, Bruno was consumed and devoured by the universe whose truths he had discovered.

Bruno criticizes ‘pedants’ repeatedly in his works. (These are people who cannot see his larger and more sweeping vision of the universe.) Bruno depicted, for good comedic effect, a certain type of grammarian pedant (such as Manfurio in his play *Candelaio*) “with masterly linguistic verve” (Gatti, 168) and this skill, Gatti writes, served him well also “in his Italian philosophical dialogues written later in London” (Gatti, 168), of which *Heroici Furori* is one. Furthermore, “according to a critical tradition of some standing, Shakespeare may have had Bruno in mind when creating some of his most ludicrous pedants” (Gatti, 168). It is quite certain that Shakespeare’s pedants, including Holofernes, are based (at least partly) on Bruno’s specific conception of a pedant, and *Love’s Labor’s Lost* makes this clear in another key passage about a hunted deer.

The main passages in *Heroici Furori* dealing with pedants are in the Second Dialogue of Part II:

Besides see what damage has come to the sciences because the pedants have wished to become philosophers, and while treating of the things of nature have meddled in determining things divine? Who does not realize that harm has come and still comes because not all minds are equally kindled to the highest love? Certain grammarians, having worn themselves out upon the rumps of infants and on the anatomies of words and phrases, have

wished to set their minds to the creation of a new logic and metaphysics, judging and giving opinions about matters they have not hitherto studied and do not understand now ....

One warbles about whether the noun existed before the verb; the other about whether the sea existed before its source; another desires to revive obsolete words – because an ancient writer once employed them he would raise them again to the clouds; another obsesses himself with false and true orthography; and still others preoccupy themselves with similar nonsense, more worthily scorned than heeded. For this they fast, become lean, grow consumptive, let their skin dry up, their beards grow, putrefy, and upon this throw down the anchor of the highest good. In the name of these futilities they scorn fortune and by them they build a rampart and a shield against the thrusts of fate. By the grace of these vile notions they think they ascend to the stars and are like the gods, and they think they comprehend the beautiful and the good which philosophy promises.<sup>12</sup>

Holofernes’ comments on the hunted deer distill and symbolize the pedant’s attitude towards the true philosopher (the deer):

Holofernes: The deer was, as you know, *sanguis*, in blood; ripe as the pomewater, who now hangeth like a jewel in the ear of *caelo*, the sky, the welkin, the heaven; and anon falleth like a crab on the face of *terra*, the soil, the land, the earth. (IV.ii.2-6)

---

12 <http://esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm>

The deer's death is described with a multitude of meaningless but learned words; it is clear that Holofernes (whose name sounds like "hollow furnace") has missed the sad point of its death (as the philosopher's ideas are ignored or suppressed) and just adds layers of pointless vocabulary in various random languages to fill in the spaces. Bruno's brilliant work was not understood by the thinkers and scholars of his day. (In fact, after his death his books became generally unavailable until the 1700s due to the stigma of heresy hanging over them.)

In Act V. scene ii, Holofernes plays Judas Machabeus in the courtly dramatic entertainment, a presentation of the "Nine Worthies". He makes sure to explain that he is not Judas "Iscairiot, sir" (V.ii.596) but he is nevertheless heckled mercilessly by the court members (these are the men who represent in the hidden conceit the enlightened nine philosophers whose eyes have been opened to the truth) and finally he is sent offstage by (of course, Berowne): "For the ass to the Jude; give it him. Jud-as, away!" (V.ii.628). *Love's Labor's Lost*, the expressive and dramatic child of *Heroici Furori*, fittingly banishes pedants.

Because of the massive importance of disguise and plays-within-plays in Shakespeare, it is also worth examining the other courtly entertainment performed in costumes in *Love's Labor's Lost*, the masquerade with the French king and the three men dressed as Russians, plus Moth, the boy. Boyet reports to the French Princess and her court what he overheard as the four men made their plans to dress as Russians:

Boyet: Under the cool shade of a sycamore  
 I thought to close mine eyes some half an hour;  
 When, lo! to interrupt my purposed rest,  
 Toward that shade I might behold address  
 The king and his companions: warily  
 I stole into a neighbour thicket by,

And overheard what you shall overhear,  
That, by and by, disguised they will be here.  
Their herald is a pretty knavish page,  
That well by heart hath conn'd his embassy:  
Action and accent did they teach him there;  
'Thus must thou speak,' and 'thus thy body bear.'  
And ever and anon they made a doubt  
Presence majestical would put him out,  
'For,' quoth the king, 'an angel shalt thou see;  
Yet fear not thou, but speak audaciously.' (V.ii.89-104)

Here we have a cunning tableau (in a conceited, hidden form) which presents the artist (someone with open eyes, someone who understands Bruno’s Divine Truth of nature) but who must go in disguised form (i.e. through the medium of fiction, drama, masques, poetry, etc.) to confer or mingle with the “Presence majestical”, also she is called “an angel”, and this is actually the Goddess or Divine Feminine, who is generally represented in this play by the French Princess and her court. Years later, when Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night*, it is very likely that he had this passage in mind when he had Viola, (who Olivia calls “saucy”, just as Moth is to act “audaciously”), go before Olivia as Orsino’s page. Viola has her “conned” lines as well.

The court masquerade in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* is a cloaked social comment by Shakespeare that the Goddess or Divine Feminine has continued to be available to us, but only inside the realm of fiction and drama, where artists continue to be inspired by her and meet her face to face. In that sense, the ending of the play, where the men cannot be united with the women until some later date after the play ends, is a stark reminder that this play changes nothing, though it replays and expresses *Heroici Furori*. Berowne is told by Rosaline that before he can marry

her he must “visit the speechless sick”, “converse with groaning wretches” and use his “wit to enforce the pained impotent to smile” (V.ii.851-3). He agrees, saying, “I’ll jest a twelvemonth in an hospital” (V.ii.872), giving us a snapshot in allegorical form of how Shakespeare conceived of his own artistic job: to entertain those who are suffering because they are still like the nine blind philosophers before they met the helpful nymph on the banks of the Thames, which is to say, they are not yet worshipping the Divine Feminine.

Finally, I’d like to come full circle by returning to the start of the play. Shakespeare always used the opening lines of each of his plays to divulge in a compact and coded way the main theme of that play. So let’s have a look at the opening lines of *Love’s Labor’s Lost*:

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,  
 Live register'd upon our brazen tombs  
 And then grace us in the disgrace of death;  
 When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,  
 The endeavor of this present breath may buy  
 That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge  
 And make us heirs of all eternity. (I.i.1-7)

According to these lines, and knowing what we know about this play, what would Shakespeare have wished as his legacy (i.e. “register’d on his brazen tomb”)? Only this: 1) that he stood with Bruno; 2) that he worshiped the Goddess, the Divine Feminine; and 3) that he wanted to proclaim these facts to the world. *Love’s Labor’s Lost* is a brilliant monument to this heroic and secret effort.

## References

- Bruno, Giordano. *The Heroic Enthusiasts*. London: Bernard Quaritch. 1889  
(Translated by L. Williams). Reissued by Nabu Public Domain Reprints.
- Evans, G. Blakemore. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. 1974. Boston: Houghton  
Mifflin.
- Gatti, Hilary. 2011. *Essays on Giordano Bruno*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton  
University Press
- Yates, Frances. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Oxon, U.K.:  
Routledge. Reprinted 2010.